

The Lord Is Risen Indeed

"The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon."

Luke 24: 34

This exclamation of joy was made by Jesus' disciples sometime in the evening of Resurrection Sunday. The simple and powerful way in which these words are presented indicates that Jesus' followers were rising out of the grief they had experienced the previous two days.

The occasion for this statement is the arrival of Cleopas and a companion at the place where the eleven had gathered. These two had left Jerusalem earlier in the day to go to the nearby town of Emmaus. As they walked the approximate seven miles to Emmaus, a "stranger" joined them. They talked together extensively. It seems that the "stranger" did most of the talking. "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the

things concerning" the Messiah. "As he sat at meat with them, ...their eyes were opened, and they knew him." And then "he vanished out of their sight." They immediately returned to Jerusalem in order to tell their friends that Jesus had appeared to them. But no sooner did they enter the room where the eleven were gathered together than someone, with unrestrained joy, blurted out the words of our text.

It is necessary to believe the fact of the resurrection before one can understand the significance of the resurrection. The disciples of Jesus did not yet understand what it meant that their Lord was risen. But at this time on Resurrection Sunday, the disciples of Jesus were coming to the conviction that Jesus was indeed risen from the dead.

Their belief in the fact of Jesus' resurrection was based on the many things that had happened that day, culminating in Jesus' appearance to Simon Peter. It began early in the morning with the alarming words of Mary Magdalene, who saw that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb

and assumed that Jesus' body had been taken away (John 20:2). Mary Magdalene's words sent John and Peter immediately running to the tomb. They returned with the information that the body could not have been stolen, for the grave clothes were still there (John 20:3-10). Shortly after, a group of women who had gone to the tomb to care for Jesus' body came back to Jerusalem with some exciting news: the stone was rolled away and Jesus' body was not there. They also relayed the words of the angels that, "He is ... risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee" (Luke 24:1-9). And the women wanted especially to inform their fellow-believers that Jesus Himself appeared to them as they were coming back to Jerusalem (Matt. 28:9,10). And then Mary Magdalene arrived, telling them that "she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her" (John 20:18).

It was around this time that Cleopas and his companion had to take their leave of their friends in Jerusalem and go to Emmaus. After they left, the eleven and their friends

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

REPRINT POLICY

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

EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: dykstra@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49468-0603
PH: (616) 531-1490
(616) 538-1778
FAX: (616) 531-3033
(e-mail: doezema@prca.org)

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: cpraudiostore@yahoo.co.uk)

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

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

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org
Website for PRC: www.prca.org

spent the rest of that day talking together, trying to make sense of what had happened. Later in the afternoon Simon Peter rejoined the others, telling them that the risen Lord had appeared to him too.

What they heard and saw of Jesus' resurrection was unique, which made it difficult for them to understand it. The disciples of Jesus had witnessed Jesus raising a few people from the dead. Those persons whom Jesus raised stood before them as proof that they had been raised. But Jesus' resurrection was not witnessed. Also, something was different about Jesus' resurrection — He was not the same. Mary was told not to touch Him. The reports of all the witnesses to Jesus' resurrection testified of two things: the reality of the bodily resurrection, and the wholly otherness of His resurrection.

For us, the bodily resurrection of our Lord is a well-established fact. In addition to the witnesses on that resurrection Sunday, there were many others to whom Jesus appeared later. Also, the fact of His resurrection was evidenced in the things Jesus left behind: the grave empty of His body, and the position of the grave clothes that had been wrapped around His body. We also accept the testimony of the angels as fact. We know that Jesus lives because His resurrection from the dead was established objectively by the gospel preached by the apostles and recorded in Scripture.

It is important that our Lord's resurrection be a well-established fact, because it is the heart of the gospel. Without the resurrection of Jesus, our faith would be vain. Without His resurrection, the cross would be without value, and there would be no salvation and no hope. So with the disciples we say, assuredly and joyfully, "The Lord is risen indeed!"

The significance of Jesus' resurrection from the dead rests on the foundation of the reality of the resurrection.

God's power is displayed in

His ability to create all things out of nothing. There is an even greater power of God at work in making the dead to live. Jesus was raised by the exceeding great power of God (Eph. 1:19,20).

Additional significance is grasped when we remember what death is. Death is not an accident, nor merely a "natural" event that ends all earthly life. Rather, death is the revelation of God's wrath against sin. The judgment of death was what God promised to Adam if he disobeyed (Gen. 2:17). Death is the punishment for sin. If death is the just wages earned from God by every sin (Rom. 6:23), then the resurrection from death is the declaration that He who brings to death is also able to raise from the dead. And then, second, the resurrection reveals that the punishment has been completely borne and that God's wrath is fully satisfied.

This significance is immediately applied to a very specific case. In our text the disciples excitedly tell the two travelers to Emmaus, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." Jesus' resurrected appearance to Simon Peter evidences that God has justified His chosen sinners, having fully paid the penalty their sins deserve and declaring them to be perfectly righteous. "Simon" is Peter's natural name. It was used deliberately. When Simon denied that he knew Jesus on Thursday night, he forfeited his right to the name "Peter." But that morning, when the angels told the women at the grave to tell Jesus' disciples that He was risen, they singled out Peter (Mark 16:7). And now Jesus had appeared to Simon. There need be no doubt that the purpose of Jesus' appearance to Simon was to inform him that he was forgiven his shameful denial. That Jesus had forgiven Simon was

a cause of great joy to Peter, but also to the other disciples. If Simon was forgiven so shameful a deed, then they could be assured that all their sins were also forgiven. The excitement in the news that the Lord is risen was also in the news that He had appeared to Simon.

The Lord's resurrection indeed is also to us the good news of salvation. The faith that accepts the facts of the Lord's resurrection


The faith that accepts the facts of the Lord's resurrection for truth is the faith that also trusts that His resurrection means our justification.

truth is the faith that also trusts that His resurrection means our justification. He who was delivered to death on account of our sins was raised from the dead on account of our justification (Rom. 4:25). When God raised Jesus from the dead, then He set His seal of approval on Jesus' word, "It is finished."

The punishment earned by our sins has been fully paid, and our eternal righteousness has been completely merited.

Christ arose by going through death to glory. He did not come back to the earthly. Until Jesus arose from the dead, the only way out of the grave was to go deeper — to hell. But Jesus made a passage out of the grave, which the natural, physical eye cannot see. This passage out of the grave is to a glory that is seen only with the eye of faith.

The faith that sees our Lord's resurrection takes hold also of the hope of our bodily resurrection to eternal life. The gospel of our Lord's resurrection is one of great joy because it gives the hope of the resurrection of our bodies unto eternal life.

The Lord is risen indeed! Can you hear the excitement in that statement? They who had known deep sorrow, now have reason to rejoice. This joy in His resurrection is made even greater when we know that He appeared to a forgiven sinner. The Lord is risen indeed! 

The Churches' Need for Preachers

Christ's church needs preachers. She is no employment agency or recruitment center that uses flashy ads and promises of earthly bonuses. She is the church. As church, she sends out the cry: "We need preachers!" She urges the Head of the church, the Lord of the harvest: "Send labourers!" (Matt. 9:38; Luke 10:2). She asks, seeks, and knocks, so that God will give her what she needs.

The church needs preachers.

The PRC feel this (enduring) need in a sharp way at present. With five vacant pulpits, over a thousand members are without an undershepherd. In addition, the Lord has removed some ministers and missionaries in various ways, at the same time that He gives more pulpits to fill. When this summer's synod meets, she will confront the policy: call another man to the seminary because our eldest faculty member will, by that time, be sixty-six years old—emptying another parsonage. And, though a decision to postpone implementing that policy is not impossible, it would only briefly put off the crucial process of preparing the next professor of dogmatics and Old Testament.

The seminary has students, but only five of them for the PRC. Two more are applying for admission next fall. But only one graduates this year (Mr. John Marcus). Two the next (Mr. Andrew Lanning and Mr. Clayton Spronk). One each of the following two years (Mr. Nathan Langerak and Mr. Heath Bleyenbergh). All this, subject to the Lord's disposition.

The church needs preachers. Soon.

Because of this need, more than a couple of the PRC synods in the past decade have asked the churches to "note the urgent need for ministers and remind the churches and consistories to press this need upon capable young men" (Acts of Synod, 2004, p. 24).

Besides, another not unimportant consideration: the church always needs missionaries. Even if the pulpits were all filled, there is still need to hear Jesus' call: "Pray ye therefore ... that he will send forth labourers into the harvest." The harvest is "truly plenteous." Now, as much as or more than ever before, the PRC membership have the financial means to support missionaries. Till the end of the age, God's elect must be drawn into the church—the harvest's ingathering.

The church needs preachers. Always.

The laborers are few. "Sovereign of the harvest, send them!"

Preachers are vital for the church because, by their work, God's church is gathered, defended, and preserved. There is high regard for preachers, and earnest desire for one on every pulpit, because the preaching is the fundamental means of grace for sinners.

The PRC member has high regard for preachers, not first of all because the young people need a role model, not because they want others to think well of their congregation and be attracted to join, not because the elders can hardly shoulder the weight of teaching catechism. Though who would deny the importance of each of these?

Rather, the Reformed church member has highest regard for preachers and entreats God for them because of their primary work: preaching. Preaching is the power to gather the harvest, from within and without. By preaching, God lives covenantally with His gathered family. Preaching is the heart of the church's worship. By preaching, God is glorified. Nothing is more important to the believer than this.



We pray that God will use the *Standard Bearer* to maintain in the PRC (and the rest of the Reformed church world) the living and clear consciousness that the church needs preachers because:

● *Preaching is the powerful means to save sinners.*

By preaching, the elect come to faith ("faith cometh by hearing..."), believers receive the gift of justification ("the just shall live by faith"), the righteous are made holy ("sanctify them by thy truth: thy word is truth"), and saints are preserved to the end ("holy Father, keep through thine own name..."). Because the gospel is covenantal, God not only befriends believers through preaching, He also draws their elect children to Him by it. Knowing this, Reformed churches will never allow the preaching to be replaced by games or gimmicks, films or programs, bands or music. Preaching saves.

● *Preaching is such a power because in the preaching Christ speaks.*

Calvin taught his flock that "the office of teaching is commit-

ted to pastors for no other purpose than that God alone may be heard there,” and that “Christ acts by ministers in such a manner that he wishes their mouth to be reckoned as his mouth, and their lips as his lips.” To believe anything less of preaching is to dishonor Jesus Christ who says, still in 2005: “My sheep hear my voice.” The Spirit-inspired Paul told the church, “when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (I Thess 2:13). Reformed believers confess, “The preaching of the Word of God *is* the Word of God” (II Helvetic Confession, Chapter 1: emphasis mine: BLG).

● *Preaching is the voice of Christ for the church, His Body and Bride.*

God forbid that Reformed believers get the sense that preaching is politicking for earthly influence or, worse, for establishing an *earthly* kingdom in the “city.” Faithful preaching—let us never lose this sense—proclaims the kingdom of God in the *church*, and *over against* the kingdom of Antichrist, the threatening and powerful kingdom of *this* world. Reformed believers seek preachers who antithetically focus on God’s glory in the church. They train preachers to be “churchmen.” These men of the church feed the flock “with knowledge and understanding” (Jer. 3:15) that every member is a pilgrim here, for the church’s sake. “The time is short...the fashion of this world passeth away.” So we call our preachers to resist the thousand distractions and keep up with their essential work: 1) public preaching, 2) teaching the youth, 3) ministering the Word “from house to house,” and 4) evangelism to gather the lost sheep into the fold of the church.

● *For the preaching to be a saving power, it must be true to Scripture.*

Not all preaching saves. In much preaching is heard the growl

and howl of wolves (Acts 20:29,30), the roar of devouring lions (I Pet. 5:8), and the voice of a dragon (Rev. 13:11). With foul breath, these herald a “salvation” that is by man, and for man. This preaching scatters rather than gathers, destroys rather than saves! Reformed believers pray that their ministers are willing, with Luther, to “let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also,” for the sake of true doctrine.

● *Therefore, it will be fatal for the church to be without the gift of good preachers.*

“Nothing is more ruinous for the church than for God to take away faithful pastors,” Calvin wrote in explaining God’s good promise in Jeremiah 3:15: “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart....” He knew the ecclesiastical wrecks caused by infidel pastors. Pray the Lord provide us with believing preachers. May He deliver us from members whose itching ears cannot endure them. May He create in us the spirit to “receive (our) minister in the Lord with all gladness,” and to “let the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace...be beautiful and pleasant unto” us (*Form for Ordination of Ministers*). And may He maintain among us a church-run seminary where the professors truly know God (with all that this implies).



But the church must do more than pray.

She must be busy “exerting herself...that there may be students ...to be trained for the ministry of the Word” (*The Church Order*, Article 19). The church should seek out good men.

The church would never expect a man to ask for the office of elder or deacon. But she does expect a man to propose himself for the preacher’s office. Of course, the process is different because the office of minister requires lifetime

commitment and extensive training before a call. Yet the church could be more forward in encouraging capable men (even “pressing” them, according to Synod 2004) to go forth to study for the ministry.

The church begins this work through the parents. Christian parents will present to their believing sons the high calling of the ministry. They will count the costs, for they are high for the parents too. As they ask God for wisdom not to exert undue pressure (with disastrous results!), the parents pray for their sons and encourage them to do God’s will with the gifts they have. “My son, the Lord’s beloved church has great need for preachers.”

Because the Christian school teachers represent the parents, teachers will notice the capable and spiritual young men and ask them to consider the ministry. Has not the seed of desire for this “good work” at times been planted by a respected teacher?

Then there is the work of the minister himself, whose opportunities with the young men are so many. How I quietly delighted to observe the serious silence descend on the catechism room when I applied the lesson to the need for preachers...and silently prayed, “Lord, use this word to move one of these young men!” What delight when a pastor mentions at family visitation the great calling of the ministry, and the maturing boy responds, “I have given it serious thought.” And the girls? At times, the young girls may be reminded that Christ’s church needs godly, willing pastor’s wives, too, to support the ministers in their sacrificial giving of themselves.

Elders, take every opportunity to get to know the young men of the church so that you can observe gifts and see who ought to be “pushed” a little. Recently your calling has increased. Early on, you must be active in the process of evaluation (Acts of Synod, 2003, pp. 51, 52, #13). Then, with confi-

dence, you can write the (weighty!) letter of recommendation to the Theological School Committee.




Especially, treat the preachers well. I did not say, “Pay them more.” As far as I know, our ministers are sufficiently supported. But treat them honorably. Pray for

them at meal time. Esteem them highly in love for their work’s sake (I Thess. 5:13). Speak with joy of the church’s labors on the mission fields. Let your children observe this in you. They are watching.

If parents can drive children out of the *church* by speaking evil of the *church*, how much easier to drive young men away from the

ministry by a critical attitude toward the preacher. But how a godly home that supports the preacher and the missionaries can be a good influence of God to lead men to say, “Lord, here I am, send me.”

(Young men, next time the question is for you: Does God call *you* to this rewarding work?) 

Letters

A “Personal” view on drama

I was happily surprised to see the editorial in the *SB* on the subject of drama and the inherent sinfulness of it. This has long been the stance of the PRC, and though there are those within the churches who are not in agreement with this position, it nevertheless is easily proven to be correct. I would like to commend the editor for an excellent series of articles on this vital and much forgotten aspect of the antithesis. I would like to add something with regard to what I believe is the fundamental sin of drama, namely impersonation. I fully agree that the issue of performing acts of sin or of performing sacred acts is a serious matter and indisputably places drama outside of Christian liberty. Nevertheless, the matter of impersonation presents no less serious a matter for the conscientious child of God.

All drama is an *attempt* at impersonation, that is, the subverting of one’s own God-given person, nature, personality, etc., in order to take upon oneself that of another, fictional or real. This is what acting is all about. This is why during the years I spent as an actor in city productions I would often hear other cast members say things like “You know, I just wasn’t in character tonight.” It is simply a fact that one’s proficiency as an actor or actress is dependent upon how well he is able to subvert his own

God-given personality and take on the character of the one he is portraying.

To see the sin in this, one need go no further than our covenant God Himself. I refer specifically to the fact that God is a covenant God by virtue of His subsistence in three *distinct* persons, in which and as which He lives that divine, Trinitarian love life of the covenant. The personal properties of these three persons are that the Father begets the Son, the Son is begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds or is breathed forth from the Father and the Son. Ever and always do these persons of the Godhead remain distinct. To put it in confessional language: “...the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost have each His personality, distinguished by their properties; but in such wise that these three persons are but one only God. Hence then, it is evident that the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father, and likewise the Holy Ghost is neither the Father nor the Son” (Belgic Confession, Article 8). God’s glory consists in this reality.

With a view to the reflection of Himself in His works internal and external, God has created all things. Also, we are called to be imitators of God. In fact, all men have this calling. In everything, wicked man attempts to deny this calling and to fashion the most ugly and perverted “image” of God that he can. But this doesn’t change the

fact that it is his calling. Such a denial of this calling must not be so for the child of God. Thus we find in Ephesians 5 the calling to be followers (imitators) of God. And so it is with regard to the covenant of marriage, which is to imitate the covenant of God in His Trinitarian life, as well as to reflect the covenant as it is manifest in its highest revelation in Christ and the church. Our family life, our work life, our begetting of children — all these are to be guided by that one principle that we must be imitators of God Himself. Or, to put it differently, our calling is to do all that we do for the glory of God. And we do this when, in our whole conversation of life, we imitate God not just in His works externally but in His life internally.


Impersonation is a blatant refusal to do so. We are to remain distinct in our persons as God created them, as imitators of the God who is distinct in His persons. Is it really any wonder that sodomy is Hollywood’s sin, since sodomy partakes of the same sin-principle as drama? A sodomite has the calling to be, sexually, who God has created him to be, namely, strait. Instead he becomes, or at least attempts to become, someone that he is not created to be. Though he may, because of his depravity, have this propensity, man was originally created good and upright in covenant with his God. He, by his refusal to walk sexually pure, defiles

the reflection (not image) of God that he ought to manifest in his sexual orientation. He in sin subverts his true sexuality and seeks to take upon himself another in blatant rebellion. The subverting of that sexuality involves the character as well. He changes his voice, his body movements, his likes and dislikes. It is for this reason that drama, a subverting of one's true character, is so appealing to the homosexual. It is really an extension of his whole life of sinful subversion.

This principle of imitation also sheds light on the often-brought objection that, logically, novels must also be condemned if drama is to be condemned. The simple answer to this is that God is the great writer of history. Writing or telling a story as such, therefore, is not wrong, because we cannot actually make history. It is in this light that all legitimate art forms

find their place in the life of the Christian. One may paint or write or compose as an imitator of God, but one cannot deny and subvert his God-given person as an imitator of God to His glory. Of course, being an imitator of God is much broader than this, but it definitely includes this aspect. Drama is the devil's art. Those who practice it sin grievously against the third commandment. We must remember that God will not hold such a one guiltless. Nor may one partake of this sin by watching it, since our catechism includes in the third commandment partaking of this sin in others by "silence or connivance." As Prof. Dykstra has made clear, what the Devil cannot accomplish by the introduction of false doctrine like common grace into the pulpit in order to destroy the Protestant Reformed Churches' distinctive witness to the gospel of

grace and the antithetical life that flows necessarily out of it, he will accomplish by another means. By leading the congregation into sin he can silence the voice of the doctrine and the antithetical preaching. In this hour we need to pray for our ministers and elders that they be found faithful in season and out of season, calling God's people to repentance, regardless of the consequences numerically. In the past several years we have seen the power of the devil to tempt and to bring the watchmen of Zion down. And we have grieved. I thank the editor for giving the call once again to strong and specific antithetical preaching and for not being content with Rev. Boonstra's solution to the "question of drama." God bless him and God preserve the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Adam Tash
Spokane, WA 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

René Descartes and Rationalism (1)

Introduction

Soon after the great victory of the Reformed faith over Arminianism at the Synod of Dordt, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands deteriorated in doctrine and life. Many reasons can be found for this rapid deterioration. The Netherlands had become extremely wealthy by means of worldwide trade, especially with the Dutch East Indies and the Dutch West Indies, and wealth is not conducive to spirituality. The

Reformed Church in the Netherlands was a state church; that is, it was under the direction and control of the civil government. No good can ever come of this, for two reasons. One is that technically all citizens belong to the church, or at least the church is responsible for the spiritual welfare of all the citizens. Thus, within the church were many who were worldly, carnal, and godless, and it was difficult to discipline them. But another reason is that the spiritual welfare of the church was dependent on the doctrinal soundness and moral uprightness of the magistrates. Rarely does a nation have such magistrates.

Perhaps another reason for the rapid deterioration of the Reformed Churches was the spirit of tolerance that prevailed in the Lowlands. The Netherlands had been known throughout Europe, even before the Reformation, as a land where diverse views were tolerated and people were granted the right to express them at will. Such tolerance was not, of course, true in any absolute sense, and outrageous heresies could rouse the nation to righteous anger. Many in the Reformed Churches, ardent and passionate defenders of the faith, were what today would be called intolerant and bigoted, narrow-minded and condemnatory — while God

Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

would call them warriors in the spiritual battle of the ages. But, generally speaking, there was to be found more freedom of thought in the Netherlands than anywhere else in Europe.

One major factor in the deterioration of the Dutch churches was to be found in the inroads of heretical thought. Even though, for example, Arminians who refused to sign the Canons of Dordrecht were banished, they soon returned in full force to occupy pulpits in the land.

These inroads of false doctrine were related to the other reasons for deterioration that I mentioned above, but were also aided and abetted by the fact that refugees from all over Europe, especially from France, streamed into the Netherlands to find safety. Many of them took along their baggage of false doctrine. They were an infection that ultimately destroyed the body ecclesiastical.

All this is not to say that the Reformed faith was not maintained in many sections of the country. The Reformed faith always had its defenders, though, over the years, they grew fewer and fewer in number and weaker in influence. God preserved His truth in the land of our forebears for many years. It took the Secession of 1834 under DeCock to rescue it from almost total defeat.

One heresy that had nothing but bad effects upon the Dutch churches was the heresy of rationalism. It came into the Netherlands under the influence of a Frenchman by the name of René Descartes. This article is his story.

The Life of Descartes

René Descartes was born in France about 100 miles from the important city of Orleans. He was born, as the saying goes, with a silver spoon in his mouth and never had to work a day to earn his daily bread.

Descartes was of very poor health, but he possessed a brilliant

mind. He was, for these two reasons, permitted to study at his own pace and by himself. This practice of studying by himself led him to form a lifelong habit of doing most of his work in bed in the morning. A change in this habit was to cause his death.

He was born Roman Catholic and so was sent to a Jesuit school in 1604, where he studied for eight years, although again at his own pace. After completing his studies with the Jesuits, he went to Paris and concentrated on mathematics, for his brilliance was especially in this field. Apparently his ill health did not prevent him from enjoying the pleasure of sin during these years, for his study of mathematics was done in connection with gambling and in an effort to "beat the odds."

After four years in Paris, he served as a volunteer in the armies of various members of the royalty, among whom was Prince Maurice of Nassau, a relative of the savior of the Netherlands, Prince William of Nassau, and himself destined to rule in the Netherlands as a member of the House of Orange.

Travel and study occupied Descartes until 1623, when he settled in Paris. Applying himself especially to mathematics, he discovered and developed analytical geometry, by which discovery he became known as the outstanding mathematician in Europe, and his fame spread far from Paris.

Not only did he concentrate on math, but he also devoted his considerable intellectual acumen to developing philosophy. This was probably why Paris became extremely uncomfortable to him, for the Jesuits, who considered him their responsibility after his studies with them, did not take kindly to his philosophy, in which he seemed to be developing ideas that, in their implications, militated against the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation. He, as so many others, found the Netherlands to be a more congenial home.

Descartes stayed in the Netherlands for twenty years. There he wrote, taught, studied, and developed his mathematics and his philosophy. His ideas, especially in philosophy, were so radical that he was not altogether safe even in this land of tolerance. During the twenty years of his sojourn in this land, he moved no fewer than twenty times. He kept his place of residence secret, except for a few friends. Descartes claimed he did this because his studies required seclusion. The more likely reason is that the more he wrote, the more he made enemies.

Descartes did have influence in the Lowlands, especially in the University of Utrecht, where some of the professors were enamored with his philosophy. But he also had enemies. The Jesuits, having since the days of the Counter-Reformation set themselves up as defenders of the faith, were always hot on his trail. The Calvinists as well found in his writings and teachings serious threats to the Reformed faith. Descartes' fiercest opponent was Gijsbert Voetius. We have met him before. He was a strong Calvinist who promoted in his writing and teachings the doctrines laid out by the Synod of Dordrecht, but he was also the antagonist of Johannes Cocceius, whose views we discussed in recent articles in the *Standard Bearer*.

Voetius fought bitterly against Descartes and made every effort to enlist the help of the civil authorities to stamp out this pestilential heretic. Voetius came within a hairbreadth of getting the magistrates to order the hangman to burn publicly Descartes' writings. Voetius did succeed in getting Descartes' philosophy stopped in the universities — but only for a time.

Both in 1644 and in 1648 Descartes returned to France in an effort to placate the Jesuits. He almost succeeded. But when he was coolly received in the royal court of France, and because he was fear-

ful of returning to the Netherlands, he accepted an invitation from the eccentric Queen Christiana of Sweden to come to Stockholm to teach and write there. The move to Stockholm was difficult, but he made his way, with his books and manuscripts, to a land where he was promised safety from “persecutors.”

The demands of teaching and the rather rigorous climate were not conducive to good health. Teaching demanded that he get up at 5:00 in the morning. After living in Stockholm only four months, he caught a cold, which turned to pneumonia and resulted in his death. He died on the eleventh of February, 1650, almost 54 years old.

Descartes' Thought

It is impossible and undesirable to go into Descartes' philosophy in this article. It was a well worked-out system of thought that was a

radical break from anything proposed in the past, but only the sketchiest of descriptions is necessary for purposes of this article.

It is necessary, however, to go back in time a bit to understand some of the influences on Descartes' thinking.

Up until Descartes' “break-through” in philosophy, the scholasticism of the Middle Ages had held sway. Among other things, scholasticism had attempted to harmonize the philosophy of Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, with scriptural truth — at least scriptural truth as it was taught and maintained by the Roman Catholic Church. These efforts had reached their climax in the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas. Descartes' philosophy was a total rejection of scholastic thinking and, although such thinking had dominated in Romish circles and continental thought, Descartes wanted no part of it.

In Europe another movement had had powerful influence on the thinking of men. I refer to the Renaissance, a movement that started in Italy and spread swiftly across the Alps into all parts of Europe. The chief principle of the Renaissance, what my Church History professor in Seminary called “the material or subjective principle of the Renaissance,” was humanism. Humanism, briefly, set up man as the center of the universe. Man is in control of the universe, able to subdue it, the master of it. The universe is understandable by man's powerful intellectual abilities, is intended for man's pleasure, is to be subdued to advance man's goals. What especially appealed to the theoretical mind of Descartes was the idea that man, by his own intellectual powers, could come to a thorough understanding of all things.

(...to be continued) 

In His Fear

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

Words of Comfort

God's people are always in need of words of comfort. God knows that. For that reason He commands the church, and more specifically ministers of the gospel, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem!” (Is. 40:1, 2a.) God says: “Don't speak harsh words to My people — words of wrath and judgment. Those are words for the ungodly and wicked. Speak instead words of love and mercy and com-

passion. Speak words that will lift My people up. Speak words that will dispel their fears and give them hope and joy and peace!”

God knows we need comfort on account of all the troubles of life. We need comfort because many are the afflictions of the righteous. As believers, we face countless struggles. We experience much sadness and heartache on account of sickness, pain, loneliness, aging, death, unrest in the world, evil in society, troubles in the church, and so on. The need for comfort is always there, and always great.

But God knows we need comfort especially on account of sin.

He knows we are involved in a fierce spiritual battle. We fight against spiritual wickedness in high places. We are constantly attacked and oppressed by Satan and his allies. We are engaged in a daily warfare against great evils, powerful temptations, and every sin.

The reason why this spiritual war is so real is because of our sinful natures. That sinful nature in each of us wants us to give in. It makes all that Satan and the world offers attractive to us. And often we do give in. We fall into sin. We commit iniquity. We become guilty of hatred of and rebellion against God and our neighbors.

Rev. Kleyn is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota.

We sin daily in thoughts and words and deeds.

Sin is the greatest misery we have. That is true especially because sin itself makes us miserable. Just think of the guilt and shame and heartache it causes. Think also of the terrible consequences sin has in the church, in marriages, in families, in friendships — and some of these consequences remain until we die.

But sin is also our greatest misery because it is the root cause of all the afflictions and troubles of life. If there were no sin, there would be no sickness, or aging, or pain, or death. If there were no sin, there would be no hatred, or fighting, or unkindness. If there were no sin, there would be no grief, or sadness, or tears. But sin exists. And because it does, so do all the miseries that are caused by sin.

Have you ever been miserable? Are you miserable now? And have you ever wondered why you are miserable? The reason is sin. You are miserable because of your sinful nature. You are miserable because of the actual sins you have committed. You are miserable because you are guilty before God on account of your sinfulness and sins, deserving to be eternally forsaken by Him. You are miserable because your sins bring all kinds of grief and shame into your life. You are miserable because you cannot rescue yourself from your sin and guilt. You are miserable because all the troubles in your life are caused by sin. Our misery in this life is great. And all that misery is on account of sin.

So great and terrible is this misery that at times the believer cries out, "O wretched man that I am as a miserable sinner! If only there were no sin! If only I didn't sin! Then all would be well!" And that is the truth!



God comes to His people in their misery and proclaims comfort to them.

That comfort is not that sin and all its evil effects will be removed from our lives. The comfort is not that our earthly lives will go so smoothly and so well that we will always be able to smile and be happy. That will never happen this side of the grave. Our lives will always be characterized by afflictions. And our lives will always involve, until our dying day, the constant spiritual battle against the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. We are, after all, the church militant on earth!

What is the comfort that God proclaims? It is that your sins are forgiven. God proclaims to His troubled and sin-burdened saints: "Your iniquity is pardoned! Your transgressions are blotted out! You are freed from guilt! You are delivered from eternal damnation! I see no iniquity in Jacob, and no perverseness in Israel! All your sins are gone — cast behind My back, thrown into the depths of the sea, removed from Me as far as the east is from the west!"

Nothing else can compare to that. Nothing else can give comfort as that can. We can think, sometimes, that we would feel comforted if only the circumstances of our earthly lives were different. We can delude ourselves into thinking that we would feel comforted if we could have and enjoy health, earthly riches, and the pleasures of life. But these things will not comfort. They are merely earthly and temporal. The comfort we need is the forgiveness of sins.

Forgiveness comforts because it means that what causes us to be so miserable has been dealt with. When sin is forgiven, it is gone. And if sin is gone, there is no misery. There is no burden of guilt. There is no fear of punishment. There is no wrath of God before which we tremble, for God is merciful and gracious, loving and kind.

When our sins are forgiven, we also have comfort concerning all the afflictions of life. We have that comfort because we know God's

favor rests upon us. We know, therefore, that God is not punishing us for our sins through the troubles He sends. Why not? Because our Lord Jesus Christ was punished for us. Thus the troubles of life are sent by God in His love and for our eternal good. Our afflictions cannot destroy us. God turns them to our profit.




This is comfort that God proclaims to us.

God proclaims it through the gospel as that gospel is written on every page of Scripture. And God proclaims it to us in the gospel that is preached. God tells us, in clear and definite language, that He has forgiven our sins and that we are, in His eyes, spotlessly clean and pure.

In proclaiming this to us, God also proclaims the sure basis for our comfort. He tells us that His wrath against us for sin was placed on our Lord Jesus Christ. God's own Son shed His blood for us and was punished in our stead. By His precious blood He has fully satisfied for our sins. We are, in God's eyes, no longer guilty — not for our original sin, nor for our actual sins.

And then God also sees to it that we receive this comfort in our hearts and souls. He sends His Spirit to dwell in us and to work repentance and faith in our hearts. Thus, when God says, "I have forgiven all your sins in My Son," we believe that Word of God. Believing it, we have comfort.

What blessed comfort! We sin, but we are not punished for those sins. There is no punishment left, for it has all been forever dealt with by the sacrifice of the Son of God in our flesh! God will never punish us. Because of Christ, He cannot.

Do you know your miseries? Do you sense your need for comfort? Then hear and believe what God proclaims. Believe! Be comforted! And rejoice! 

Religion in the Public Arena

Throughout the history of the United States, citizens have often referred to the “wall of separation between church and state.” The concept is usually referred to when questions arise either because of government limitation on the activity of churches, or when the institutions of the state include religious practices or symbols, such as the old controversy over prayer in public schools. In recent years, different individuals and groups have increasingly challenged the role of religion in public life, often challenging practices that have been taken for granted for years, such as the phrase “under God” in the pledge of allegiance. Such attacks are met with staunch resistance from conservative evangelical groups. As this article goes to print, the United States Supreme Court is about to issue an opinion dealing with the display of the Ten Commandments on public property,¹ an issue that it has avoided ruling on for several years.

This article will examine a brief history of the issue of separation of church and state, some recent developments, and the implications for the church for the future.

The constitutional provisions dealing with the separation between church and state are located in the first amendment to the constitution. Interestingly, the first amendment does not refer to a wall of separation between church and state, and the words “separation,” “church,” and “state” do not ap-

pear at all. The language simply reads “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof....” The phrase “wall of separation between church and state” is not in the Constitution, but was coined by Thomas Jefferson in 1802 as he wrote a letter to a Baptist congregation. Jefferson pointed to the language of the first amendment in assuring them that the recently organized government would not impinge upon their freedom to worship. A widespread rumor had been circulating that Congregationalism was to become the national religion, and Thomas Jefferson sought to reassure them that this was not the case. He did so by drawing on a statement that had been made by a Baptist minister, Roger Williams, about a wall of separation constructed by God between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world.

This anecdote reveals the context in which the first amendment was adopted. Many citizens of the United States had immigrated seeking religious freedom, coming from countries such as England, where the state church, the Church of England, imposed heavy restrictions on worship by other religions or denominations. The amendment was intended to guard against a similar situation in their new country.

The first amendment is actually made up of two clauses, referred to as the Establishment Clause (“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion”) and the Free Exercise Clause (“or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”). Although the two

clauses would appear to be intended to promote the same goal, that of prohibiting a state religion so that individuals can engage in the free exercise of any religion, the law has developed in such a way that the two clauses are often in conflict. Most often this conflict arises because of an attempt to use the government to perform functions that it should not be used for, such as education of children.

The conflict appears already in the 1948 *McColum* case.² That case involved private religious teachers giving instruction in public school facilities. The supporters of this practice argued that they had the right to exercise their religion, but the Supreme Court ruled that when the public facilities were used for religious instruction, this violated the Establishment Clause. The line of cases involving public schools continued to the point that Bible reading was prohibited in *Schempp*,³ and even a moment of silence for voluntary prayer was ruled unconstitutional in *Wallace*.⁴

In 1970, the Supreme Court established a three-prong test, and action must meet all three prongs in order to be upheld: 1) it must

1. McCreary County, *Kentucky v. American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky* (U.S. Supreme Court, No. 03-1693); *Van Orden v. Perry*, (U.S. Supreme Court, No. 03-1500).

2. *McColum v. Board of Education*, 333 U.S. 203 (1948).

3. *Abington School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963).

4. *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985).

Mr. VanEngen, a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa, is a practicing attorney.

have a secular legislative purpose, 2) its primary effect must not be either to advance or inhibit religion, and 3) it must not foster excessive government entanglement in religion.⁵

On the one hand, some of this limitation may be for the best. The traditional “Christian” majority in the United States is slipping away, and by some reports the number of people who consider themselves Protestant Christians is declining. If our children attended public schools, we wouldn’t want them to be led in prayer by someone who is praying to Buddha. On the other hand, we would want them to be able to pray on their own. This is one reason we can be thankful for the freedom to establish our own covenant schools.

The underlying conflict arises because those who do not profess to be Christians are still guaranteed an equal voice by law. Therefore, similar problems arise with public expressions of faith in many areas of our pluralistic society. Dr. Michael Newdow raised the ire of many Christians when he filed suit to have the Pledge of Allegiance declared unconstitutional because it contains the phrase “under God.” His suit was thrown out by the Supreme Court, but only because the Court found that he lacked standing, or the capacity to sue.

As Reformed believers, we recognize that all men *must* acknowledge that all things are “under God,” so one can understand why Dr. Newdow would fight against the Pledge. If a Muslim majority were to gain control of the Congress and would amend the Pledge to state “under Allah,” would we want to recite it? Obviously not. Dr. Newdow is an avowed atheist and obviously wishes to remove any language acknowledging that our nation, and all of creation, are under the sovereign dominion of the Almighty Creator.

If the Court does eventually hear a case on the Pledge, it may

be upheld under the *Lemon* test on the basis that the main thrust of the Pledge is patriotic, not religious. However, the fact remains that many will only pay lip service to the idea that our nation is “under God.”

Another such issue that the Supreme Court has previously declined to address on a number of occasions is the display of the Ten Commandments in public buildings and courthouses. Not long ago, Chief Justice Roy Moore, of the Alabama Supreme Court, received national media attention over this issue when he was removed from office for refusing to remove a monument of the Ten Commandments from his courthouse.⁶ Those opposed to such displays argue that by the use of them the state is implicitly endorsing a particular religion, in this case the Christian faith. Those in favor of such monuments argue that the decalogue forms the basis for the laws in the United States, regardless of religion, and therefore have a secular basis under the *Lemon* test. But looking around at American society today, it would be hard to argue that our society even remotely adheres to a prohibition against having any gods other than Jehovah. Adultery is no longer penalized, but is instead glorified by Hollywood. Our modern American society does not any longer even pause on the Sabbath day, much less remember it to keep it holy. Any laws which did require adherence to these tenets have long since fallen away.

We certainly wish to maintain our freedom to exercise our religion for as long as possible, and certainly also ought to hold God’s truths before the world around us, primarily through the preaching. We cannot set aside our religious beliefs when engaging in the activities of government, whether that be as a voter, a concerned citizen writing a congressman, or a government employee. But while the state does bear the sword, so that we can

freely exercise our beliefs, the state is not the proper vehicle to promote our beliefs. In a pluralistic, democratic society, we cannot expect the government to be able to incorporate aspects of our religion in a way that is pleasing to God. One has only to think of the watered-down, “non-denominational” prayers that are offered at public functions to try to appease everyone and to avoid the Establishment Clause.

Government involvement in matters of religion is not conducive to the purity of doctrine in the church, as was shown repeatedly by the history of the Netherlands in the struggles of the Reformed fathers with the state church in that country. The footnote to Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, as it appears in our Psalter, contains an instructive quote from the Acts of Synod 1910 of the Christian Reformed Church. The language reads, in part, as follows:

[B]oth State and Church as institutions of God and Christ have mutual rights and duties appointed them from on high, and therefore have a very reciprocal obligation to meet through the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from Father and Son. They may not, however, encroach upon each other’s territory. The Church has rights of sovereignty in its own sphere, as well as the State.”

Conclusion

While we may enjoy seeing the symbols of our faith included in public displays, such as the Ten Commandments, we must expect that a pluralistic society whose values are rapidly diverging from our own will resent those symbols and seek their removal. This is not to justify the antichristian spirit that motivates their efforts, but it is a mistake to conclude, when the state *does* incorporate prayers or displays such as the Ten Commandments, that our nation as a whole shares our beliefs. For the purity of the church, it is best that the

separation of the state from the church be maintained as much as possible. For Reformed believers, the primary concern is when that movement to restrict the exercise

of religion through public institutions becomes an effort to restrict the exercise of religion in public.



5. *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1970).

6. Jeffrey Gettleman, *Alabama Panel Ousts Judge Over Ten Commandments*, *New York Times*, November 14, 2003, §A, at 16.

All Around Us

Rev. Michael DeVries

Tolerance

We live in an age of almost unparalleled tolerance. Tolerance is put forth as one of the great virtues of our times. It is possible to give it other names, to use another label for this notion, different terminology. It may be called “cultural accommodation”; it may be termed “political correctness”; it may be euphemistically labeled “sensitivity.” But underlying all of these characterizations is the notion of *tolerance*. Though many in our day would undoubtedly desire to add “tolerance” to the list of the fruits of the Spirit and formulate another beatitude around it, Scripture doesn’t use the word. A form of the word, the word “tolerable,” is used by Scripture in reference to the degree of God’s judgment upon the ungodly. But Scripture certainly speaks of compassion, longsuffering, and many other beautiful virtues.

Properly speaking, tolerance is defined as a recognition of and respect for the opinions, beliefs, or actions of others. And it implies neither approval nor disapproval as such. To be tolerant of someone means to put up with him, to accept his legal right to believe or do what he does. The toleration of various beliefs and activities is, to a degree, necessary, living in the midst of this world of various peoples and cultures. Certainly tol-

erance, as properly defined and understood, is manifest in the lives and activities of God’s people, also of the saints in Scripture. For example, we may say that Abraham tolerated, put up with, the Canaanites that were dwelling in the land of promise to which the Lord had led him and in which by faith he remained a pilgrim and a stranger.

But Scripture knows not, and never condones, a tolerance by God’s people of sin, of the lie, or of the impenitent sinner in the fellowship of the saints or in the communion of the church. (See I Corinthians 5, Revelation 2:12-17, 20.) We must understand that something very devious has taken place in our society and in much of the church in regard to this notion of tolerance. Well-known Canadian author and social commentator William D. Gairdner, in his book *The War Against the Family*, lists ten “popular illusions,” which he defines as popular beliefs without foundation that conflict with the core values of our society. One of these “popular illusions” he terms “The Tolerance Illusion,” and he carefully explains how the idea of “tolerance” is turned (twisted) into the notion of “approval.” He writes, “Little by little, the idea of tolerance has been forcibly altered to mean ‘approval’, and it is used by the media and by activists, by human rights types, and by lobbyists of all sorts to promote their agenda against a soft-headed gullible public.” He points out that the quickest way to get someone to back down on any issue is to accuse him of being intolerant.

Gairdner gives compelling examples that demonstrate his point. To mention only one, the abortion issue, he writes, “If you approve of abortion, you are ‘pro-choice’ (tolerant). If you don’t approve, you are ‘anti-abortion’ (and to be ‘anti’anything in our culture is to be intolerant).” So he shows that the public has been effectively manipulated into accepting the idea that approval is the politically neutral, correct posture; tolerance equals approval, as he puts it.

Now, to be quite honest, all of this, as it applies to society in general, does not concern me all that much. Oh, yes, I am grieved by the abounding immorality and corruption we see here in North America — the tolerance of gambling, pornography, divorce and remarriage, illegal drug use, homosexuality, and, especially at this time, the same-sex marriage legislation that is being emphatically promoted here in Canada. But what truly grieves my soul is that this phenomenon, this, to use Gairdner’s terminology, “tolerance illusion,” has to a great extent beguiled the churches, even Reformed and conservative Presbyterian churches of our day. Bret McAtee, a Christian Reformed pastor, astutely pointed this out several years ago in an article in *The Outlook* entitled, “The Need for a Sure Word.” In describing how we are told by those with supposed compassion that we live in modern times and our culture demands a new sensitivity (or tolerance) from the Bible, he writes, “The Word must be sensitive to the homosexual who ‘loves Jesus’, sensi-

Rev. DeVries is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario, Canada.

tive to the person who is clucking 'in the Spirit', sensitive to feminists who arrogate to themselves positions of authority, and sensitive to those who find God's masculinity offensive. And of course, being sensitive (read "tolerant": MDV) these days is code language for 'agrees with.'

Though examples are "all around us," notice the following shocking examples, even in Reformed churches at the present time:

R. Albert Mohler Jr. reports in the February 9, 2005 issue of *Christian Renewal* in an article entitled "The Church that Cannot Make Up its Mind" as follows:

The famous Dr. Seuss once told the story of a "young man from Zoad, who came to two signs in the fork of the road." Forced to choose between two directions, the indecisive Zoad simply decided to go both directions at once. As Dr. Seuss explained, "that's how the Zoad who would not take a chance went to no place at all with a split in his pants."

That little parable comes to mind with the mid-January release of the report on human sexuality conducted by an official task force of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The "Task Force for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Studies on Sexuality" as commissioned by the denomination in 2001 and charged to bring a full report on controversial issues related to homosexuality so that the church could consider the issue in 2005. In August, the report will be considered by the ELCA's "Church Assembly" which will convene in Orlando, Fla. Like most mainline Protestant denominations, the ELCA has been torn by controversy over issues related to human sexuality. Forces pushing for the blessing of same-gender relationships and the acceptance of openly homosexual clergy have been pushing the issue through local and regional levels of the church. At the same time, powerful forces have defended the church's current policy and discipline which

excludes practicing homosexuals from service as ordained ministers and "rostered leaders." The church also bans same-sex blessing ceremonies as rites recognized by the denomination.

The denomination had been eagerly awaiting the release of this report, but it is likely to please no one. Rather than settling the issue one way or the other, this report is a classic demonstration of the bureaucratic mind at work, couching its language in the voice of compromise and *toleration* (emphasis mine, MDV) while offering no conclusive answer to the most basic questions at stake....

Acknowledging the level of conflict in the denomination, the task force states: "It has become clear to the task force that the disagreement over these issues before the church is deep, pervasive, multi-faceted, and multi-layered. This church is not of one mind." Accordingly, the task force's first recommendation was that the church "concentrate on finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of our disagreements...."

Regrettably, this ELCA task force took as its model not Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms but Dr. Seuss's Zoad at the fork in the road. Like the proverbial Zoad, this report will go no place at all — with a split in its pants.

In an article entitled "Polite Rebuke," written by Edward E. Plowman in *World* (October 30, 2004) under the heading, "Anglican commission mildly taps radical bishops on the wrist," Plowman writes:

Pickings were slim for conservatives in the long-awaited Lambeth Commission's "Windsor Report" on the crisis in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

They had wanted to see the predominantly liberal U.S. Episcopal Church (ECUSA) "disciplined" for consecrating as bishop last year V. Gene Robinson, a homosexual living with his male partner, and for allowing same-sex blessings under official ECUSA auspices. Instead, liberal bishops in ECUSA got off with little more than a mild tap

on the wrist, and Bishop Robinson kept his job.

The conservatives also had wanted approval of a plan that would allow conservative congregations to receive spiritual oversight by biblically faithful bishops, regardless of diocesan boundaries. The report rejected such a plan and accused overseas bishops who had come to the aid of North American conservatives of contributing to disunity.

It called for a moratorium on any further interventions, including declarations of broken or impaired communion with ECUSA (as 18 mostly African provinces, representing the vast majority of the world's Anglicans, have done so far).

One of those overseas leaders, Archbishop Peter Akinola of Nigeria, the world's largest Anglican province, fired back. "Why, throughout the document, is there such a marked contrast between the language used against those who are subverting the faith and that used against those of us, from the global south, who are trying to bring the church back to the Bible?" he said. "Where is the language of rebuke for those who are promoting sexual sins as holy and acceptable behavior? The imbalance is bewildering...."

Examples could be multiplied. Consider the teachings of the Word of God, both as regards doctrine and life, that are denied, openly denied, which denials are tolerated, yea, approved! The doctrine of creation in six ordinary days, the flood, double predestination, sovereign particular grace, observance of the Lord's Day, the honoring of the marriage bond, the proper calling of women in the church, the antithetical Christian life, and many more.

And the keys of the kingdom rust from disuse, utter neglect, particularly the key of Christian discipline. That third mark of the true church, Christian discipline, in the love of Christ, is scarcely to be found in our day. There is an astounding degree of tolerance prevalent — a tolerance that can


recognize as “Christian” the most blatant contradictions of the truth as it is revealed in Scripture — in both doctrine and life!

What does the exalted Lord Christ say about all of this?

I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my

faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the

Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Rev. 2:13-16).

May God give us grace to “contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3b). “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches...” (Rev. 2:17a). 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

If Then I Be a Father, Where Is My Honor?

The Father

To serve God and to honor Him are by no means the same.

He who serves is in that service a *servant*, who fulfills his servanthip by strict obedience and discharge of all his duties.

Hence, in the service of the Lord our God this servanthip stands in the foreground. To be a “Servant of the Most Highest” is an honorary title, and “servant of God” stands so high that it is common to all angels and men and to the Mediator between God and men. Even the Mediator is called “the suffering servant of God.”

But true piety goes further than service, and the name of *Religion* points not to the service, but to the honor of God. And so in our circles we speak of the Christian *Religion*;

but in the general understanding of the people this noble name has found no entrance.

The great mass of people know of nothing else nor of anything higher than to serve God — something that ordinarily is reduced to the doing of one’s duty, so that all religion is lost in the so-called *practice of virtue*.

And, however excellent discharge of duty and practice of virtue may be when as ripe fruits they are picked from the plant of faith, yet, by themselves, apart from that plant, they can never make good the lack of real religion.

Surely, it is your duty to keep the commandment, but on condition that you honor Him who gave you that commandment.

Every father of you who has obedient children who never do wrong and never make any trouble, but who never company with him, never honor him, nor show him filial affection, might envy the other, whose children are not always exemplary for goodness and sweetness but who dote on their father and carry him on their heart and

are attached to him with their best love.

And not this antithesis, but this rule applies also to the Lord our God.

Altogether good people, but who have no desire after the hidden walk with God, are an offense to Him and an insult to His love.

And therefore calls and complains the Lord so touchingly and tenderly by Malachi (1:6): “If then I am a Father, where is *mine honor*?”



What this honor of God is, appears when you consider two things: first, *reverent praise*, and second, *attachment of soul*.

“Praise is comely for the upright” (Ps. 33:1), says the Scripture. To praise it urges man and angel. “Praise the Lord, sing forth the honor of his name!” (Ps. 66:2) is the call that is sounded in all the holy Testament. To make the name of God ever greater is the blessed accord that is enticed from human tongue and angel voice.

In unhealthy mysticism, they

Reprinted from *When Thou Sittest In Thine House*, by Abraham Kuyper. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1929. Used by permission of Eerdmans Publishing Co.

who are over spiritually-minded object to this, and put the question whether before God anything counts except the impulses of the heart, and what that outward praise and Hallelujah Song can mean to Him; but this standpoint is false and is contrary to the creation-ordinance that created us soul *and* body.

Of course, praise in the lips *without* praise in the heart degrades the human psalm to the song of the lark. In the praise of the lips the heart must flow out. But the heart must never imagine that the “calves of the lips” have no significance before God.

As among men the tribute of praise to those who attain high and honorable posts is demanded, so the Lord your God demands of you that you praise Him, that you confess Him, that you honor Him, that you thank Him, that you worship Him.

It is impious familiarity, which does not become you, when you deem that your love for God excuses you from reverent worship.

Read it in Revelation how even in the heaven of heavens, where love is perfect, the offering upon the altar of the Holy One is unalterably composed of love and *adoring* praise.



But you are right in this: in that outward worship the honor of your Father who is in heaven does not come to its own.

If then I am a Father, asks the Almighty, where is mine honor? So in the honor which you offer unto God, the child-element also must come to its own, by warming the worship that by itself is cold, and by making it glow with the *soulful affection of filial love*.

Also in this honor of God there operates a *centripetal* and a *centrifugal* force.

A sense of deep reverence and

respect, which would make you exclaim: “Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man.” A trembling before His Word, and a sacred fear before His Holy Majesty.

But also a deep-felt sense of clinging affection. A drawing of heart after the Eternal. Inability to rest before His

holy fellowship is found. A thirsting after God, as the hart thirsts after the watersprings. A going out with all your soul after His hidden walk.

This is the second part of the honor that is due unto God as Father, and *because* He is Father.

The claim of the Father-heart that is well-pleased and accepts the love of His *child*, and where in its sum-total it constitutes the outflowing love of His people.

A love in which we always fall short; which on earth shall ever remain a small beginning of what it must be; and which by reason of its insufficiency ever and again puts to shame those who spiritually are more deeply initiated.

When these two, this reverent worship of prayer and praise and that soulful attachment of love, inwork one upon the other, then, and only then, *is worship and love mingled as offering*, and our Father who is in heaven receives something, however imperfect, of His honor.



In addition to these two parts there is still another, even the *reflective*, which equally closely touches the honor of God as Father.

God the Lord has put into human fatherhood a *reflection* of His own divine Fatherhood.

He could have ordained human procreation in another way, so that no man would ever have become a father.

But He did not ordain it so. By His ordinance regarding the propagation of our race, God made man a father. And even now, for as many as there are whom God granted to beget a child, it is our God *who made them father*.

Then in such a one He mirrors the image of His own divine Fatherhood, and wills and demands that in this reflected fatherhood we shall honor His *original* Fatherhood.

Therefore must a child honor his father.

Not to preserve domestic order. Not because his father supports him. Not because father is the older. But because in honoring father we honor our Father who is in heaven.

When I tear off the epaulets from an official, I do no injury to him, but to the king who attached these epaulets to his shoulders as a sign of his office. So also, when a child withholds honor and homage from his father, he does sinful man no harm, but he assails God, who shadowed forth His divine Fatherhood upon him.

To honor your father and your mother is to honor God in them.

And he who professes piety and breaks the fifth commandment robs God with the left hand, of what with the right he offered upon His altar.



He who is an earthly father sees in that part of God’s honor an obligation for himself of highest seriousness.

You can mirror God’s Fatherhood in your own fatherhood before your children in a beautiful and striking way, but you can also do it in an unsightly and false way.

Then arise those bitter conditions in which you do not entice honor and love from your children, but rouse antagonism in them, strife between

He who professes piety and breaks the fifth commandment robs God with the left hand, of what with the right he offered upon His altar.

dislike of your person and the honor which they owe you as their father.

The holy apostle calls this “provoking one’s children.” To demand: you must honor me, and meanwhile given them occasion to despise you, or at least to have no respect for you.

Something which never sets the child free from obligation to the fifth commandment. This, like all other divine commandments, remains unshakable as a rock. But


for your child it becomes a grievous temptation to sin. A temptation that goes out from you, to work its ruin.

Whoever therefore is father or mother must in this respect also give God honor, so that in their own person they bear *with honor* the reflection of the Fatherhood of God.

That in everything they prove themselves worthy of respect before their children, and make themselves a blessing to their children

in the grave work of training and educating them, not merely to safeguard themselves against self-degradation, nor yet merely to teach their children order and discipline, but above all and first of all in this matter of the home-life to let the Lord our God come to His honor as Father.

Here, too, in God the starting point and in God the final goal.

From, through, and to Him likewise the honor of the fifth commandment. 

An Overview of Buddhism

A Buddhist trying to give other Buddhists an overview of Christianity faces a daunting task. The history of Christianity is extensive; its doctrines cover a broad range; and each branch of Christianity has its own peculiar history and doctrines to be considered.

A Reformed Christian faces the same difficulty in attempting to give Reformed Christians an overview of Buddhism. The various branches of Buddhists each have their own peculiarities of thought and life. Two Buddhists will not always agree on what is fundamental to their religion.

Such an attempt, however, though difficult, will be beneficial. Because Buddhism is a growing force in western countries, Buddhists might very well be the neighbors who cross our paths and

whom we are called to love. We show this love by showing them the deceit and hopelessness of Buddhism, speaking to them of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and calling them to repentance and faith in Christ, who alone is the way, the truth, and the life.

History

Buddhism originated with Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, the “Enlightened One.”

He was born about 563 BC in what is now Nepal. His father, a prince, raised him in luxury and sheltered him from seeing any form of suffering. In his adulthood, having traveled from the palace, he discovered four forms of suffering — a man suffering from old age; a sick man; a dead man; and a poor monk begging for bread. Gautama concluded that happiness was an illusion. To search for the cause of suffering and the way to eliminate it, he left his wife and child when he was 29. For six years he lived ascetically, depriving himself of food, sleeping on hard beds, and not sitting down. At the point at

which he almost died of his self-deprivation, he realized that this was not the way to eliminate suffering. Other teachers did not help him find the answer either. One day he sat down, vowing not to rise again until he found the cause of suffering. Meditating deeply, he found his answer, which he called the “Middle Way,” because it avoided both extremes of self-indulgence and self-deprivation. This moment is called his enlightenment. Until his death around 483 BC, he taught others what he had discovered. The heart of Buddhism is the understanding and practicing of this Middle Way, and sharing this way with others.

After the Buddha’s death, monks continued teaching his ideas throughout India. King Ashoka embraced Buddhism in the 200s BC and sent missionaries to other lands to teach it. As Buddhism spread, two main branches developed — Theravada Buddhism (spreading to southeast Asia) and Mahayana Buddhism (in northeast Asia). Theravada Buddhism holds that Gautama was the only Bud-

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

This article was previously published in Reformed Perspective, and is reprinted here by permission.

dha; that his writings alone constitute their Scriptures; that enlightenment is limited to monks and other elite; and that one ought to be concerned only with his own enlightenment. Mahayana Buddhism teaches that other Buddhas have existed; that the Buddhist Scriptures include many writings from other good Buddhists, and are even still being written today; that everyone can be enlightened; and that one ought to try to help others reach enlightenment. Within these two main groups there are smaller divisions.

In the 1800s, Chinese and Japanese immigrants brought Mahayana Buddhism (especially Zen and Tibetan Buddhism) to America's western shores. The religion became very popular in the mid-1900s. The main Buddhist organization in North America is the Buddhist Church of America, but many Buddhists are not affiliated with any organization.

Buddhism is a growing force in America. It is estimated that between a half million and six million Buddhists live in America. That it has affected our culture is evident from the fact that Hollywood has popularized the religion in a number of movies ("Red Corner" and "Seven Years in Tibet," for example).

Fundamental teachings

The Four Noble Truths set forth the basic principles underlying Buddhism. First, life consists of suffering. Second, the cause of suffering is our desire for things that are not permanent (material things that can be lost, food that will not prevent hunger from returning, etc.). Third, this suffering will end when one eliminates his desires and attains enlightenment. Fourth, the way to enlightenment is set forth in the Middle Path.

The Middle Path consists of eight steps. The first two deal with wisdom. They are Right Understanding (knowing the four noble truths, and rejecting wrong ideas

about suffering's cause and elimination) and Right Thought (freeing our mind of all evil desires, and focusing on the Middle Path). The next three deal with ethical conduct. Right Speech means speaking well of others, and refraining from slander and gossip. Right Action requires one to refrain from killing men or animals, from stealing, from lying, from drinking intoxicants, and from unchastity (sex outside marriage is forbidden; in marriage it is permitted, but one must not let his sexual desires prevent him from following the Middle Path). Right Livelihood means that a Buddhist's occupation must be one that is productive and helpful to others and that does not violate religious principles (for example, he must not be a butcher or a brewer). The last three steps of the Middle Path deal with mental discipline. The Buddhist must put forth Right Effort, trying to overcome evil, and developing one's powers of thinking. Right Awareness requires him to understand things as they really are, and to be aware of minute details in his life, such as his breathing and the moment he falls asleep. Right Meditation, finally, requires him to meditate on a particular object until he falls into a trance, is free from distractions and sensations of suffering, and becomes enlightened.

This survey of Buddhism's main teachings shows us three things. First, the religion is based very much on legalism and works. One must live a certain kind of life to be "saved." Second, consistent Buddhists must teach that theirs is the only way of "salvation." Following the Middle Path is the only way Buddha found enlightenment, and it is the only way others can find it. Third, this "only way" is far different from the only way of Jesus Christ, His saving work, and faith in Him.

Contrasts with Christianity

I suppose one could find similarities between Buddhism and

Christianity. Both encourage their followers to know certain truths and to live ethical lives. Both realize the existence of suffering and speak of salvation in terms of the end of suffering. But these similarities are only superficial. In substance, the two religions are far different.

In their view of *God*, the two differ greatly. The Buddha himself taught that gods exist, but they are merely spirits who also must know the Four Noble Truths and follow the Middle Path to attain enlightenment. One must not worship these gods, or any other being. Some branches of Buddhism consider the Buddha to be a god; others do not. Among those who do, some worship him, others do not.

How different from the Christian faith! Scripture begins, "In the beginning God..." (Gen. 1:1). Scripture reveals God as being eternal, sovereign and independent, unchanging, wise, all-knowing, gracious, loving, merciful, just, triune — and much more. This God is not an impersonal, nameless God — He is Jehovah God! To know Him is eternal life (John 17:3). We depend on Him for all things related to our earthly and spiritual existence. Him alone we serve, for He commanded us to have no other gods before Him (Ex. 20:3). Faith in God is not merely part of our faith; it is really the *whole* of our faith.

Rejecting faith in the true God, Buddhism also rejects faith in *Jesus Christ* and in the *Holy Spirit*, who are also divine. Of course, Buddhists do not deny that Jesus lived on earth; some even consider Him to be one who attained enlightenment. But they consider Him to be merely a man. Any "salvation" that He provided consisted only of teaching others who were alive when He was how to become enlightened. Having left earth, He plays no further saving role.

How different from Scripture's revelation of Jesus Christ as being

God come in our flesh (John 1:1, 14)! And that our salvation is based on His atoning work on the cross alone (Rom. 3:24-25; II Cor. 5:19; Gal. 3:6)! And that He arose again, ascended into heaven, sits at God's right hand governing all things, and sent His Holy Spirit into the church and hearts of believers, to apply to us all the blessings of salvation that He earned for us on the cross! How different from Christ's own claim to be the promised Messiah, the only Savior of the world (Luke 4:21; John 4:26; 14:6).

Buddhism's lack of faith in any god, let alone Jehovah God and Jesus Christ, is due to its thinking that man can save himself. Of course, if man can save himself by his own right thinking and works, who needs God? And who needs Jesus Christ? In fact, Buddhism makes *man* God — thereby committing the great sin of unbelief and pride. Buddhism is idolatry.

As part of "right understanding," Buddhism teaches regarding man that he has no soul. That man has a soul is declared to be a lie that Christians invented in their quest to escape suffering. Rather, man consists of five things: body, feeling, perception, disposition, and consciousness. These five things are united in one human being as long as that human is alive. At death, these five parts separate from each other, and reassemble with parts of other dead humans, to make another human — just as one might use different parts of five cars to make one car. This is the Buddhist view of reincarnation — quite different from the doctrine of reincarnation as taught by other religions. Because of this reincarnation, Buddhists teach that suffering is endless, apart from enlightenment.

Enlightenment, Buddhism's

conception of *salvation*, is the only thing that will make this suffering cease. This enlightenment is the end to suffering in this life. It does not change the objective facts of life, which include hunger, pain, sorrow, etc. But the enlightened one does not experience suffering on account of them. At death, the five parts of the enlightened person are not reincarnated, but cease to exist. Salvation consists of nothing more. It does not consist of covenantal communion with God. It is not enjoyed everlastingly. It is only the end of suffering and of existence.

While all branches of Buddhism seem to agree that the means to such enlightenment and "salvation" involves following the Middle Path, some branches teach that more is necessary. Theravada Buddhism requires one to renounce the world and become a monk. Zen Buddhism requires one to practice meditation regularly. Tibetan Buddhism requires, in addition to regular meditation, the use of mantras (chants by which one communicates with divine spirits), certain body gestures, the prayer wheel, and other techniques. In one branch of Buddhism, Amida Buddhism, this salvation is obtained through reliance on the Amida Buddha.

By contrast, Christianity, on the basis of Scripture, teaches that man consists of body and soul (Gen. 2:7), both of which are derived from one's parents at conception and birth. Both body and soul are totally corrupted by sin, so that, apart from God's saving grace, fallen man experiences only His wrath (even good material and earthly things are given in preparation for Him justly to destroy the ungodly, Ps. 73:3-20), and they are able only to sin more, bringing upon themselves, even more greatly the experience of His

wrath (Rom. 3:10-18). Our life consists of suffering, but that suffering is due to sin.

Salvation consists not only in the removing of sin's guilt (so that we no longer need fear God's wrath) and corruption (so that we can begin to obey God's law again), but even more in the positive enjoyment of fellowship with God, as members of His covenant. That salvation is based on the work of Christ, who bore the wrath of God in our stead. It is given us through faith in Christ. This faith is worked by the preaching of the gospel and strengthened by the administration of the (two) sacraments. And this salvation, which we begin to enjoy in this life, is enjoyed perfectly after death, when in our souls we are brought into the presence of God in heaven, and even more perfectly after Christ's return and the resurrection of the body, when we and the whole church of the elect are glorified as the body of Christ, made perfectly sinless, and serve God with praise and thanksgiving to all eternity.

Indeed, Buddhism and Christianity have no essential similarities. Buddhism denies the truth of Scripture, and teaches instead the lies and inventions of a man. It is really Pelagianism (an old heresy that our church fathers battled in the early centuries of the Christian church), in that it denies that man's suffering is due to his inherent sinfulness, and claims that man is able to deliver himself from his suffering by his own works, entirely apart from Christ. Buddhism begins with a different starting point than does true faith in Christ, leads one along an entirely different path, and brings one to an entirely different destination. I say with sorrow, but not with any hesitancy, that a Buddhist who holds yet to his ideas on his deathbed will awake in hell. Salvation cannot be for him, for he has not known or confessed salvation from sin to be found in the crucified and resurrected Christ alone (Rom. 10:9).

...perhaps the most effective practical witness to the Buddhist would be to live our faith consistently when we suffer.

Witnessing suggestions

Because Buddhists disagree among themselves on the way to enlightenment and other issues, one who desires to witness effectively to a Buddhist should not assume to know what he believes, but should ask him to state his faith himself.

The fundamental difficulty in witnessing to Buddhists is that by nature they, like all of us apart from grace, are blind to the truth. Before witnessing, we should pray to God to use our words to accomplish His purpose, and if it is His will, to use them to bring the Buddhist to sorrow for sin and faith in Christ. Not always is this His purpose. However, we must remember that His word never returns to Him void (Is. 55:11).

Witnessing to Buddhists is also difficult because the Buddhist views negatively certain concepts that are fundamental to the Christian faith. We speak of salvation as being life with God, ultimately enjoyed in heaven, a place of permanent existence; they consider “salvation” to be a matter of not existing. We speak of regeneration as being an aspect of salvation. They see it as the Christian counterpart to reincarnation, which they


desire to escape. We speak of the need to search the Scriptures, and to think through the doctrines of the Christian faith. Their goal in meditation is to be released from and rise above the thought processes. So a Christian witness to a Buddhist will require patience on the part of the Christian, a willingness on the part of the Buddhist to allow his own faith to be challenged, and perhaps repeated attempts at witnessing for the Buddhist to begin to understand.

Clearly, to witness to Buddhists the Christian must know and be firmly convinced of the truth of Christianity. One must know and experience the suffering of sin, the sure relief of that suffering through faith in Christ, and the certain hope of blessed existence with God after death, in order to witness with earnestness. Then we must express our Christian faith clearly, appealing to Scripture, and consciously showing how our faith is contrasted with Buddhism.

Responding to the Buddhist's view that all things are everlasting but impermanent, the Christian would do well to teach that God is permanent, and His love for His people is a permanent, faithful

love. Picking up on the idea that suffering will end when desires are eliminated, the Christian should show that God requires us, not to eliminate our desires, but to put away our evil desires and to desire Him (Ps. 73:25). Recognizing that the Buddhist has no real conception of sin, and that he views lapses in moral conduct as only a weakness, the Christian ought to emphasize the reality of sin, sin's consequences, and Christ as the only way of deliverance from sin.

The Christian must always witness by living his faith. However, the Buddhist does the same. We could explain why we live ethically, and how we are able to do so — in these areas, we differ. But perhaps the most effective practical witness to the Buddhist would be to live our faith consistently when we suffer. Scripture often commands us to contentment and joy in suffering (Phil. 4:11; James 1:2; I Pet. 2:19ff.; 4:12ff.). Should the Buddhist notice that, rather than complaining or trying to eliminate our suffering, we have found joy in it, he might question us as to the reason for our faith and hope.

Should that happen, let us have an answer! 

Book Reviews



Doctrine according to Godliness: A Primer of Reformed Doctrine. Ronald Hanko. Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association. 2004. xiii + 338 pages. \$28.95 (Hard cover). [Reviewed by Prof. Russell Dykstra.]

Doctrine according to Godliness is a significant publication by the Reformed Free Publishing Association. I would describe it as a Reformed Dogmatics for the common man. As such it complements the other solid doctrinal and biblical studies published by the RFPA. It is a valuable book with the potential for benefiting the broader Reformed church world and be-

yond. *Doctrine according to Godliness* sets forth the truth of Scripture, that is to say, Reformed doctrine, in a clear and logical form, and it does so in a manner that is not intimidating. This is doctrine in a form that every believer can grasp, can understand and embrace.

The book consists of a series of nearly 240 different topics, from “General Revelation” to “The Covenant of Grace” to “Heavenly Glory.” The topics are divided under six headings, roughly corresponding to the six divisions commonly used in Reformed theology: 1. God and His Word; 2. Man and His World; 3. Christ and His Work; 4. The Cov-

enant and Salvation; 5. The Church and the Sacraments; 6. The Return of Christ and the Last Things.

Each section is, for the most part, a self-contained discussion of a particular doctrine. The sections are brief — under a page and a half. To place together in one book that many brief selections is difficult to do. This effort succeeds very well, producing an interesting, united whole. It is that because of the many commendable features of the book.

First of all, the book is well written. Hanko's evident abilities as a writer enabled him to avoid the danger of “sameness,” that is, producing numerous brief articles that

follow the same pattern, and soon all begin to read the same. He has a knack for drawing the reader into the topic immediately so that, though one may have intended to stop “after this one,” a glance at the next section leads to reading another, and then a few more. In addition, the author uses a variety of methods to explain the various doctrines, and he writes a conclusion appropriate to the doctrine treated.

The genuine earnestness in the message, together with a winsome spirit, add to the pleasure of reading this book. Rev. Ron Hanks is a pastor with twenty-five years of experience, who also served as a missionary for many of those years. He writes to the people. He asks the reader, also those who may disagree, to consider carefully what he writes. He obviously has the heartfelt desire that others will have the same convictions about the truth.

A second notable feature of the book is the capable and copious use of Scripture. Rev. Hanks is unashamedly committed to the infallibly inspired Scriptures. Each and every section is based on Scripture. Hanks weaves Scripture into the discussion naturally. One never has the feeling that he is simply “proof-texting.” Hanks consciously employs the Reformation principle that Scripture interprets Scripture. As one example, consider his use of the words of Jesus to demonstrate that evolution is incompatible with Scripture (86).

If you believe that man “evolved,” then consider what Jesus says in Matthew 19:4, 5: “Have you not read [in Gen. 1:27 and Gen. 2:24] that he which made them in the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?” Jesus obviously believed the first two chapters of Genesis to be true. Should not we believe them also?

But all those commendable fea-

tures of the book would be of no account if the doctrinal content of the book were poor. It is, after all, a book of doctrine. In fact, the doctrinal substance is the best feature of the book — it is of the highest quality of theological, Reformed writings. Hanks is an able and knowledgeable theologian with a thorough understanding of Reformed theology. He not only knows the doctrines, he knows the topics that are debated, and he addresses controversy, though, again, not in a manner that intimidates the reader.

The doctrines are clearly and concisely expressed. Terms are defined, or carefully described. Notice how the difficult term “God’s simplicity” is introduced (56).

In books of theology, you will sometimes read of an attribute called God’s “simplicity.” The word is confusing, and since it is not found in Scripture, it might be better to use a different word—perhaps “perfection.” In any case, what we are talking about when we speak of God’s simplicity is part of his oneness—that he is *one* in all his attributes and works. There is no disharmony, no conflict, no contradiction among his works or attributes. They are all one. God is perfect and without weakness or flaw in any way.

As the above quotation also indicates, the treatment of the doctrines is fresh. This freshness is partly due to the fact that the application of the doctrine is so apt. Consider how Hanks demonstrates the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity in a section entitled “The Trinity and the Family” (pp. 59-60). It begins, “Nothing shows the importance of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity so much as its connection to family life. It is the foundation of the family and of our various callings in the family.” After supporting that assertion from Scripture, he continues:

This has many practical implications. For one thing, it explains

the deterioration of the family and of family values today. Created to be a reflection of God’s own trinitarian family life, the family cannot prosper apart from him.

Moreover, the Trinity is where we learn to live as families. That we go to God to learn about family life does not only mean that we go to his Word in the Bible. It also means that we go to him as Father to learn about being fathers (and mothers) to our children. It means that we bring our children to his holy child Jesus to learn about their calling as children. It means that we go to him as Holy Spirit to learn about peace, unity, love, fellowship, and all the other blessings of family life. Only the Spirit can teach us these things. He is the source of these blessings.

Hanks is at pains to demonstrate the interrelatedness of various Reformed dogmas. He does this in the various discussions as he shows how the one doctrine affects others. He also does this in the combinations of doctrines. For instance, there are six related discussions on the doctrine of justification (pp. 197-204). They are entitled: “Justification”; “Justification by Faith”; “Justification and Election”; “Justification and the Atonement”; “Adoption” [which Hanks regards as “the first and greatest of the benefits of justification, (p. 202)]; and “Peace.” This is most beneficial for the believer, for it helps him to know not only the given doctrine, but also its relationship to other cardinal truths.

Since the book contains much application of the truth to practical matters, Hanks takes clear stands on many concrete issues. This will mean that not everyone will agree with every implication that he brings out. My own disagreements were few and far between. However, I did have a few. At least twice Hanks asserts that Isaac was told that Esau was a reprobate (pp. 70, 271). Although Isaac was told that the elder would serve the younger, and that two manner of peoples were repre-

sented in the womb of Rebekah, I doubt that these covenant parents had such a burden laid upon them, namely, that their firstborn son was explicitly labeled a reprobate. That does not take away from the statement of Romans 9 that God (always) hated Esau. But the Old Testament narrative (Genesis 25) does not record that *those* words were spoken to Isaac and Rebekah.


In addition, can we know with such certainty that Ham was reprobate (p. 271)? Not he directly, but his son Canaan was cursed, though granted, Ham is presented in a most unfavorable light in Genesis 9. Yet Ham was one of the eight souls of whom the Bible records that they were saved by water (I Pet. 3:30).

And finally, Hanko maintains, on the basis of I Timothy 2:11-14, that Eve's fall was the reason that she must be in submission in the church (p. 110). I'll have to think about that some more. I Timothy 2:11-14 certainly teaches that the woman is to be in subjection in the

church. Actually, two reasons are given for that subjection, and one has nothing to do with the fall, but rather with her creation. It seems to me that the reference to Eve's fall might serve a somewhat different purpose. It demonstrates that exactly when Eve usurped the authority of her husband in answering the serpent, she fell into sin.

Three other criticisms I have of the book as published. First, the index is too limited to be of any real value, being only an index to words in the headings, and not of the body of the work. I hope that a more complete reference will be made for the next printing. Second, and this is admittedly picky, but what is the point of the odd numeration of the page numbers in the table of contents (007, 008, 024, etc.)? It makes the book resemble a sort of home computer publishing endeavor and serves no useful purpose that I can see. Third, there is some overlap of treatment in the doctrine of the covenant. Fourteen sections are devoted to the doctrine

of the covenant. However, the doctrine is treated in three different sections. It is unavoidable, then, that some repetition of material is found in these various sections.

However, these are relatively minor matters, and this book is highly recommended to all our readers. I know personally that it is already being read with enjoyment and profit by readers young and old, and by some who are not so quick to pick up a book, let alone a book on doctrine. *Doctrine according to Godliness* is an excellent resource for the ministers and elders who teach catechism. They can gain ideas and insights as to how to introduce specific truths, and how to apply them concretely to the youths. Societies could profitably use it for study. Evangelism committees could be guided by the content and style of the book in their promotion of the truth. And, above all, any and all believers who take it up to read will be edified, encouraged, and comforted by the precious knowledge of the truth. 

Report of Classis West

Classis West met in regular session on Wednesday, March 2 in Bethel Protestant Reformed Church, Roselle, IL. An office-bearers' conference was held the day prior to Classis on the subject, "Reformed Evangelism." The meeting of Classis was chaired by Rev. A. Brummel. Most of the work of Classis was routine.

The main item of business was Rev. W. Bekkering's request for emeritation. Classis approved this request and forwarded it to the Emeritus Committee. Classis also expressed its appreciation to Rev. Bekkering for his 33 years of faithful labors in our churches.

The church visitors reported on their work. With thanks to God, they informed Classis that their visits revealed there is unity, peace, and love within the congregations of Classis West.

Subsidy requests were approved for three churches, and these will be forwarded to synod.

Pulpit supply was arranged for three vacant churches for the next six months. First (Edmonton) received supply for an average of three Sundays a month, which includes supply by Rev. M. DeVries from Classis East for two Sundays. Bethel received supply for two Sundays a month. And Doon received supply only until April 3, since Rev. David Overway, who has accepted the call to Doon, is expected to move there soon.

The following were elected as delegates and alternates to Synod 2005. Minister delegates: Rev. A. Brummel, Rev. G. Eriks, Rev. S. Houck, Rev. S. Key, Rev. M. VanderWal. Minister alternates: Rev. D. Kleyn, Rev. D. Kuiper, Rev.

R. Smit. Elder delegates: Gary Eriks (Peace), Henry Ferguson (Edmonton), Egbert Gritters (Hull), Alan Meurer (Bethel), David Poortinga (Loveland). Elder alternates: Allen Brummel (Edgerton), Gysbert VanBaren (South Holland), Henry VanderMeulen (Lynden), Robert Vermeer (Peace), Edwin Westra (Hull).


In other elections, Rev. D. Kleyn was reappointed to a three-year term as stated clerk, and Rev. D. Kuiper to a three-year term as assistant stated clerk. Rev. David Overway was appointed to a three-year term on the Classical Committee, to begin after he has been installed in Doon. Elected as church visitors were Rev. A. Brummel, Rev. S. Houck, Rev. S. Key, and Rev. D. Kleyn, with Rev. R. Hanko and Rev. R. Smit as alternates. The following are the synodical deputies of

Classis West: Rev. A. Brummel, Rev. D. Kuiper, and Rev. S. Houck, with the alternates being Rev. D. Kleyn, Rev. R. Smit, and Rev. G. Eriks.

The expenses of Classis totaled \$5,483.70.

Classis decided to hold its September 2005 meeting in South Hol-

land, IL, and its March 2006 meeting in Loveland, CO.

Rev. Daniel Kleyn
Stated Clerk of Classis West 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

Rev. D. Overway, pastor of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ, was invited to preach for the Filipino CRC of Jersey City, NJ on Sunday afternoon, February 27. The following Thursday, March 3, Rev. Sideco of the Filipino CRC came to Covenant and gave an informal speech. Rev. Sideco spoke regarding his experiences in evangelism work as a church planter both in the Philippines and in the United States.

Mission Activities

Rev. J. Mahtani, our denomination's missionary to Pittsburgh, PA, along with Elder Gary Boverhof, returned to visit the saints in Allentown, PA the last weekend in February. Plans called for them to conduct house visits, teach a Bible Study, and preach God's Word on Sunday.

In mid-February, members of a "Follow-up Committee" in our denomination's mission work in Pittsburgh, PA introduced a "New Visitors Welcome File" to their fellowship. Ushers at worship services were instructed to make sure that all first-time visitors received a copy of this file. This file included an introductory CD, several introductory pamphlets, and a visitor form.

How many times have you been privileged to receive instruction from the Heidelberg Catechism? Well, on Sunday, February 20, Rev. R. Miersma, our denomination's missionary to Ghana, West Africa, was able to begin a new instruction from Lord's

Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism for the Fellowship there. This begins the second time through that confession for them. One twist, instead of sermons in the morning as in the past, Rev. Miersma will now preach this confession in the evening worship service.

Sister Church Activities

Congratulations to Rev. Paul Goh! He was ordained February 20 as a minister of the gospel and sacraments in the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. Rev. Goh will be serving as "minister at large," assisting in the work of the ministry both in the Singaporean churches and in mission labors. We rejoice with Rev. Goh and his wife, Suet Yin, in God's fulfilling the desire of their hearts, and we pray for the Lord's grace to prosper Rev. Goh in the ministry of the Word.

Rev. K. Koole and Mr. D. Kregel left for Singapore February 23 on behalf of the Contact Committee of our churches. They planned to meet with our minister-on-loan, Rev. A. denHartog, attend the annual Classis meeting, and speak and preach in our sister churches there.

School Activities

The Board of Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI called a special Society Meeting for February 24. Heritage is working to find the right solution to provide their growing enrollment with a quality Christian education. That night the Society approved a proposal that they purchase two reconditioned portable classrooms for placement by September. This should meet their needs for the next two years.

The Free Christian School Society of Edgerton, MN met February 8 in the auditorium of the Edgerton PRC. At that meeting they decided that classes would not be held for the 2005/2006 school year.

Denomination Activities

Praise with the Piano IV, an evening of sacred piano music, was held February 20 at the Hudsonville, MI PRC. This year's program featured ten piano players giving expression of their God-given talent playing a wide and varied collection of familiar religious pieces.

The Voices of Victory presented a concert Sunday evening, February 27, at Grace Community Church in Hudsonville, MI. They sang some of their older familiar songs, as well as several new ones. An offering was taken for the 2005 Young People's Convention, hosted by the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI.

March 1, the day before the spring meeting of Classis West, the delegates to that classis and other interested saints from around the Chicago, IL area met at the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL for an Officebearers' Conference. This latest conference looked at the subject of Reformed Evangelism. Rev. D. Kuiper, pastor of the Randolph, WI PRC, delivered the keynote address that morning under the theme, "The Church's Duty to Preach the Gospel Indiscriminately." This address was followed at 10:30 by Rev. J. Mahtani, Eastern U.S. Missionary in our churches, leading a sectional entitled, "Equipping Our People for Personal Evangelism." Afternoon sectionals featured two of our pastors from Classis East. First, Rev.

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

M. Dick, pastor of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI, spoke on "Keeping Busy in Congregational Evangelism," followed at 2:45 by "Remembering That the Work and Fruit Is of the Lord," presented by Rev. R. VanOverloop, pastor of the Byron Center, MI PRC.

Congregational Activities

All the ladies and young girls from the congregation of First PRC in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada


were invited to a Cabin Fever Party Friday, March 4, in their church basement. Those 18 and older could use the evening to sign up for a secret pal, or, if they wished, they could just simply come and enjoy the fellowship and food.

The Boys' G.R.O.W. Group from the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI sponsored a Pine Box Derby night at their church on February 19. Supporters of the boys not only saw some good rac-

ing, but they also enjoyed a Potato Bar and Hot Dog supper as well.

Minister Trios and Calls

Rev. D. Overway, pastor of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ, has accepted the call to serve as the next pastor of the Doon, Iowa PRC.

The Lord willing, the evening of Good Friday the Hudsonville MI PRC will call a pastor from a trio of the Revs. A. Brummel, M. Dick, and D. Kleyn. 

Announcements

SPRING LECTURE

The Evangelism Committee of First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan will be sponsoring a Spring Lecture entitled, "A Look at Bible Translation." The speaker will be emeritus Professor Herman Hanko. The lecture will be on April 29, 2005 at 7:30 P.M. at the Holland Protestant Reformed Church located at 3641 104th Ave., Zeeland, MI 49464.

Refreshments and fellowship following the lecture and tapes of the lecture will be available upon request.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On April 21, 2005,

ROBERT and DOROTHY NOORMAN will celebrate 50 years of marriage, D.V. May our God bless them as they commemorate this happy milestone and may He continue to lead them faithfully in the future. "O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart" (Psalm 36:10).

- * Rick and Sue Noorman
Mike and fiancée Jamie Mol, Joel, Denise, Renae (in glory), David, Taylor, Brianna
- * Gary and Joyce Noorman
Lisa, Chad, Paul
- * Jim and Faith Noorman
Alison, Elizabeth, Benjamin, Lydia
- * Keith and Sara Noorman
Kyle, Jared, Jeffrey

Jenison, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to Miss Elaine Treizenberg on the passing away of her brother-in-law,

REV. FRED GUNNINK.

May Elaine find her comfort from the word of God found in Rev. 21: 3-4, "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, President
Mr. Tom Kiel, Clerk

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 11, 2005 at the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by April 10, 2005.

Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 28, 2005, our parents, **TIMOTHY and SHARON RUS**, celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary.

We rejoice with them and give thanks to our Lord Most High for their godly instruction and guidance. To God be the glory for their communion together in marriage, as one in Christ. We pray the Lord's continual blessing upon them in the years to come.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- * Chad and Jill Rus
- * Jeremy and Kelly Langerak
Jeremy Richard
- * Courtney Rus
- * Alisha Rus
- * Charity Rus

Jenison, Michigan

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for April

Date	Topic	Text
April 3	"Blessed Are the Peacemakers"	Matthew 5:9
April 10	"Blessed Are the Persecuted"	Matthew 5:10-12
April 17	"Where My Beloved Is Found"	Song of Solomon 5:1-3
April 24	"Addicted to the Ministry of the Saints"	I Corinthians 16:14-18