

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

*A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine*

The Lord chastens His children in order to teach them the riches of His grace and mercy. This is truly wonderful. He teaches us lessons through chastisement that we could not learn in a life of ease and luxury in which we never experienced any trouble. Chastening can produce in the child of God a profound consciousness of God's love and faithfulness.

See "Our Father's Chastisement" — page 250

*Vol. 68, No. 11
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In This Issue...

Rev. denHartog writes in this issue, near the beginning of his second installment of "Our Father's Chastisement," that "sometimes God's children need to be chastened on account of their continuing sinfulness." Everyone who understands the weakness of his own flesh knows that he will never in this life reach a point where correction becomes unnecessary. Whenever we are afflicted, therefore, we should always "consider whether the Lord is dealing with us because of our sin." Rev. denHartog's point, however, is not that, if we find ourselves unable to associate a particular affliction with a particular sin in our lives, then we may conclude that the affliction is not in fact *chastisement*. True, the word "chastisement" does have the connotation of correction for wrongdoing. But, and this is the thrust of Rev. denHartog's article, hardly is that the *only* purpose of chastening. Apart now from any specific sin on our part, by chastisement we can be *instructed*. By chastisement we can learn experientially what we before learned in theory. By chastisement we are, as one writer put it, melted in His furnace, that we might be stamped with His image. And that's how the Lord uses *all* affliction — to instruct, to chastise. Never therefore may an affliction be despised as if it were not heaven-sent, and did not require a response of faith.

Do we sometimes consider our lives to be normally rather easy, with the tranquility interrupted on occasion by an affliction of some sort, sent to help our weakness? Consider this from John Calvin: "God may allow us intervals of ease, in consideration of our weaknesses, but would always have us exposed to calamities of various kinds." And he adds, "Were it not for the comfortable consideration that they are a blessed people whom God exercises with the cross, our condition would be truly miserable."

And then, to learn what are those other reasons for chastening, and what should be our response, read, in this issue, "Our Father's Chastisement."

D.D.

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Meditation

Prof. Robert Decker

Severing His Earthly Ties

"... Woman, behold thy son! ... Behold thy mother"

John 19:25-27

Without a doubt the most difficult aspect of death is the severing of our earthly ties. When facing death God's people often confess, "I'm not afraid to die; I'm ready to meet my Lord. But I like to remain for my wife or husband's sake or for my children's sake." We know as the apostle Paul did that to depart and be with the Lord is far better, but those earthly relationships are so strong. Even Paul was in a strait betwixt two when he thought of these things. He wanted to be with the Lord, but he wanted to be with the Christians at Philippi too!

How true to our experience. When our loved ones are dying, we who remain behind are comforted by the gospel. We even pray with the dying that God will take them soon out of the suffering into His glory. And we are relieved when they are taken. We testify of our comfort and of God's goodness.

But then! After the last viewing of the remains of our loved one, after the funeral service, and after the burial ... then the finality of death hits us. It's all over! My husband, my wife, my child, my parent, my friend is gone. The tie is forever broken!

Your whole life is changed! There is that terrible — always present

— empty place! When you were married the minister said, "From now on you go down life's pathway together." But now, because of death, you go down life's pathway alone! You never feel mother's warm embrace again. You cannot seek your father's wise counsel. You never hear the cheerful voice of your son or daughter!

That is the hardest part of death! Were it not for the hope of the gospel and the comforting mercies of God's grace we simply could not endure that loss!

Also this aspect of death — the severing of earthly ties — Jesus bore. Jesus tasted death, our death, all of our death, all of its heartbreaking sorrows. Because He did, we have life and we have hope. Yes, we sorrow, but with a view to glory!

The text tells us that four women (among them Mary, Jesus' mother) and John stood near to the cross. When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold thy son." To John Jesus said, "Behold thy mother." From that moment on John took Mary to his own home. Thus did Jesus sever the tie between Himself and His beloved mother!

Profound suffering this was for Jesus!

While the tie of mother and son may not be the most intimate, it is surely one of the strongest earthly relationships. A man's wife may divorce him, but seldom does a mother lose her love for her son.

That is especially true of the relation between Jesus and Mary. From Mary's viewpoint, this child was en-

tirely her flesh and blood. According to His human nature, Jesus was her son and not Joseph's. Not only so, Jesus had besides been a perfect child.

From Jesus' viewpoint, He lived the life of a son in highest perfection of human love. Simply because He was the Son of God and therefore perfectly holy, Jesus was able to taste the love of motherhood and enter into the love of a son perfectly.

Now Jesus is on the cross. And from the cross He severs the tie with His mother and commits her to the care of John!

To death belongs the suffering of the severing of earthly ties. Husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, parents, children, friends, and loved ones — all these ties are broken forever by death. While all these relationships have significance, they are fleshly ties. And flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. In heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage. These earthly relationships end forever in death.

Thus it is with Jesus at this moment. The time for separation is at hand. His relationship with His mother must be severed. And it must be severed in order to be restored to the higher, heavenly relationship of the communion of the saints in glory.

Even so, this does not take away from the heart-rending and profound suffering involved for both Mary and Jesus.

Think of Mary, His mother! What a terrible grief must have flooded her soul. Her son, the one she loved so dearly, is hanging on a cross, bleeding, dying as the lowest and meanest of criminals. She does not understand why. To Mary the cross

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meant that her beloved Son, Jesus, is rejected and utterly defeated.

Jesus sees her suffering and grief. Jesus knows and is touched with the feeling of her infirmity. He is touched with the feeling of her agony at this apparently senseless and cruel death of her beloved son.

But, what is more, her suffering is His suffering!

More than it could possibly be hers!

Profound suffering this is for Jesus! Simply because He could taste the agonies of the suffering of death to the full as the perfect man. And to an eternal depth as the Person of the Son of God in our flesh.

*Jesus Himself
felt the numbing pain
of losing a loved one.*

Jesus suffers the wrath of God willingly. Consider what He might have done. He might have come down from that cross. His is all the power. Jesus' human heart was filled with pain at the sight of His mother's grief. He Himself felt the numbing pain of losing a loved one.

What a scene that would have been! Even if Jesus came down just for a moment, just for a brief embrace. Then He could return to the cross. That surely would have stopped the mouths of His enemies.

But no! Jesus could not leave that cross, not even for a moment. For then He would not have been about His Father's business.

What Jesus does is speak! "Woman, behold thy son." And to John, "Behold thy mother."

This represents the willing surrender of his earthly sonship. Yes, He cared for His mother. And He commits her to the care of His beloved disciple. But, this Word from the cross reveals that also this aspect of death, the severing of Jesus' earthly ties, is an act of His will. No one takes His life from Him. Jesus lays down His life for His sheep and bears the

suffering of the severing of His earthly ties willingly. This too belongs to the atoning suffering of our Savior, the suffering that ends all the suffering of God's children.

Note, Jesus addresses her as "woman." He does this not out of disrespect or a lack of love for His mother. Yet, this Word is a firm denial that her motherhood may interfere with His suffering for the sins of God's people. The earthly ties must serve the heavenly.

Woman, I am busy doing my Father's will. For that reason I must now sacrifice my earthly ties, even that tie between us as mother and son. Behold thy son! It is fully determined of my Father that our relationship as mother and son must end. Look at John as thy son.

At the same time, this Word speaks of Jesus' tender care for His mother.

His death leaves a terrible gap in her life. Jesus is not insensitive to her suffering and grief. To comfort her in her deep sorrow Jesus transfers His earthly sonship to the disciple whom He loved. He of all the disciples could best care for Mary.

*Jesus severed
His earthly ties
with His mother
so that He could remove
the sting
of this aspect of death.*

The Word of the cross in all of this? Marvelous comfort!

For Mary. For you!

For Mary? Mary too must sacrifice the earthly tie. Her beloved son dies and is gone. But Jesus dies and is gone exactly to arise from the dead as her Savior. Her Lord and her God!

For you? Jesus sacrificed all. He entered into every phase of your death, tasting death as He alone could taste it. Jesus did that in order to satisfy God's justice and atone for your sins.

Jesus, this means, severed His

earthly ties with His mother so that He could remove the sting of this aspect of death.

When we leave our loved ones in death, even that is not without hope. Death in this respect too is not the end. It's only the way to that higher relationship of the communion of the saints in the glory of the Father's house of many mansions.

You have lost your wife? Your husband? A father? Mother? Your son or daughter? You are lonely and you weep in the night? At times you can hardly bear the pain?

Jesus knows that! The footsteps of Jesus are in the valley of our deepest sorrows!

Those footsteps lead to glory! Fellowship with the Father and fellowship with all God's saints!

In your sorrows pray to your merciful High Priest. Jesus will bring those prayers to God!

And God will wipe away all tears from your eyes. □

Amen

Teach Me to Obey
What though the task Thou hast for me,
Tedious, and long, and hard may be,
Speak to my soul that I may see,
And teach me to obey.

Thy will, O God, not mine, not mine!
Nothing have I that is not Thine,
So unto me the work assign,
And teach me to obey.

Lead me, no matter when or where;
Show me the burden that I must bear;
Only my selfish heart prepare —
And teach me to obey.

Keep me, O Lord, from self and sin;
Help me to obey Thy will.
Pure I would be without, within.
Oh, teach me to obey.

*Standard Bearer
July 1, 1933*

Church Unity, Reformed Synods, and Independency (3)

Editorial

A friend lent me the March, April, and May 1991 issues of the Outlook, which contain articles called "Synod-ocracy: Cause and Cure." The writer's complaint is that the synod of his church (the Christian Reformed Church) had opened the doors of local church office to women. His solution is virtually a modified form of independency, unless I read him wrongly.... Have you read the articles in the Outlook? I would value a response to "Synod-ocracy: Cause and Cure," unless you agree with the articles, of course.

Shall There Be Synod?

This was the request of a correspondent in Liverpool, England in a letter that was published in the February 1, 1992 issue of the *Standard Bearer*. The request refers to three articles in the religious periodical, *Outlook*, entitled, "Synod-ocracy: Cause and Cure," by Dr. Lester DeKoster. In these articles, Dr. DeKoster offers advice to Christian Reformed congregations that oppose the decision of the CRC synod of 1990 approving the ordination of women to the offices of minister and elder. The advice treats the church political aspect of the difficulty of these aggrieved congregations: How can they live in the denomination?

As our English correspondent recognizes, the issue in the *Outlook* articles is whether synodical union has a rightful place in the life of Reformed churches.

It is the fundamental claim of the three articles in *Outlook* (hereafter, "SCC—1,2, or 3") that the Reformed

synod has no authority over the local churches. Although DeKoster attempts a description of the strange word, "synod-ocracy," that links it with Roman Catholic hierarchy, "synod-ocracy" for him is not that synod abuses its authority or that synod usurps authority that does not belong to it, but that synod has, and exercises, any authority at all. The sin of "synod-ocracy" is simply that synod is synod.

The Word gives no authority to synods ("SCC—2").

Authority in the church, the marks of the true church, the keys of the kingdom are all lodged in the local congregation. None belongs to classes, synods nor all trappings of bureaucracy built up by them. Let us be so clear about it, that synodocracy will wilt on the vine it has intruded among us ("SCC—3").

Synods do not have, and can never attain, authority on their own; nor can the churches loan it to them ("SCC—3").

This last reflects on the Reformed explanation of the authority of synod as derived from the local churches themselves who delegate ministers and elders with authority to classes and synod, so that the authority of synod is the authority of the local churches themselves thus assembled. DeKoster denies this categorically.

You cannot (he says, speaking to the local church — DJE) delegate divinely assigned authority to any other body; it is not yours to pass around ("SCC—1").

A congregation cannot give a del-

egate any authority to lord it over anybody, nor even to join in lording it over the congregation itself. Delegates do not come trailing clouds of authority to be manipulated by bureaucrats for their own ends ("SCC—2"; the language is pejorative, but the reference is to the local churches' authoritative delegation of men to the major assemblies — DJE). They (the local churches — DJE) have no authority in and of themselves to delegate to classes and synods ("SCC—3").

Or Church Order?

This denial of all synodical authority over the local churches brings DeKoster into conflict with the Reformed church order of Dordt, which church order in revised form is also the church order of his own denomination. DeKoster's resolution of this conflict is radical. First, he denies any and all authority to the church order.

Of necessity a *Church Order* is descriptive, not prescriptive. That is because it has no authority, cannot command obedience with, "Thus saith the Lord!" ...church orders *do not* enjoy divinely endowed authority. They *describe*, not *prescribe* ("SCC—1").

That article of the church order which is of crucial importance for the denominational union, Article 31 (Articles 29 and 30 in the revised church order of the CRC), DeKoster charges with the capital crime of challenging the sole authority of Scripture:

Note, then, how the *Church Order* (in Art. 31 of the church order of Dordt — DJE) not only sets itself on

a par with the Bible, but wishes to be viewed in place of the *Forms of Unity*. This... is a boulder for synodical autocracy ("SCC—2").

He holds up Article 31 to ridicule:

All the *Church Order* allows is that churches, mind you, come crawling to synods, mind you, begging to be heard.... You come; you kneel; and perhaps his excellency will grant you an audience ("SCC—2").

Thus does Dr. DeKoster, all on his own, by mere declaration, set aside the long, honorable, well-argued Reformed tradition, shared by the Presbyterian churches, that the Reformed church order is based on Holy Scripture, so that its authority at bottom, like that of the confessions, is the very authority of the King of the church, Jesus Christ.

Settled and Binding

But so clear and strong is the language of Article 31 of the Dordt church order against DeKoster's denial of synodical authority that he thinks it necessary to combat the article in yet two other ways. Article 31, after all, states that the decisions of synod "shall be considered settled and binding, unless (they) be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the church order"

In the first assault upon this article (which has no authority in any case, since the entire church order lacks authority), DeKoster offers the novel explanation that "settled and binding" does not refer to the local churches and their members, but to the following synods who might otherwise waste time discussing matters already decided.

"Settled and binding" ... once was useful, not for laying edicts upon the churches but for obliging synods to discipline themselves.... Synods meeting in such circumstances had absolutely no time for repetitious talk. And thus a decision became "settled and binding," not upon the churches but upon following synods.

But even as regards the subsequent synods, decisions of a previous synod are settled and binding "only as precedent, for synods have no authority

over each other either" ("SCC—2"). All of this is to say that decisions of Reformed synods are "settled and binding" upon absolutely no one and upon absolutely nothing.

*Article 31 states,
in clear,
unmistakable language,
that the decisions of synod
shall be considered
settled and binding
by the appellant...*

To his credit, Dr. DeKoster has in the past shown himself a staunch opponent of the "new hermeneutic" as a way of interpreting the Bible. It is not to his credit that he now permits himself the use of a "new hermeneutic" in order to explain away the clear rule for denominational life found in Article 31 of the church order. Treating as it does of the right of appeal by a member against a "minor assembly" (consistory), Article 31 states, in clear, unmistakable language, that the decisions of synod shall be considered settled and binding by the appellant, by the consistory, and by every congregation and member in the denomination.

Article 31, Meet Article 84

The second additional assault upon Article 31, after declaring it (as part of the church order as a whole) to be without any authority whatever, consists of pitting Article 84 of the same church order against it. (This has become Article 95 in the revised church order of the CRC.) Article 84 is the grand anti-hierarchical article of the church order of Dordt: "No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no minister over other ministers, no elder or deacon over other elders or deacons." This, says DeKoster, means that synods possess no authority over the local churches and that synodical decisions are not settled and binding for the churches. If a synod has authority over the local

churches, it would be lording it over the churches. The ministers and elders at synod would then be lording it over the other ministers and elders ("SCC—2").

His error, of course, is that he confuses "lording over" with "exercising legitimate authority." Also, he fails to see that the attempt by a local church to dominate other local churches is not at all the same as the mutual exercise of their authority by all the churches in assembly through ministers and elders duly appointed.

Dr. DeKoster had done well to leave Article 84 of the Dordt church order out of his polemic against the Reformed synod. Indeed, he might well have hoped that no one would think of this article. For this article demolishes his case. The article has always been of vital importance to the Reformed churches. In the original draft of the church order, the fathers put this article first. It was Article 1. Abominating the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church from which they had just been delivered, the Reformed churches in The Netherlands were determined to avoid all hierarchy in their own life. No fiercer enemies of hierarchy existed than these churches. But it was these very churches with their antipathy toward all hierarchy that included in their church order the articles that required synods (Art. 29); gave synods "jurisdiction" (Latin: *auctoritas*, that is, 'authority') over the consistories (Art. 36); and stated that the decisions of synod on matters of appeal against consistories "shall be considered settled and binding" (Art. 31).

*Reformed churches
have always understood
that synodical authority
is not inherently hierarchical.*

The explanation is that the Reformed churches have always understood that synodical authority is not inherently hierarchical. Synod is not "synod-ocracy."

There is no need to introduce Article 31 to Article 84. They have known each other well, and been good friends, now for almost 500 years.

Kill The Patient!

Dr. DeKoster diagnoses the cause of "synod-ocracy," and prescribes the cure. The cause of "synod-ocracy" is the *existence itself* of synod according to the Reformed church order. The cure for "synod-ocracy," accordingly, is the annihilation of synod. The conservatives in the CRC have brought to physician DeKoster a sick patient, their synod. By the virus of common grace, it has lost its immunity to the disease of worldliness and is presently ravaged with feminism. The cause of the problem, says the doctor, is that the patient exists at all. The cure? "Kill the poor fellow!" Henceforth, no broader, or major, assemblies. Only independent congregations.

Independency

Thus DeKoster dissolves the denominational bond. Our Liverpool correspondent shows shrewd insight when he says that DeKoster's advice

"is virtually a modified form of independency." It is, in fact, actual, complete, and developed independency. DeKoster is even willing to embrace the name: "Congregationalism is, historically, Calvinism steering shy of synodocracy" ("SCC—3").

*Congregationalism is,
principally and historically,
Calvinism committing
suicide.*

This is bad enough. For, as I have shown in earlier articles, independency abandons that which is essential to Reformed Christianity. Congregationalism is, principally and historically, Calvinism committing suicide. Independency sins against the unity of the church.

But for Dr. DeKoster and the conservatives for whom and to whom he speaks, the advice in "Synod-ocracy: Cause and Cure" is even worse. Recommending that those aggrieved by the synod of 1990 remain in the denomination, DeKoster

urges that local churches in the CRC refuse to recognize any synodical decision as settled and binding ("you decide to take it or leave it"); refuse to send delegates to classis and synod; refuse to pay the synodical quota; refuse to receive the classical church visitors; and receive ministers without any denominational regulation or examination ("SCC—3"). This is revolt against the church order that is still binding upon all congregations and members in the CRC. The result is anarchy.

Not one voice, to my knowledge, has been raised in the conservative CRC press, including *Outlook*, against this manifesto for independency.

Synod does not have many friends today. The denomination has fallen out of favor.

The fact remains that the Reformed denomination of churches, united in the truth set forth in the "Three Forms of Unity" and cooperating in accordance with the church order of Dordt, is a wonderful thing. It is not man-made. It is the creation of the Spirit of Christ.

And rare. □

—DJE

Letters

Interest in the T.B.S.

In behalf of the Trinitarian Bible Society, I would like to express our sincere thanks for your article in the

January 15, 1992 *Standard Bearer* about the T.B.S. ("Writings Worth Noting"). Since your article appeared, we have had much interest expressed for literature and also received donations. The needs are very great in all

parts of the world for the uncorrupted word of God.

Jack R. Swets
Secretary, Trinitarian Bible Society
(U.S.A.)
Grand Rapids, MI

Example

The word "example" does not occur in the Old Testament, which is not surprising when we consider that the Old Testament contains many persons and events that are examples for them that should come later. In the New Testament there are five Greek words translated "example," or "ensample." These five words have their own nuances, but also show a high degree of similarity and agreement. One refers to a mark that a strike or a blow makes, that is to be observed as a dissuasive warning or an example to be imitated; another means a sign either for imitation or warning; another means a written copy of the alphabet as an aid in learning, as an example before our eyes. An example can be defined as a person or thing that is ordained by God to serve as a pattern that is to be imitated or avoided. Scripture uses other terms, such as "disciples," "followers," and "imitators," to get across the same idea. Only the very foolish and headstrong would ignore the examples God gives us in His Word.

Hear the Scriptures. *Ministers* are to be examples unto other believers in word, in conversation, in spirit, in faith, in purity (I Tim. 4:12). *Elders* are examples to the flock, and not cruel overlords (I Pet. 5:3). *Job* is our example of suffering affliction (James 5:10). *Paul* is to be followed in his heavenly conversation (citizenship), as well as others who walk as he walks (Phil. 3:17). He is also an example to us of one who does his own work and eats his own bread (II Thess. 3:9). *Faithful churches* are commended by the apostle and are set forth as worthy examples for other congregations in the areas of charity, brotherly love, suffering affliction, and faithfulness in evangelism. As we read the Old Testament we are to understand the *priesthood* and the *tabernacle service* as examples of better, heavenly things, for Moses made all things according to the pattern (type, example) shown him by God in the holy mount (Heb. 8:5).

Because of our sinful natures and the presence of a twofold seed in the church, Scripture also speaks powerful warnings, gives negative examples, things never to be emulated. The entire history of Israel in the wilderness is replete with examples for us upon whom the end of the world is come. We are not to lust after evil things, commit idolatry or fornication, tempt Christ, or murmur. We are exhorted to heed these examples, or we fall even as we are thinking we are strong (I Cor. 10:1-12). Many in Israel could not enter the land because of unbelief; we are to labor to enter into the rest that remaineth to the people of God, lest we fall after the same example of unbelief (Heb. 4:11). The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with brimstone, as well as Lot's wife, are warning examples to us, but especially to those who should after live ungodly (II Pet. 2:6; Jude 7).

The greatest example for the believer is God's own Son in our flesh, our elder Brother, Jesus Christ. It is true He is much more than an example, for by His Spirit He is also the power by which we are enabled to follow Him. But first of all, He is the splendid example for every aspect of our calling. Using the word that means a copy of the alphabet as an aid to learning, Peter writes, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his footsteps" (I Pet. 2:21). The Alpha and Omega teaches us the ABC's of discipleship. Especially is this true in respect to suffering patiently and committing ourselves to God the righteous Judge. The night before He died, Christ gave to us the example of footwashing, "that ye should do as I have done unto you" (John 13:14, 15). The context makes plain that as Jesus labored to make us clean every whit, we are to be busy in washing one another's feet, i.e., in humble assistance of the brother and sister in overcoming sin and living a holy life as becometh saints. The pattern for life that Christ has left us is one of self-forgetfulness, self-denial, and willingness to suffer even to the extent of losing one's life; in other words that we are careful to place our feet precisely in the footsteps He has left upon the pages of Holy Writ.

The current word for "example" is "role model," a word much in the news these days. People in the world of sports, music, movies, and television think of themselves, and are thought of by multitudes of others, as role models for children and young people. Where this pernicious idea came from I can only guess; it has to be the measure of the blindness and poverty of unbelief. One after another these idols fall as Dagon, as their lives of drug use, sexual promiscuity, gambling, and greed are exposed in the media. And there are many more out there ready to topple! Are their posters hanging in the bedrooms of our children? There is something wrong if our children's examples are not found around the dining room table, in the elder's bench, in the church's pew, and in the Word of God preached, studied, and believed?

Disciples of Christ, take good heed. □

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When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. MaryBeth Lubbers

The Reformed Family: Friends

Even though you are not a wife or mother, a husband or father; even though your parents may be old or have already died; even though you may not have a brother or a sister, there is a relationship in the Reformed family which can be yours. It is that of friend. How precious is a friend. How blessed for you if you have a close friend. Birth gives us our relatives, but we are allowed to choose our friends. Nor does having a close friend contradict the enjoyment of the communion of all saints.

Friendship is an ancient relationship. It is even older than God's friendship with Moses in the desert wanderings (Ex. 33:11), or with Abraham on the plains of Mamre (II Chron. 20:7; Is. 41:8), or with Adam in Paradise (Gen. 2:8). It goes back to eternity, to timelessness. It is embraced in the triune God, who enjoys perfect, transcendent friendship within the Trinity.

David is one prominent Old Testament example of a man who experienced the intimate bond of friendship. His friendship with Jonathan is extolled for all time in his *Song of the Bow* (II Samuel 1). Conversely, David also endured betrayal by the closest of friends, his counselor, Ahithophel. Ahithophel is the Old Testament picture of Judas Iscariot, who lives forever in ignominy for betraying the Savior. And, speaking against all

traitors, Proverbs 27 warns:

Faithful are the wounds of a friend;
but the kiss of an enemy is deceitful.

It is also in David's regret over the loss of his dear friend Ahithophel that the Scripture gives good guidance for choosing a friend. In Psalm 55, David laments the loss of three pleasures that his companionship with Ahithophel had provided:

1. We ate together.
2. We talked together.
3. We went to church together.

Still today this triad forms solid foundation for true friendship. Who can enjoy the intimacy of eating with unbelievers or strangers? Who can benefit from "sweet counsel" with the enemies of Christ? Who can be united with a despiser of the Reformed faith?

*One of the
precious privileges
of friendship
is conversation.*

One of the precious privileges of friendship is conversation. Friends "talk of many things: Of shoes — and ships — and sealing-wax — of cabbages — and kings" (Lewis Carroll). Nor are friends always in agreement. Discussion even becomes rather heated. Friends chide one another over wrongdoing. But out of that hot discussion and that gentle chiding greater understanding and stronger links of love are forged. William Blake wrote:

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.

I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow
A Poison Tree.

Friends communicate, are sympathetic with one another, are unselfish, holding true the adage, "It is better to give than to receive." And if you have a friend worth loving, love him not only, but tell him so, because why should kind words never be said of a friend — until he is dead? C. S. Lewis wrote:

Friendship is unnecessary,
like philosophy, like art...
It has no survival value;
rather it is one of those things
that gives value to survival.

A longtime friend is like an old shoe — you can leave it sitting around for a long time, but when you slip it on once again, it is just as comfortable as ever it was.

A friend does not say "Be warm" and give you no coat; "Be quenched" and give you no water; "Be fed" and give you no food. But rather, along with the coat which he drapes over your shivering shoulders, the cold glass of water with which he refreshes your parched soul, and the tasty meal he serves to satisfy your gnawing hunger, he enfolds you in the warmth of his arms. And all with no thought of remuneration. A friend never says, as is so common in the world of business, "Now you owe me one."

Even, and especially, in our family relationships, the cord which binds us is that we are first of all friends. There can be no cohabitation without tried and tested friendship. And it is oneness at the communion table which unites true friends. The friend I cherish here is the friend I want to meet in heaven. This is the pain endured of

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friends who go astray or forsake the commandments of God — we will not share eternity with them. And this friendship is a mutual trust, compassion, and support based once again on giving, not getting.

*The friend I cherish here
is the friend I want to meet
in heaven.*

A friendship of souls knit together is a friendship which will endure through adversity and prosperity, through disgrace as well as honor. And it is simply not true as the cynic Mark Twain observed, "When you ascend the hill of prosperity, may you not meet a friend."

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul not only pays tribute to his own friends, but also lays down regulations for the formation of friendships.

Many times in Paul's ministry he was confined to prison, he was beaten, he was stoned, he was in peril, and he was often maligned; but his friend Onesiphorus did not judge Paul according to popularity polls. Onesiphorus remained loyal to Paul.

And Paul pens his gratitude to him in II Timothy 1:16:

The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain....

Surely the friendship of Onesiphorus reiterates Proverbs 17:17: A friend loveth at all times.

Paul also pointedly warns against being unequally yoked with unbelievers. And what concord hath Christ with Belial (II Cor. 6:15)? Because our friends are such an influence upon us, it is imperative that we choose our friends carefully. Choosing our friends involves two criteria: common foundation and common goals. Upon what is our friendship built? Where is it headed?

Here, too, Scripture is explicit in telling us of the specious friendship which sprang up between Herod and Pilate. Two political opponents who spent a lifetime hating each other came together for a short period in history in their common foundation — hatred of Christ, and their common goal — exterminating the Son of God. "And that same day, Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves" (Luke 23:12). Even in the church, one must guard himself

against hastily cemented friendships based on a common devious purpose.

The Lord Jesus also had friends during his earthly ministry. The Son of God deemed this human relationship a worthy one. The disciple John, "who leaned upon his breast," was one of Jesus' closest friends. For although Jesus had twelve disciples, and He loved them all — save one — indisputably John was the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 13:23).

Often when Jesus was lonely, in need of comfort and companionship, He headed for Bethany to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Scripture indicates that in this home, Jesus' home away from home, He experienced the earthly companionship of friends.

Christ is our Savior, we are His redeemed. Christ is our Master, we are His servants. Christ is our elder brother, we are His siblings. And Christ is also our friend.

What a friend! After telling us the supreme sacrifice that a man must make for his friends — that he will lay down his life for them — Jesus tells us in words sweetly confidential: henceforth, I call you friends (John 15:15).

□

In His Fear Rev. Arie denHartog

What a difference there is in the way the Lord deals with various of His children! Some seem to go through much of their life without any trouble. And when they come to the end of their life they are taken to glory in a

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Our Father's Chastisement (II)

moment, peacefully, without any struggle and with little suffering. Then there are others of God's children who have one trouble after another. They experience sorrow upon sorrow. Some of God's children must suffer long years of sickness and agony before they are finally taken to glory. Why such a great difference?

That question cannot always be answered. God's ways are higher

than our ways. They are mysterious. Sometimes He leads His children into the depths of the sea without showing the reason. The reason is hidden in His secret counsel, not to be revealed until the last day. But this is absolutely sure: the ways of the Lord in dealing with His children are always perfectly wise and good.

Scripture however makes plain various purposes of the Father in chas-

tening His children. Sometimes God's children need to be chastened on account of their continuing sinfulness. Contrary to what is taught today in many churches, the child of God remains weak and sinful all the days of his life. He is made perfect only when the vile body of sin is destroyed in the grave and he receives a new body fashioned after the glorious image of Jesus Christ. Though the Lord repeatedly admonishes His children by His Word, that Word is not always obeyed, even by those who are the children of God. We are by nature hard-hearted and slow to believe and obey the Word of God. Our sinful nature rebels against the commandments of God. To correct children who continue to disobey the Word of God it sometimes becomes necessary for the Lord to chasten them.

This is a fearful thing. Sometimes the Lord has to give us over to our sins and let us suffer its bitter consequences. Peter was given over to the sin of pride and self-confidence when he denied his beloved Lord at the very time He was being tried to be crucified. He was given over to the devil to be sifted as wheat. What an awful experience that was for the great apostle of the Lord! After he had fallen into sin he went out and wept bitterly. David, because of the sin of pride and carnal trust in the strength of his army, was moved to commit the great sin of numbering Israel. This had most dreadful consequences for all Israel.

Young people are sometimes given over by the Lord to the consequences of their sins when they refuse to obey the Word of God and to listen to its many warnings concerning the serious consequences of sin and worldliness. They choose their friends from the world and follow the lifestyle of the world. They hurt themselves so grievously that they are scarred for life. They end up with ungodly life partners and deprive themselves of the great joy and blessing of Christian marriage for the rest of their life on earth. All of this may be the chastening of the Lord. Even older men might be so foolish as not

to listen to the warnings of God's Word concerning such things as excessive drinking or yielding to the temptation of adultery. As a result they bring awful shame and misery upon themselves and their families. Young women forsake their God-ordained calling in the home for the glamor of worldly careers. They will sometimes be severely chastened of the Lord and suffer the bitter consequences of children who in later life forsake the Lord and live wicked and ungodly lives.

When we are chastened of the Lord we ought always to consider whether the Lord is dealing with us because of our sin. This is not something which the child of God is exempt from because he has been made righteous in the cross of Christ. The Bible gives numerous examples of the Lord chastening His people because of their sins. Israel in the wilderness, though they were the special people of God, had to be chastened again and again because of their sin of murmuring and complaining and rebelling against the Lord. How often we complain against the Lord in a similar manner. The Lord chastens His children to cause them to repent of their sins and to plead with Him for His forgiving mercy.

*Some of the greatest saints
of the Lord have suffered
the most severe chastening
of the Lord.*

When the Lord chastens us on account of our sin we must not harden our hearts and continue in sin nor turn from the Lord in anger. But rather we must by the grace of God in our hearts humble ourselves under the chastening hand of the Lord and repent of our sin. Furthermore, we must be thankful that the Lord did not leave us in our sin to be destroyed by the devil, but in the greatness of His mercy has by chastisement taught us the great seriousness of our sin and turned us away from the sin and back

unto Himself. By chastisement He saved us and turned us again into the way of righteousness and life.

Though some of the Lord's chastisement is on account of specific sin in the life of the child of God, this is by no means the only reason for chastening. It is a grave mistake to accuse of some great sin every child of God who is being chastened of the Lord, and to judge him in our minds. This is what the supposed friends of Job tried to do when Job was grievously chastened of the Lord. But one of the amazing things of the book of Job is that it begins with the testimony concerning Job that he was "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1). The "friends" of Job were entirely wrong in accusing Job of some great evil and only added to his grief and sorrow by their high-sounding accusations. Some of the greatest saints of the Lord have suffered the most severe chastening of the Lord. God's purposes in such chastisement are largely positive. His purpose may be to perfect His virtues in His saints for the glory of His own name. Think of how gloriously the faith of Job shines in the midst of his great affliction. He is an outstanding example of patience and trust in God. The Lord Himself worked those glorious virtues in Job by means of chastisement.

Sometimes the Lord chastens His children in order to keep them from evil. That is strikingly illustrated in the life of the apostle Paul. Paul tells us in II Corinthians 12 of an amazing experience that happened in his life. He was translated in the spirit into heaven where he saw wonderful visions, more glorious than any other man had seen. Then Paul says that, in order that he might not be exalted above measure and become proud of himself, God gave him "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him." That thorn in the flesh was given to Paul to prevent pride from arising in his heart and to keep him humble. It reminded him daily of his own great weakness and of the need of the grace of God in his life. When God gives some of His saints very

high privileges in His church and kingdom, such as those He gives to ministers and office bearers, He sometimes must chasten them in order to keep them from spoiling their life by the sin of pride and self-exaltation.

The Lord often chastens His children to teach them their great weakness and complete dependence on the Lord. How hard it was for Israel to depend on the Lord as He led them through the wilderness to the promised land. Therefore the Lord had to chasten them over and over, to try their faith and cause them to cry out unto Him for help. We are just as slow to trust in the Lord. Our sinful nature is such that we desperately want to rely on ourselves and glory in our own strength and wisdom. So the Lord has to teach us again and again our need of His grace and strength in all our life. We can learn this often only through chastisement by our heavenly Father.

*Through chastisement
we learn again
that we are only pilgrims
and strangers in the world,
just passing through.*

The Lord chastens His children in order to teach them the riches of His grace and mercy. This is truly wonderful. He teaches us lessons through chastisement that we could not learn in a life of ease and luxury in which we never experienced any trouble. Chastening can produce in the child of God a profound consciousness of God's love and faithfulness. As a pastor I have heard some of the most beautiful testimonies of the grace and mercy of God from the mouths of saints who were severely chastened of the Lord. Such chastisement actually brought these saints closer to the Lord and caused them to experience more than ever the goodness and mercy of God, even when they could not fully understand the way of the Lord. Truly "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

The Lord sometimes chastens His servants in order to make them better ministers of His to comfort and encourage other saints in the midst of their trouble and sorrow. How much more sympathetic we can be towards our fellow saints when we ourselves have gone through trials of affliction similar to what they are going through. This draws us closer to each other in the bond of love.

The Lord often chastens us to make us more heavenly-minded. We are by nature earthly-minded. We seek the things of this world. Our life is often totally consumed with earthly pursuits and pleasures. How easily this steals our hearts from God and from heavenly pursuits. Through chastisement we learn again that we are only pilgrims and strangers in the world, just passing through. The Lord removes from us earthly treasures and keeps us from indulging in earthly pleasures because our hearts must be set upon the glorious heavenly inheritance that He has prepared for us.

The Lord chastens His children in order that they might be partakers of the fellowship of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is perhaps the most beautiful of all the purposes of the Lord in chastisement. Our Lord suffered and died for us. His suffering was an atoning suffering. No one ever suffered like He did, nor could any one ever suffer like He did. Through His suffering He paid the full penalty of our sin and accomplished all righteousness for us. None of our suffering is atoning suffering. We must never imagine such a thing lest we rob the cross of its glory. In our own suffering we learn more deeply to appreciate the great suffering of the Lord on our behalf and learn to love Him more. Especially when we suffer directly for the testimony of the Lord and because of our faith in Him we are drawn closer to Him. In this way we as Christians partake in the sufferings of the Lord. This is a wonderful privilege. It is an honor that we should be counted worthy to suffer for the name of the Lord. The Christian rejoices when he understands this.

The Bible exhorts us not to despise the chastening of the Lord. We are not to have a careless disregard for it. We must rather consider carefully and humbly how the Lord is dealing with us. We must not murmur and complain against the Lord and begin to criticize and judge the way of the Lord that it is evil. Through

*We are not to receive
the chastisement of the Lord
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or stoically...*

faith we must submit ourselves under the chastening hand of the Lord, believing and knowing that it is for our good and salvation and for His glory. It is a great sin to become bitter against the Lord because of how He chastens us in His great love. We avoid this when we meditate on the great purpose of His love as it is revealed in the gospel. We are not to receive the chastisement of the Lord merely passively or stoically without faith in God. But rather we are to endure the Lord's chastisement in patience and faith. Then we will be exercised by the chastisement of the Lord and it will make us strong to serve the Lord. When we endure chastisement it will bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

To have peace with God! What can be more wonderful and blessed! Those who are at peace with God enjoy His favor and loving-kindness. To walk in righteousness is the greatest good. The child of God through suffering learns obedience. Even the Lord Jesus, according to Hebrews 5, learned obedience by the things which He suffered. How much more needful this is for us.

By chastisement the Lord will make us partakers of His own holiness. Only when we have been made holy can we dwell with the Lord. The Lord has not promised that our lives on earth will always be full of joy and happiness. His great interest is not merely to make us happy, as some

preachers today foolishly preach. He is more interested in making us holy. Holiness is more important than happiness. True and lasting joy can come only in the way of holiness. God makes us holy in order that He might prepare us for our place in heaven. Rejoice therefore when you are chastened of the Lord.

Present chastisement always seems grievous. It is hard to bear. The Lord knows that, and He is full of mercy to help us and give us the strength we need to endure it. We

must not faint when the Lord chastens us. The Lord's chastisement must not make us depressed and utterly discouraged. It must not destroy in us the joy and hope of the Christian life. The chastisement of the Lord must not make us forsake the Christian life or even become listless and careless in it. As we are chastened of the Lord we must continue faithfully and zealously to live the Christian life and to testify of the glory of the name of our God. By faith understand the

Lord's loving purpose and blessed end in chastening us. Our focus must not be on this world but ultimately on the glory and blessing for which the Lord is preparing us. The sorrow of our necessary chastisement will last only for a moment. The Lord calls us to endure unto the end. When finally He brings us to glory He will give us to understand how His way of chastisement was good and served the purpose of our eternal glory. □

Decency and Order
Rev. Ronald Cammenga

Jurisdiction of Assemblies

In these assemblies ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted and that in an ecclesiastical manner. In major assemblies only such matters shall be dealt with as could not be finished in minor assemblies, or such as pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common.

Church Order, Article 30

Introduction

Article 30 concerns the proper jurisdiction of ecclesiastical assemblies. The article specifies that the jurisdiction of all ecclesiastical assemblies is limited to ecclesiastical matters. In regard to the major assemblies, the article specifies that their jurisdiction is limited to those matters which could not be finished in the minor assemblies or which pertain to the churches in common.

Article 30 also prescribes that the business of the assemblies be trans-

acted in an "ecclesiastical manner."

Reference is made to "major" and "minor" assemblies. Other terms have been used: "higher" and "lower"; "broader" and "narrower." "Broader" and "narrower" may be the best terms, although no matter which terms are used they may be exploited by those who are advocates of hierarchy.

"Major" means "more" and "minor" means "less." The idea is not that major assemblies have greater *intrinsic* authority than the consistory. The consistory has the only intrinsic authority. Besides, the consistory has authority to do what no classis or synod can do: preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and exercise Christian discipline. The distinction between "major" and "minor" refers to the relationship between assemblies in the church federation. The scope of the authority of a consistory

is limited to the one congregation over which that consistory has been placed. Within the church federation, however, the authority of a classis is over all of the churches of the classis; the scope of the authority of synod is over all of the churches of the denomination. In this sense the broader assemblies are certainly "major" assemblies. The authority exercised by the major assemblies derives from the willing consent of the minor assemblies, and ultimately from the consistories that have willingly joined the federation.

Ecclesiastical Matters Only

The emphasis of Article 30 is that the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical assemblies is confined to ecclesiastical matters: "In these assemblies ecclesiastical matters *only* shall be transacted...." The boundaries are clearly set.

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This means that only those matters which concern the life and calling of the church and her membership are to be the concern of the ecclesiastical bodies. Strictly speaking, the assemblies are limited to those things that pertain to the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Christian discipline.

The assemblies are not to busy themselves in matters which are outside of the sphere of the church: matters political, social, civil, educational, industrial, personal. Any assembly that does, intrudes itself into an area outside of its proper jurisdiction. For any assembly to do this is to abandon its God-given calling and invite God's wrath. For, in the end, it is God who limits the jurisdiction of the church.

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The sphere of the church is solely things spiritual. Only in as far as there is a spiritual aspect is the church to be involved in a matter. For example, it is not the business of the church to settle financial disputes between brothers. In this case, Jesus' word in Luke 12:14 applies: "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" But if the sin of fraud or stealing enters in, then it becomes an ecclesiastical matter.

Every assembly must concern itself with the issue of the legality of a matter that has been brought before it: "Is this matter legally before the assembly? Is this a matter that the assembly ought to be involved in?" In deciding upon legality, the first question to be answered must be: "Is this matter properly an ecclesiastical matter?"

Early on the Reformed churches

in The Netherlands resisted every attempt to persuade the church to be involved in non-ecclesiastical matters. The Synod of Emden, 1571, did not acquiesce to the request of Prince William I that the churches support him by recruiting soldiers for his army, by collecting money for the support of the army, and by assisting in the relaying of army bulletins. It was the decision of this Synod that, "The minister(s) and the elders shall make sure that they deal with ecclesiastical matters only in the consistories, classes and the synods. But if there are some matters which are partly ecclesiastical and partly political, such as in case of marriage, if any difficulties arise, they shall seek the judgment and authority of the government."

Jurisdiction of Major Assemblies

All the assemblies are limited in their work to ecclesiastical matters. But, in distinction from the consistory, two additional restrictions are placed on the jurisdiction of the major assemblies, i.e., classis and synod: "In major assemblies only such matters shall be dealt with as could not be finished in minor assemblies, or such as pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common."

Jurisdiction of major assemblies is limited, first, to those matters which could not be finished in the minor assembly. Whenever a matter comes to the major assembly from the minor assembly or from someone who has been working with the minor assembly, the question before the major assembly is: "Is this matter finished in the minor assembly? Could this matter have been finished in the minor assembly? Was everything possible done so that the matter could be finished in the minor assembly?"

This is the second question that must be faced with respect to legality. If this requirement of Article 30 has not been met, the matter must be declared to be not legally before the major assembly. It is ruled out of order and there is no treatment by the major assembly of the substance of the issue. The matter is referred back to the minor assembly.

That a matter could not be finished may refer to the fact that it could not be finished to the satisfaction of the parties involved, in which case the aggrieved party comes to the major assembly by way of appeal. (The matter of appeal to a major assembly will be treated in Article 31.) Or the matter could not be finished because of serious division in the minor assembly (let us say, the consistory) that makes it impossible for it to "finish" a matter satisfactorily, in which case the help of the major assembly may be sought.

*Article 30 keeps
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the minor assemblies.*

There is sound, practical wisdom in the requirement of Article 30. It forces the minor assemblies, particularly the consistories, to do their proper work, and not shirk their God-given responsibilities by passing the matter on to the broader assemblies. It also forces individuals to work with the minor assembly, especially the consistory, and not too quickly to appeal to the major assembly in order to bypass the consistory. It protects the minor assembly from unlawful intrusion and interference by the major assembly. And it keeps the major assemblies from being flooded with matters that could have and properly should have been dealt with by the minor assemblies.

In the second place, jurisdiction of major assemblies concerns matters that pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common. This is the third question raised with regard to legality: "Does the matter concern the churches in common?" If it does, it belongs at the major assembly.

Matters which pertain to the

work of the classis may be brought directly to the classis. Two examples may be these: matters which deal with the annual church visitation, or matters which deal with the revision of the "Classical Rules of Order."

Matters which pertain to the work of the synod may be brought directly to the synod: matters concerning missions, the theological school, sister-church relations, revision of the *Church Order*.

Even though matters dealing with the churches of the major assembly in common may be brought directly to these assemblies, it is proper that these matters come before the major assembly via the minor assembly. This makes it possible for the major assembly to be served by the judgment, investigation, and insights of the minor assembly.

Classification of Materials

It may be helpful to classify the main types of materials that come before the assemblies. Sometimes there is confusion over the terms that are used to describe these materials.

PROTEST — A protest is a request to an assembly for revision or reversal of a decision made by that same assembly with which the protestant is aggrieved.

APPEAL — An appeal is a request to a major assembly (classis or synod) for judgment against the decision of a minor assembly with which the appellant (an individual, a consistory, or even a classis) is aggrieved.

OVERTURE — An overture is a proposal sent to an assembly for change of existing policy, procedure,

or practice or recommendation of some new policy, procedure, or practice.

GRAVAMEN — A gravamen is a formal objection directed to the major assembly against a teaching of the confessions of the church, including a request for revision.

REPORT — A report is information supplied to an assembly of work mandated by the assembly and accomplished in the name of the assembly. This would include reports of various committees, reports of functionaries (Stated Clerk, for example), standing committees, special committees, or study committees.

The Ecclesiastical Manner

Article 30 also prescribes that the work of the assemblies is to be carried out "in an ecclesiastical manner." This presupposes that there is a proper ecclesiastical manner. The business of the assemblies is to be conducted in this manner. The assemblies must be concerned not only with what they are doing, but with how they are doing it.

This "ecclesiastical manner" is not spelled out in the article. Nevertheless, it is clearly implied.

*If a matter is so serious
that the assembly
ought to treat it,
it must not be treated
superficially and hastily.*

All matters are to be treated decently and in good order, I Corinthians 14:40. This means that all matters must be treated according to the provisions of the *Church Order*, and according to the adopted "Rules of Order of Classis and Synod."

The ecclesiastical manner means that the discussion of every issue must be brotherly and considerate. (Cf. Article 35 where among the duties of the president of the assemblies is this, that he "...silence the captious and those who are vehement in speaking.") Speakers are to exercise due respect for the assembly and the chair, and their remarks are to be concerned with the issue before the assembly and not to be directed to persons.

The ecclesiastical manner also implies that decisions are to be taken solely on the basis of the Word of God and the confessions. It is NOT the ecclesiastical manner when decisions are made on the basis of expediency, popular opinion, or personal preference. But decisions must be made on the basis of the objective standard of God's Word.

The proper ecclesiastical manner includes also that every matter brought before the assemblies is given thorough, careful discussion and treatment. If a matter is so serious that the assembly ought to treat it, it must not be treated superficially and hastily. Every effort must be made to convince all parties of the rightness of the decision taken. Although not always possible, it is desirable that unanimous decisions are reached, or at least that everything is done in an attempt to secure a unanimous decision. □

*Trials must and will befall;
But with humble faith to see
Love inscribed upon them all,
This is happiness to me.*

Be not afraid of those trials which God may see fit to send upon thee. It is with the wind and storm of tribulation that God separates the true wheat from the chaff. Always remember, therefore, that God comes to thee in thy sorrows, as really as in thy joys. He lays low, and He builds up. Thou wilt find thyself far from perfection, if thou dost not find God in everything.

*Standard Bearer,
March 15, 1933*

School Graduation Prayer Case: Supreme Court Poised to Issue Landmark Decision

Church and State
Mr. James Lanting

The wall of separation between church and state is a metaphor based on bad history, a metaphor which has proved useless as a guide to judging. It should be frankly and explicitly abandoned.

— Chief Justice William Rehnquist

The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to announce its decision shortly in the public school graduation prayer case of *Lee v. Weisman*. This pending case gained nationwide attention after the Court recently intimated that it may use the *Weisman* decision to forge significant changes in church-state law. Constitutional scholars, religious leaders, and other court-watchers are eagerly awaiting the outcome of this case, which many expect to be a landmark religious freedom decision.

What are the central facts in the *Weisman* case?

Daniel Weisman brought suit against local public school officials in

Providence, Rhode Island, after they scheduled a local clergyman to offer an approved prayer and benediction at his daughter's eighth grade graduation ceremony. Weisman alleged he and his family were "opposed to and offended by the inclusion of prayer in public school graduation ceremonies."

What was the outcome at the trial court level?

Even though the challenged graduation prayer was "non-sectarian" and purposely bereft of any mention of Jesus Christ, it nonetheless made reference to the Deity or God. Consequently, the federal trial judge ruled the prayer to be unconstitutional. The federal appeals court agreed and the school district, with the full support and sponsorship of the Bush administration, appealed the adverse ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court where a decision is expected shortly.

What is the constitutional issue at stake?

The First Amendment's non-establishment clause forbids government to engage in any activity "respecting an establishment of religion." The Weismans contend that a prayer to God at a public school eighth grade graduation is precisely the kind of governmental religious activity prohibited by the non-establishment clause, constituting an insidious breach of the historic "wall of separation between church and state." The school district and the Bush administration argue that such an innocuous prayer offered by a clergyman at a public school ceremony is not government establishment of religion, but merely a permissible accommodation of our nation's diverse religious views.

But since the supreme court outlawed organized classroom prayers already in 1962, how can the school suggest that graduation prayers would pass constitutional muster?

Mr. Lanting, a member of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, is a practicing attorney.

The Bush administration and the school have argued in their briefs that graduation prayers are different from admittedly illegal organized prayers in classrooms (where "subtle coercion may be present"). In contrast to the classroom setting "where inculcation is the name of the game," a graduation is a celebratory, voluntary, non-educational civic ceremony where prayers merely lend solemnity to the occasion and acknowledge our country's diverse religious heritage.

Is everyone really that concerned about generic prayers at graduation ceremonies?

No. The rather mundane Weisman case gained sudden notoriety when the Bush administration intervened at the Supreme Court level and filed a brief requesting the Court to abandon the *Lemon* test, the standard traditionally used to determine whether challenged government activity runs afoul the non-establishment clause.

What is the *Lemon* test?

In the 1971 case of *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, the Supreme Court enunciated a three-part test or standard for determining whether a government practice violates the First Amendment. Under the *Lemon* analysis, a government law or practice which touches upon religion, if it is to be permissible under the non-establishment clause

- (1) must have a secular purpose;
- (2) must neither advance nor inhibit religion; and
- (3) must not foster an excessive entanglement between government and religion.

The federal courts have applied this trilogy of tests to countless church-state cases in the past decades, striking down, for example, such practices as Christmas creche displays on public property and tuition tax credits to parents of children in non-public schools. On the other hand, the

Lemon test was judged to permit paid chaplains to offer prayer at state legislature sessions and allow federal funds to flow to religious "non-sectarian" private colleges.

Will the court use the Weisman case to jettison the traditional *Lemon* test?

Perhaps. Chief Justice Rehnquist (see quote above), Justice Kennedy, and Justice Scalia have recently complained that the *Lemon* test has only led the Court into a confusing morass of contradictory and erroneous decisions in this area. The Court appears to be poised to chart a new course in church-state law and abandon the notion of "strict separation" between government and religion.

What standard will replace the three-part *Lemon* analysis?

It is anyone's guess, although numerous constitutional scholars suspect Justice Kennedy's "coercion" test may carry the day. This proposed standard holds that the non-establishment clause forbids any governmental act (1) tending to establish a national church, or (2) which compels a citizen to participate in conduct that violates his religious conscience. Others, however, suspect the *Lemon* test will be essentially retained but severely pruned and trimmed to allow "accommodation" of religious activity.

Will the Weisman decision disclose deep philosophical differences among the court justices in this area of religious freedom?

Undoubtedly. In recent First Amendment decisions, the Court has been bitterly divided on this issue. Two divergent views have emerged. The "accommodationists" (J. Rehnquist, J. Kennedy, and J. Scalia) are eager to adopt the proposed "coercion" test and abandon the *Lemon* test, which they claim has unfortu-

nately led to an attitude of "relentless extirpation of all contact between government and religion." Justice Kennedy wrote recently in an opinion approving a Christmas creche on display in a county courthouse: "Government policies of accommodation, acknowledgment and support for religion are an accepted part of our heritage. The Establishment Clause permits government some latitude in recognizing and accommodating the central role religion plays in our society. Anything less would border on latent hostility toward religion." On the other hand, the "strict separationists" (J. Stevens and J. Blackman) insist that the *Lemon* test should be retained, that the government should remain totally secular, and that we must maintain a high and impregnable "wall of separation" between church and state.

Why is the Weisman case so important and what will be practical effects of the *Lemon* test's demise?

Its importance lies in that the case is a showdown between the conservative accommodationists on the Court and the separationists. Many predict that the adoption of the new "coercion" test will pave the way for "Choice," the Bush administration's agenda for federal and state tuition vouchers, grants, or tax credits to private and parochial school parents. This is because the accommodationists will argue that government aid to parents of children who attend private or sectarian schools is merely a permissible accommodation of our nation's religious pluralism and entails no coercion or establishment of a national religion. □



Malachi

Lesson 7

Will a Man Rob God?

(Malachi 3:7-12)

*Search the
Scriptures*
Rev. Carl Haak

We have seen repeatedly in our study of Malachi how the prophet's day and our own are so much alike. The sins present among God's people then are similar to those of today, especially the mere outward observance of religion and the cold formal worship of the true God. We have also observed how Malachi deals with these sins, namely by always holding them up to the light (brightness) of God in order to show how heinous and treacherous it is when a people sin against the goodness and mercy of the Lord, depart from His ordinances, and render Him the service of a carnal heart.

We have another penetrating, applicable, and urgent lesson before us in these verses. It deals with the "worship of giving" (see II Cor. 8, 9). It is the call to supply the needs of God's church and kingdom, as well as to show benevolence to the poor.

The evil exposed in these verses is the failure to bring the tithes and offerings to God's house (vs. 8). These "ordinances" (vs. 7) were clearly marked out in the Old Testament Scriptures. It was also a common sin of the covenant people, one which their fathers had committed and for which they had been furnished. How

the restored exiles from Babylon had settled (fallen) into the same sin. Evidently the Lord had chastened them with "a curse" (vs. 9), "the devourer" and that which "destroys the fruit of the ground" (vs. 11). A famine, pestilence, or plague of some sort had been sent (see Joel 1:4). Yet the people, in the hardness of their heart, had not seen this as the Word of God's rebuke, but had hoarded for themselves whatever they had left.

The heinousness of this sin and the underlying rebellion, distrust, and covetousness are exposed by the "messenger" of God.

1. It was a hereditary sin (vs. 7). History seems to have taught them nothing, although their history was full of examples of the Lord's faithful and gracious care and His heavy chastisements upon their father's covetousness and greed. (See Daniel 9:3ff; Psalm 78; Acts 7; Ezekiel 9:54.)

2. It was to rob God (vs. 8). The question is biting and arresting: "Will a man rob God???" The principle of the eighth commandment is at work. It reveals that in stealing, and in failing to serve the Lord with the possessions intrusted to us, we are insolent and incredibly defiant. (See Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 42.)

3. The people were hardened in it, and their stinginess revealed their spiritual barrenness. To the call "Return unto me!" (vs. 7), they respond "wherein shall we return?" That is, they were so ignorant of themselves and of the spiritual demands of God's

law, that they could see nothing in themselves for which they should repent, and rather saw themselves justified in the way they dealt with their possessions. More: to Jehovah's reproof, "ye have robbed me" (vs. 8), they have the audacity to say "wherein?" —that is, they refused (as do we so often) to own up to their sin of coveting and of hoarding for ourselves the things of this life.

4. The sinful reasoning of the people is brought out in verse 10. The Lord says, "Bring..." and then "I will open you the windows of heaven." Offer, out of trust in Me to supply your future need, but offer *first*! In contrast, they reasoned this way: Let God first give us plenty (open the windows) and then we will bring Him the tithes and offerings. It was the "you first" mentality. "Thou, O God, must prove us, see if we will not indeed offer willingly when Thou dost give us plenty to offer," rather than "proving" God, trusting Him to supply future needs and rendering to Him out of our present circumstances (see Luke 21:2).

Valuable truths concerning our giving to God's church and to the poor, as well as our entire life of stewardship, are taught us.

1. God must be served first. The causes and needs of His kingdom come first. (See I Kings 17:13; Matthew 6:33.)

2. Stewardship. To rob is to take for oneself what belongs to another. We are taught by implication that all

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things belong to God and that He is to be served, not with some, but with all we have. (See Psalm 24:1; 50:12.)

3. The way of giving is the way of blessing. Greed, stinginess, covetousness result in spiritual barrenness. We are not made poor by liberal giving to God's church and kingdom. Much rather, we shall experience blessedness. (Verse 10; see also II Corinthians 9:8.)

God calls them to return (vs. 7). See Jeremiah 31:18 for the relationship between God's grace and our turning from sin. One of the evidences of true spiritual repentance is seen in bringing in the tithes and offerings. Where grace has touched the heart, the hand is opened as well. (See Luke 19:8; II Corinthians 8:8.)

The promise of God is twofold. A. "I will return unto you" (vs. 7) — that is, in the way of a sincere stewardship we are given to enjoy the lovingkindness of God. B. God will richly supply our earthly needs, often beyond our imaginations (vs. 10b).

In such a lesson as this we hear Him speak, "Beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth..." but in being "rich toward God" (Luke 12:15-21). How our carnal nature reveals itself when it comes to what we say is "mine" and are called to render unto the Lord. May our study produce a "return," a seeking of God's glory first and a wise use of the earthly goods of our Master which have been entrusted to our stewardship. (See Matthew 25:14-30.)

Memory Work:

Malachi 3:10

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

Luke 12:31, 32

But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Fear not, little flock; for it is your

Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Questions for Study:

1. Let us begin with setting forth clearly in our minds and hearts the relationship of the Christian to earthly things.

a. What is a steward?

1) Look up

Matthew 25:14-30

Psalm 50:7-23

2) Explain briefly the principles of stewardship.

b. Are material things sinful? Is it more pious to be poor? See I Timothy 4:1-5; Romans 14:14, 20.

c. What is our fundamental calling toward earthly things? I Corinthians 10:23-33; Colossians 3:23; Romans 14:6-9.

2. The evil exposed by the prophet: Failure to bring in the tithes and offerings.

a. Consult a Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia on "Tithes."

1) Look up the following and state what they teach as to tithing.

Leviticus 27:30-32

Numbers 8:21-32

Deuteronomy 12:18

Deuteronomy 14:18, 29

2) What then were the three steps in the process of tithing?

b. Offerings. See Lesson 3 for the references to offerings. (Does Malachi have in mind any particular offering neglected, or simply a general neglect of all things?)

c. The sin of not bringing in the tithe and offering.

1) Robbing the Lord. (Word means "defraud, hide, cover.")

a) Explain the force of this.

b) In what ways do we rob God? (See Lord's Day 42 of the Heidelberg Catechism.)

2) Covetousness.

a) Look up the following passages on covetousness.

Luke 12:15-21

Ephesians 5:5 (Colossians 3:5)

II Timothy 4:10

I Timothy 6:6-10

I Corinthians 12:32

b) What is the sin of covetousness? Why is it idolatry? In what area's of our life does it rear its ugly head?

3) Failure to learn from sins of their fathers (vs. 7).

a) Show that this sin was repeated in Israel's history. (Psalm 78; Daniel 9; Ezekiel 9.)

b) Why is the history of God's gracious care for His people in past years so important for trust and contentment today?

3. The principles of giving.

a. Read II Corinthians 9 and list the important truths mentioned concerning the worship of giving.

b. Show from our passage in Malachi the following principles of giving, briefly explaining and making application to our lives today

1) God must be first

2) Stewardship

3) The blessedness of giving

4. Repentance.

a. Examine the following passages in connection with verse 7.

1) Jeremiah 18:11

2) Jeremiah 31:18

3) Lamentations 5:21

4) Zechariah 1:3

5) Canons of Dordrecht III, IV, Art. 16.

b. Answer now the following questions:

1) What should have been the response to the call to return? (See Jeremiah 3:22.)

2) What are the graces produced by God in a heart that turns from disobedience? (Example: Humility, etc.)

3) Why is our use of the material gifts of God a true indication of the attitude and state of our heart towards God?

4) What therefore does the answer that the people gave indicate?

5. The promise of God (vss. 11, 12).

a. Will one ever become poor for the reason of faithful, cheerful, and liberal giving unto the causes of God and His kingdom? (See Proverbs 3:9, 10; 11:24, 25; 19:17; Psalm 31:19; 41:1-3.)

b. Do we wait until we have

enough of something before we give for the needs of God's church? (See Luke 21:1-4.)

c. What is the relationship between our giving and God's blessings, or God's provision for our future needs? (See I Kings 17:8-16; II Kings 7:2, 19, 20.)

d. What are the errors of the "health, wealth, and success gospel" so prevalent today? (See James 4:2, 3; Proverbs 30:7-9; Hebrews 13:5, 6; Philippians 4:11.)

e. How do we teach these things to our children? How do we instill them in ourselves?

6. Can you write from memory Malachi 3:10 and Luke 12:31, 32?

Recommended Reading:

Tithing, by A.W. Pink. (Pamphlet of 31 pages, available from:

Gospel Mission

Box M

Choteau, Montana 59422. □

Book Reviews

Preaching With Freshness, by Bruce Mawhinney. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1991; 258pp., \$12.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

This book is a novel approach to Homiletics (the art and science of preaching, RDD). It is this because the book is cast in the form of a novel, a story. While Mawhinney deals with the discipline of homiletics and while he sets forth many sound, biblical principles of homiletics, the book is entirely free of technical, theological terms. The author presents his theology of preaching in the form of a fictional account of a young preacher who... you read the story. You will enjoy it.

The principles and methodology of preaching set forth by Jay Adams in his book, *Preaching With Purpose*, are woven skillfully into the narrative.

Any preacher, especially the preacher who finds himself "bogged down" or whose preaching is being criticized as being dull or boring, will do well to purchase the book, read it, and implement Mawhinney's suggestions. In addition to sound, biblical principles of homiletics, the book contains many practical suggestions which, if taken seriously and implemented, are bound to improve one's preaching. The reminder of chapter three, *viz.*, that preaching is the preacher's chief task, his "one business," is in itself worth the price of the book. A preacher ought never allow himself to do what others in the church can do. He may be so busy with a host

of worthwhile matters that he finds insufficient time to prepare good sermons!

But this is not a book just for preachers. Lay people ought to read it as well. In fact I would urge our readers to get the book, set aside two to four hours, and read it from cover to cover. Not only will you enjoy the story, but you will learn something about preaching. The book will enable you to put yourself in "the preacher's shoes." It will help you to understand what it's like to be a preacher in God's church.

Ordained in 1976, Dr. Mawhinney is pastor of New Hope Presbyterian Church in Monroeville, Pennsylvania. He received the Master of Divinity degree from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and the Doctor of Ministry degree from Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California. ■

No Condemnation in Christ Jesus: As Unfolded in the Eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, by Octavius Winslow; Banner of Truth Trust, 1991; 396pp., \$8.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Herman Hanko.]

This excellent commentary written by a 19th century divine, was first published in 1853 and is now republished by Banner of Truth. It is in many respects a gem which will be a valuable addition to anyone's library. If you are looking for devotional reading, this book will please you. If you are looking for help in understanding this beautiful and important chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans, this

book will be of great assistance.

Romans 8 is one of those totally crucial chapters in Holy Scripture, which has occupied such a large role in the life of the church of God's people since the time of the Reformation. It has in it all the essentials of the great truths of salvation by grace alone, and it is brimful of comfort for the tried and afflicted child of God. Perhaps few chapters in all Scripture have more often been read at sick beds and to and by saints in great suffering of body and soul. When I was yet a child, my parents insisted that I, my brother, and my sister, commit the entire chapter to memory. It has been a chapter to carry with me all my life.

This little book will indeed give the reader a sense of the great power of Romans 8. It is a doctrinally strong and biblically sound book so that one has meat to eat; but it is also written in such a way that it catches the "spirit" and power of the chapter.

There is only one warning. It is very much written in the Puritan tradition, particularly that of the 18th century Marrow Men, and has, therefore, some of the weaknesses of these men. Particularly one will sometimes take issue with its incipient doctrine of "preparationism" and want to discard its view of conversion. Being aware of this, however, will prevent one from falling into its snares. ■

New Testament Criticism & Interpretation, ed. by David Alan Black & David S. Dockery; Zondervan Publishing House, 1991; 619 pp., \$17.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Herman Hanko.]

It appears as if the entire church world has gone mad over higher criticism. And this book would seem to be the proof of it. One of the blurbs on the back cover speaks of the fact that "the editors have assembled a talented team of conservative-evangelical scholars" for the writing of this book; and so it is. But every one without exception is a higher critic and, as the title indicates, is given to higher criticism of Scripture. The list of authors reads like a "Who's Who" in American evangelicalism, and high praises for the book are sung on the back cover by leading evangelicals from leading evangelical seminaries around the world.

In three separate sections the authors discuss what is meant by critical studies of Scripture, what are the basic methods in New Testament criticism, and some special issues that arise in New Testament interpretation.

The authors are very bold. One of them does not hesitate to say that the historical accuracy of Scripture must be decided on rational and empirical grounds (p. 81), and that, while we may admit the possibility of the supernatural, this too must be historically investigated and the reliability of witnesses examined (pp. 87-90). Another argues forcibly for multiple meanings in the text, a view which carries us back to medieval Roman Catholic interpretation which closed Scripture to the people of God (pp. 270, 271). Another boldly states that the authors of Scripture did not agree in doctrine (p. 475), and yet another is not ashamed to insist that the gospels are not historically reliable (p. 508).

There are two striking passages in this large book. One destroys all higher critical theories. It is not by an author of the book, but by another. The author of this chapter in which the quotation appears only mildly agrees. The author of the quote is David Steinmitz, and it is devastating for all higher criticism. That the author of the chapter is oblivious to the implications of Steinmitz' quote is amazing. It reads: "Until the historical-critical method becomes critical

of its own theoretical foundations and develops a hermeneutical theory adequate to the nature of the text which it is interpreting, it will remain restricted—as it deserves to be—to the guild and the academy, where the question of truth can endlessly be deferred" (p. 271).

The other quote is in a chapter on New Testament Interpretation and Preaching.

This generation of preachers has access to a range and depth of biblical scholarship unparalleled in the history of Christendom. The sciences of hermeneutics, exegesis, and textual and other critical studies are finely developed. Yet preaching is in crisis. We do well to recall, of course, that every age, even the nineteenth-century "golden age of preaching," has had its crisis. But the contemporary crisis is, to put it bluntly, different: It is the seeming inability to preach biblically despite (or *because* of?) a full century of the most intense biblical scholarship ever known. In the words of David Buttrick: "Preachers drift out of seminaries trained in historical-critical method, practiced in homiletical techniques, yet at a loss to preach 'biblically.'"

The author then makes this statement: "Depending on one's point of view, the current crisis amounts either to a failure to make use of what is now available, a failure to be honest about known critical problems, or the demoralizing effect of critical approaches to Scripture (emphasis mine, HH)." The author is convinced that his first option is the correct one. How can he be so blind? It simply is a fact that critical approaches to Scripture have a demoralizing effect not only on preaching, but on all Bible study. And until evangelicals are willing to see this, the situation is not only hopeless, but bound to get worse.

Anyone who is interested in Hermeneutics in general and in higher criticism in particular ought to read the book. It will give him a clear summary of all the current methods used in higher criticism, but will also show him the futility and wrong of critical approaches to God's holy Word. ■

Catholicity and Secession, A Study of Ecumenicity in the Christian Reformed Church, by Henry Zwaanstra; Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991; 128pp., \$14.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.]

Any church which is faithful to her Lord and King struggles with the question with which this book deals. On the one hand, the church is required to be faithful to the Scriptures and her confessional heritage and is called to live in separation from other churches if union with them will compromise this all-important calling. On the other hand, the church is called by Christ to seek the unity of the church, and to do so also by bringing the church into organic and institutional unity as the church comes to manifestation in this world.

Dr. Henry Zwaanstra, professor of church history and historical theology in Calvin Seminary, struggles with this question as he reviews the history of his own denomination over the years. He tells of the birth of the denomination in the secessions of 1834 in The Netherlands and 1857 in our own country, and points out that these secessions made a deep impression on the consciousness of the church, which led the church to emphasize for many years separation at the cost of church unity. The role that the question of membership in oath-bound societies played in this struggle, the ecclesiology that was at stake (especially as it involved Arts. XXVII - XXIX of the Belgic Confession) in making decisions concerning church union, the contacts official and otherwise between the CRC and such organizations as the FCCC, the NAE, the WCC, the RES, the WPA (World Presbyterian Alliance), NAPARC, — all these are amply treated and discussed in the book.

As it turns out, two events in the history of the CRC proved to be major turning points. The first took place in 1944.

The committee in the CRC which was responsible for contact with other churches submitted a report to the Synod of 1944 in which it empha-

sized, on the one hand, that all Christian churches were sister churches, while on the other hand it stated that, because the CRC was the purest church, only one system of doctrine, that of the CRC, was acceptable. Dr. Zwaanstra's analysis of this position is:

... the CRC's ecumenical calling was narrowly reduced to reproving and correcting other churches....

The committee failed to understand that there can be different and equally valid perceptions of biblical truth. It did not anticipate that through ecumenical dialogue God might lead his church into a fuller understanding of the truth than is represented in any one of the great church traditions, including the Reformed (p. 114).

The second major turning point came in 1987 when the CRC adopted a "charter" which significantly broadened the basis for contact. Of this charter Zwaanstra says:

The new Ecumenical Charter has broken some new ground that may enable the church to fulfill its ecumenical task more confidently and effectively. Perhaps most noteworthy is the recognition that churches—including the CRC—have different perceptions of biblical truth that can be shared with one another, and that they can trust God to lead his church into a fuller understanding of that truth. This insight may relieve the CRC of its historic sense of superiority in understanding and purity and may make it teachable in the ecumenical arena. The charter's endorsement of dialogue as a legitimate means to engage in ecumenical conversation may also provide a basis and framework for a feasible approach and working method for implementing its ecumenical calling.

It is apparently this position which has led the CRC to retain its membership in the REC in spite of the apostasy of the GKN, and this charter will undoubtedly serve to pave the way for eventual membership in the WCC.

The book is a significant contribution to current ecumenical thinking in the CRC. ■

Books for Young Readers, Reviewed

The Escape, by A. VanDerJagt; Inheritance Publications, 1988; 182pp., \$9.95US, \$10.95. (Reviewed by J. Kalsbeek, Jr.)

The Escape is a book about three Huguenot young people who fled from the persecution of those who called themselves Roman Catholics. The story is based upon historical facts which took place in France during the late seventeenth century.

The main characters are John, his sister, Manette, and a boy named Camille (no last names are given). They are teenagers who were raised in French Protestant or Huguenot families.

At the time this story takes place, Louis XIV, the Sun King, rules France and is determined to stamp out Protestantism. As a result many Huguenots were sentenced to be galley slaves. (One of these was John and Manette's father.) Another result of this persecution was that many of the Huguenots fled for their lives to neighboring countries such as Switzerland, Germany, Holland, England, and even across the ocean to the English colonies of North America.

Soon after John and Manette's father is sent away to be a slave on a galley ship, their mother dies. Since they are now orphans they are separated by their Roman Catholic relatives.

Manette is sent to Paris where she is ill treated, and John is assigned to live with his uncle and aunt. Both of them, though young, refuse to be converted back to Roman Catholicism. They are determined to continue in the faith of their father and mother. Consequently they experience the cruel hand of persecution.

John is about to be sent by another uncle, Uncle Francis, a Roman Catholic priest, to a monastery because he refuses to give up his Protestant beliefs. He escapes and goes to Paris to find his sister. On the way, he makes friends with Camille. Together they find Manette and the three of them continue their dangerous journey to Holland.

It is a story of courage in the face of many grave dangers. It is a story of great faith in the God they love. It is a story of hardships, afflictions, hunger, and pain. It is a story that is easy to read.

Although it is written about a time long ago, it is worthy of your time and effort. At the very risk of their lives, John, Manette, and Camille refused to give in and take the easy way. They were given a very simple way to avoid persecution. All they had to do was to renounce their Protestant beliefs and declare that they would become Roman Catholic. This they refused to do. That kind of courage is still needed today. It takes just as much courage today to say "no" to the world, to the devil, to our friends who tempt us to walk in a sinful way. Peer pressure is so prevalent today. It makes cowards even of those who think they are strong.

Young people, teenagers, I encourage you to read this book. It is about courage—something you all admire and desire and need. Do not be afraid to do what is right and pleasing to God even if it turns those you consider to be your friends against you. ■

Judy's Own Pet Kitten, by An Rook. Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada: Inheritance Publications, 1991; 26 pp., paper, \$4.95Can., \$4.50US. [Reviewed by the Editor.]

Little Judy's pet kitten had died. When the river flooded her parents' farm, Judy saw a kitten stranded on strawbales in the water. Judy would rescue the kitten herself. "...but oh the water was much deeper. She stumbled and fell face down into the muddy water. It was so terribly cold. She gasped for air...."

A story for children aged 4-8 that can be read in one sitting. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Mission Activities

When Rev. B. Gritters and his father, Elder E. Gritters, went to Jamaica to conduct a seminar for the leaders of the Jamaican P.R. Churches, they also, as is customary, brought benevolence gifts with them. For this reason the Consistory of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA decided to conduct a clothing drive for that purpose in their congregation. On Saturday, January 25, members of the congregation were encouraged to bring any appropriate light-weight clothing for either children or adults. Donations of shoes, eye glasses, and purses, etc. were also accepted.

On January 29th, Rev. R. Dykstra and Elder Henry Bleyenbergh left to do investigative work in Ghana, Africa. Plans originally called for Rev. M. DeVries to accompany Elder Bleyenbergh, but due to the serious medical condition of his father, Rev. DeVries was unable to go.

These men will be in Ghana over three Sundays, meeting face to face with contacts that our churches have had there for several years. They will be doing some preaching and teaching, while investigating also the possibility of making Ghana a denominational mission field.

Congregational Highlights

When the congregation of the Byron Center, MI PRC celebrated the sacrament of the Lord's Supper back in December, they did so with a completely new communion set. Byron Center's Consistory had been buying

the set in pieces, and with the purchase of the chalice, the set was finally complete. The Consistory went on to thank the catechism students for their support in the past years, since their collections had been used for the purchase of this set. On the Monday following that communion in December, the students had an opportunity, at catechism, to see the set that their collections had bought.

In appreciation for their congregation's efforts involving the 1991 Young People's Convention, the Young People's Society of the Byron Center PRC served cake and ice cream after an evening service in December. Besides the cake and ice cream, a brief slide presentation dealing with last year's convention was also shown. In this small way the Society wished to thank the congregation for their prayers, help, and support.

Presently the congregation of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA is working to expand both their library and their book store. An encouragement to expand their library came in the form of a gift of a complete set of bound volumes of the *Standard Bearer*. To accommodate these and other books, more shelves are being added to the library.

Hope's Evangelism Committee has also decided to expand its book sales and place some of the books available on display at the church. Once this project gets underway, Redlands hopes to be able to purchase books from many good Christian publishers and make them available at cost. Hope is doing all this to promote the reading of good Christian books both in and outside of their congregation.

The Consistory of Hope in Redlands decided to appoint some of their young single men to serve as ushers for visitors to their worship

services. These men will not usher everyone to their seats, but will serve as greeters and ushers for visitors to their services.

Evangelism News

Rev. C. Haak was unable to go to Boise, ID for two Sundays in January to preach for the Sovereign Redeemer Fellowship on behalf of our churches. The Evangelism Committee of the South Holland, IL PRC, the church working with the group in Boise, was able to secure the services of Rev. A. den Hartog to assist there for the month of February. He planned to be there from February 8-17.

School Activities

The supporters of the Loveland Christian School, in Loveland, CO were invited to father-son, mother-daughter basketball games on January 31. The boys' and girls' teams from the school played these parents. No word on how those games turned out. Any guesses?

Denominational Highlights

Many of you are no doubt aware that two of our churches' emeritus ministers have not been well recently. Rev. George Lubbers fell and broke his hip in mid-January. Consequently, he underwent surgery for a hip replacement. After surgery he was able to be moved to the nursing section of Raybrook Manor in Grand Rapids, MI. His therapy is progressing nicely.

And Rev. C. Hanko has been suffering from a bad case of bronchitis. He was able to attend services in Venice, FL for the first time in three weeks on February 2, and he hoped to be able to preach again the next Sunday. May we all be reminded of the words of Isaiah 26:4: "Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

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

Ministerial Calls

Since Rev. R. VanOverloop declined the call to serve as missionary pastor to the Covenant Reformed Fellowship of Larne, Northern Ire-

land, the council of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, the calling church for a missionary to Larne, formed a new trio consisting of the Revs. B. Gritters, M. Kamps, and J. Kortering.

A call was to be extended to one of these men after a congregational meeting on February 23. □

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of the Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church expresses its Christian sympathy to our pastor, Rev. Michael DeVries and family, in the loss of his father,

VERNON DEVRIES.

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (II Corinthians 1:3).

Harley Buys, Secretary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 17, 1992, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. GARRET FLIKKEMA,

will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. We give thanks to God for them, and for blessing us through their love and covenantal instruction. Children are a blessing from the Lord, but so also are God-fearing parents, the ones God has given to us. May God continue to bless them and bestow His love in their hearts and for each other. "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

* Rev. Richard and Marcia Flikkema
Tammy, Tricia, Heidi (and Kyle, who is now with his heavenly Father in glory)

* George and Denise DeJong
Matthew

* Bill and Pat DeJong

Brenda, Paul, Beth, and Joanna

* Jim

Peace Protestant Reformed Church

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies' Aid Society of First Church (Grand Rapids) mourns the loss of one of her faithful members:

MRS. JEAN PASTOOR,

who was taken to her heavenly home on February 1, 1992.

May we and her family be comforted by the words of the psalmist, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

*Mrs. P. Decker, President
Mrs. G.E. Bylsma, Secretary*

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory and congregation of the Pella Protestant Reformed Church extend heartfelt and sincere Christian sympathy to their members Conrad and Anna DeVries and Loren and Beulah DeZwarte and their families in the death of their son and Beulah's brother respectively,

. MR. VERNON DEVRIES.

May the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, comfort them in their sorrow.

*Rev. Wayne Bekkering, president
Jim VanDonselaar, clerk*

TEACHER NEEDED

The South Holland Protestant Reformed School will be needing an additional upper grades teacher. Send application and resume to the school at 16511 South Park Ave., South Holland, IL 60473 to the attention of Lamm Lubbers, Principal, or call (708) 333-9197 for more information.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On February 21, 1992, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. ALBERT VANDENTOP,

celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them, and we are thankful to our covenant God for the many years they have shared, and for the love and godly instruction we have received from them. It is our prayer and hope that the Lord will continue to keep and bless them in the years that He may give them.

"The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Psalm 33:11).

* John and Jean Wynia
* Gerald and Bertha VanDenTop
* Robert and Geraldine Blankespoor
* Duane and Sandi Alsum
* Wesley and Hester DeGroot
* Ron and Deb Hoksbergen
* Sharon VanDenTop
33 grandchildren
1 great grandchild

Doon, Iowa

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association expresses its sympathy to its president, Mr. Cornelius Pastoor and family, in the passing of his mother,

MRS. JEAN PASTOOR.

It is our prayer that they find comfort in the assurance of faith that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

*Al Rau, Vice-President
Cal Kalsbeek, Secretary*