

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**



**Professors David Engelsma and
Herman Hanko conduct Conference
in Northern Ireland**

See "Covenant Conference in Ulster: A Report" — page 8

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In This Issue ...

On the broad expanse of today's ecclesiastical scene, the conference to which reference is made on the cover constitutes hardly a ripple. The British Reformed Fellowship, which sponsored the event, is small. And the men who were asked to speak at it are professors in a seminary the student body of which numbers but seven.

However, the theme which encompassed the eight separate speeches given at this conference was "The Covenant of Grace"; and in those addresses the great truths of that covenant were set forth in all of the splendor afforded them by the Word of God itself.

Though the Fellowship would surely have been thrilled had the Conference Center proved too small, the fact is that the importance of what happened there on the shores of Belfast Lough is not measured by numbers. Consider the testimony of the professors that "both of us were constantly bombarded with questions; requests were constantly being made to speak to us privately about various matters that came up in speeches.... It was sometimes difficult to get away to relax a bit or prepare for another speech." Numbers pale when one works among Bereans. Indeed, what a great privilege, for the PRC, to be able to share their rich heritage with this energetic group, which is determined to promote the Reformed faith in the U.K., a land which has by and large abandoned it.

For a short account of that conference see, in this issue, "Covenant Conference in Ulster."

D.D.

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Departed to be Received

For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him forever.

Philemon 15

These are pretty soft words, it seems, to describe a dastardly sin committed in the house of Philemon!

Philemon was a Grecian convert who, together with his wife, Apphia, and his son, Archippus, were close personal friends of the apostle Paul. For years the church of Colosse had met in Philemon's house, and it was during this time that he and Paul had become close to one another. Now Paul, in this letter to his friend and fellow saint, addresses a difficult personal problem that had arisen in Philemon's household.

It was a matter of a runaway slave named Onesimus. Evidently Onesimus had fled the house of his master, only to end up in the city of Rome, a place to which many a runaway resorted. While in Rome Onesimus became acquainted with Paul and heard the Gospel proclaimed. God had then worked mightily in his heart and brought him to repentance and faith. Now a humbled and submissive Onesimus returned to his master carrying with him this letter from Paul. And in it Paul writes, "...he therefore departed for a season." Surely the word "departure" was a very delicate way of describing the sinful flight of this servant. It seems almost to be a euphemism.

Philemon had not hired Onesimus as a paid laborer who could

leave if he would so choose. Neither was Onesimus an indentured servant in the household of Philemon. Onesimus was a slave — a bondman. As such he stood in a permanent relationship of servitude to Philemon: Philemon owned him! But from this letter we learn that Onesimus had forsaken his master and had run from him in rebellion. He had disobeyed the command of God to servants as given, for example, in I Peter 2:18: "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear...." So the flight of Onesimus was not simply a departure; it was rebellion against God-ordained authority and therefore sin against the fifth commandment. Besides this, Onesimus had stolen something of value from Philemon's house before running (vss. 18, 19), thus adding sin to sin!

The explanation for his sinful behavior is obvious too. Although Onesimus had from eternity been chosen by God as one of His elect children, nevertheless God had not as yet brought him to repentance and faith. Onesimus was as yet lost in the darkness and hopelessness of sin and unbelief. He was given over to a corrupt mind and sinful desires, being characterized by selfishness and pride. For that reason Onesimus had not thought twice about stealing or running away from his master. He did not care that he was disobeying God's commandments. He simply followed after his sinful desires. So in sin and rebellion he had taken his flight.

Yet we cannot overlook the wording of the apostle Paul in this verse. Paul speaks of "departure" rather than of "sinful flight." He does this, not because he condoned this sin of Onesimus, nor because he was try-

ing to make light of it in order to convince Philemon it was not all that serious. Paul uses this word because he saw the flight of Onesimus from a different point of view: that of God's sovereign control over all things. Paul looks at this sin of Onesimus as guided and directed by the very providence of God. Consider the beauty of this truth in connection with the sin of Philemon's runaway slave. Before time began, in eternity, God carried with Him His divine counsel or plan for all things. In that counsel God has conceived of all things in their minutest detail. Nothing escapes that all-comprehensive will of God — neither the acts of nature nor the events of history and of our own lives. Even the eternal destiny of every person is predetermined by God.

*God controls the thoughts
and intents of our hearts,
even when they are sinful!*

God's providence is that power of God by which He makes sure that every detail of His divine will and counsel is worked out in time. God through His providential power keeps, as it were, His almighty hand on His creation, and controls everything that takes place. He guides the rivers in their courses. He directs the sparrow to find a nest. He numbers the very hairs of our heads, that not one can fall out save by His own divine guidance. Through this same power God controls the very thoughts, words, and actions of a man. This does not mean, of course, that God does not hold man responsible for his sinful deeds. God is not the author of

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sin! God always deals with man as a rational, moral creature who is responsible for what he does or does not do. God does not conceive sin in us; but when we sin we both conceive of that sin and carry it out in our words or actions. We desire sin and are therefore responsible. Yet, that does not change the fact that God controls the thoughts and intents of our hearts, even when they are sinful! He must, if He is indeed God. Either all stands within His control or there are certain things He does not control. If this latter is true, then God is no longer God!

It is from this point of view that Paul considers the sinful flight of Onesimus. On the part of Onesimus his flight was a deliberate and willful act of sin and disobedience for which he was held responsible — by his master and by God. But from the point of view of God's providential control, this was but a planned departure. God had eternally purposed something for the life of Onesimus that neither he nor Philemon had ever dreamed of. God brought about this sinful flight of this elect child in order to fulfill His own sovereign good pleasure!

*How necessary
it is for us
to rest in the will
of our heavenly Father.*

What beauty and comfort such knowledge is to the child of God! We are so quick to forget that we, like Philemon, are those chosen by God to life eternal. We belong to God, and therefore we can be assured that all things in our lives are for our spiritual good and salvation. Yet, how quickly we forget this when events in our lives, or in the lives of one of our household, become adverse. Is this not true especially when we see a loved one stray from the paths of God's Word and walk in open sin and rebellion? Parents can experience such pain when they struggle with a child

who walks in unbelief and sin. It hurts so much to see that child or sibling turn his back on all he has been taught and perhaps even leave the church. How we can sorrow over that! And rightfully so! But at these times we need not despair! To us this is a sinful flight, but according to God's sovereign good pleasure this is but a planned departure. God holds all things in His mighty hands, and He uses all these things in some way for the good of His people — even if that means that the disobedient loved one never returns. God's will is always perfect for us, and for that one who departs.

How necessary it is for us to rest in the will of our heavenly Father. Who knows His almighty will? Is it not true that many times God leads a loved one away into sinful paths only to lead them back again into the folds of the church? May we ever despair of God's mercy? It never ceases to amaze me when I witness the various ways God leads His people to faith and repentance. It is true that according to His eternal decree of election God has chosen a certain number unto Himself. But this does not mean that God regenerates or saves them all in the same way or at any one certain time in their lives. It is true that where God establishes His covenant with believers and their seed, there He often saves and regenerates in infancy. But this certainly is not exclusively true. There are others, even born into the church, who can be and are brought to faith and repentance later in their lives. God is never limited in the way He saves His people! God guides the various circumstances in the lives of His chosen children in order to bring them to that point of salvation. And after that point too He continues to guide their lives to preserve and nurture them in their salvation.

Such we learn in this account too. Paul explains to Philemon that Onesimus was directed by God's providence to depart for a short season only in order that Philemon could receive him forever. Not simply once more as a servant — although it is

likely that Onesimus returned to his present status as servant in Philemon's household. But now Philemon could receive Onesimus as a fellow brother in Christ (vs. 16), who together with him was an heir of eternal glory. Onesimus had left his home in Colosse and sinfully fled to Rome, only to be directed by God to the doorstep of Paul. There, Onesimus learned of the

*When one is truly sorry
for his sin,
then he must also cease
from his sin....*

seriousness of his sin against his master and against God. There, by the grace of God and the work of His Spirit in his heart, he was brought to his knees in sorrow and repentance. There, Onesimus learned of the good news of salvation in the blood of Christ. There, he was brought to the knowledge that for the sake of Christ even his heinous sin of theft and rebellion was forgiven him. And there, through the work of sanctification he also came to know that, in order to make matters right, his sin must be confessed to his master. When one is truly sorry for his sin, then he must also cease from his sin and confess such sin to those against whom he has sinned.

This Onesimus now does. Paul writes this letter to Philemon only to explain that God had used all the affairs of Onesimus' life to bring him to the same knowledge and assurance that Philemon himself experienced as a child of God. What reason there is to rejoice — for us too! So often God leads His chosen children through this deep way of sin in order to work in their hearts a true knowledge of what sin is, and a hearty confidence that our sins are forgiven only in the cross of Jesus Christ. We ought never to despair! Instead, we must sing of the mercies of the Lord — forever! □

At its annual meeting in June, the staff of the *Standard Bearer* reappointed the men now serving to the offices of the editorial staff. The exception was the appointment of Professor Herman Hanko as general adjunct.

Changes in the content of the magazine for the next volume year, which begins with this issue, include the following. Rev. Barrett Gritters returns as a writer, co-editing "Strength of Youth" with Rev. Steven Key. A new rubric, "Come, Lord Jesus," will appear in six issues. It will treat contemporary events, exclusive of ecclesiastical events, as signs of Christ's coming. The writer will be Rev. Gise VanBaren, who also has written for the *SB* in the past.

Rev. George C. Lubbers has agreed to write the guides for the study of Scripture. These will be

studies of I Timothy. Author of commentaries on Galatians (*Freeborn Sons of Sarah*) and on Hebrews (*The Glory of the True Tabernacle*), Rev. Lubbers is presently working on a commentary on I Timothy. Societies and individual members alike will profit from Rev. Lubbers' exegetical gifts. We encourage the Bible study groups in our fellowship to consider making I Timothy the object of their study this season.

The other rubrics and writers will be the same as in the previous volume.

We thank our returning contributors and welcome back the two newcomers to Volume 69.

Some of the rubrics will appear more often than before. We have requested guest articles by various ministers and periodic reports by synodical committees. Contributions

from our readers will be considered for publication. Plans are being made for special issues that we hope will be of interest to our readers. The next issue will be our annual special issue in observance of the Reformation. The theme is "The Reformation and Freedom."

As for one of the more popular of our columns — "Letters" — this is strictly up to our readers, as is the column, "The Reader Asks," which ran very infrequently the past year.

The support of our subscribers is invaluable: mainly reading faithfully what we write.

The blessing of God is essential. May He qualify and encourage all who co-operate to produce the magazine, and may He continue to use the *SB* for the defense and promotion of the Reformed faith and life at home and to the world's end.

— DJE

Editorial

The Death of Confessional Calvinism in Scottish Presbyterianism (3)

Providence and Sin

More serious is Professor Macleod's condemnation, in his book, *Behold Your God (BYG)*, of Hoeksema's doctrine of providence as "virtually blasphemous" (p. 131). Macleod is here commenting on Hoeksema's criticism of common grace's deviation from the Reformed doctrine of providence.

Hoeksema is treating the question of the relation of the fall of man into sin and death to the providence of God. He is setting forth the truth that the one purpose of God with the creation was its perfection in Jesus Christ in the way of sin and grace. In this connection, Hoeksema denies that an original purpose of God to develop the creation through Adam was

unfortunately spoiled by the devil so that the work of Jesus Christ is mere "repair work" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 235). Then Hoeksema writes:

But with this same conception we can also depart from the truth in a different direction, namely, in that of common grace. According to this theory, God has in mind the creation

ordinance; and He still maintains it: the riches of creation must be brought to light under the dominion of man. Satan meant to frustrate this purpose of God through the fall of man. But God through common grace, by which He restrains sin and checks the curse in creation, so that man does not become a devil or descend into hell or fall dead in paradise before the tree of life, counteracts this attempt of the devil and maintains His original ordinance of creation, realizing His purpose. In the meantime, however, the Lord begins a new work, through which the chief purpose of all things is realized and all things will be reunited in Christ Jesus as their head.

Hoeksema criticizes this conception in these words:

Also this conception finds no support in Holy Writ. Besides, it is certainly a dualistic conception: for it proceeds from the erroneous assumption that sin, death, and the curse, instead of being powers which God works, manifestations of His wrath, are powers outside Him and apart from Him, which He must restrain (RD, p. 236).

Macleod is severe in his condemnation of this objection to common grace as unbiblical dualism:

From a Christian point of view this is quite unacceptable; and, when it goes the length of regarding sin as something which "God works," virtually blasphemous (BYG, p. 131).

Hoeksema makes plain that he does not mean that God "works" sin in the sense that God performs sin. God is not the author of sin. But sin, particularly now the fall of Adam, is included in God's eternal counsel. God decreed the fall. Also, God governed the fall, as He governs all the sinful deeds of men.

And the providence of God certainly implies that from the very first beginning to the end of the world, that is, till the return of Christ, God governs all things and guides them by His counsel unto the end He has in view. And from the beginning to the

end nothing ever occurs in all the world which does not happen according to the counsel of the Most High (RD, p. 236).

Hoeksema is explaining the *Reformed doctrine of providence*. The Reformed doctrine of providence denies the existence and operation of admittedly hostile powers operating apart from God's sovereign decree and sovereign government, needing, therefore, to be restrained by a common grace.

Hoeksema is applying the Reformed doctrine of providence to the vital truth of the goal of God with creation and history. The Reformed doctrine of providence, thus applied to creation and history, affirms the express teaching of the Bible in Ephesians 1:9, 10; in Colossians 1:13-20; and in other places, that God's one purpose with creation and history was, is, and shall be Christ as head of the redeemed church. God has no purpose with creation, that He is now realizing by common grace, alongside this purpose.

Macleod sourly dismisses this view of world-history as "a thorough-going monism" (BYG, p. 131). In fact, it is the Reformed faith's unique, glorious "philosophy of history." It is also biblical: "All things were created by him, and for him (Jesus Christ): And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.... For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col. 1:16-20).

The objection of the Scottish Presbyterian to Hoeksema's use of the word, "works," to describe God's sovereign control of sin, death, and the curse to serve His one purpose in Christ should disappear as soon as Macleod realizes that "works" refers to the decree and power of divine providence. To teach this is not blasphemy.

Or was Martin Luther a blasphemer when he wrote that "since

God moves and works all in all, He moves and works of necessity even in Satan and the ungodly.... Here you see that when God works in and by evil men, evil deeds result; yet God, though He does evil by means of evil men, cannot act evilly Himself, for He is good, and cannot do evil ...?"

And did the German Reformer blaspheme when, a little later in the same book, he wrote, concerning the inclusion of the fact of sin in the decree of God:

If God foreknew that Judas would be a traitor, Judas became a traitor of necessity, and it was not in the power of Judas or of any creature to act differently, or to change his will, from that which God had foreseen. It is true that Judas acted willingly, and not under compulsion, but his willing was the work of God, brought into being by His omnipotence, like everything else (*The Bondage of the Will*, tr. J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston, James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1957, pp. 203ff.)?

Did John Calvin blaspheme, in his great work, "A Defence of the Secret Providence of God by which He Executes His Eternal Decrees being a Reply to the 'Slandorous Reports' (Rom. 3:8) of a Certain Worthless Calumniator directed against the Secret Providence of God," when he adopted as the very "principle" of his view of God's government of sin the truth that "those things which are vainly or unrighteously done by man are, rightly and righteously, the works of God!"?

Was it blasphemy of Calvin to go on to affirm that "the fall of Adam was not by accident, nor by chance; but was *ordained* by the *secret counsel* of God"? And was it raving blasphemy of Calvin to assert that

All who are in the least acquainted with the Scripture, know full well that a whole volume might be made of like passages of the Holy Scriptures, where God is made the author, as commander, of the evil and cruel deeds done by men and nations. But it is utterly vain to spend more words upon a subject so well known and

self-evident (*Calvin's Calvinism*, tr. Henry Cole, Eerdmans, 1950, pp. 207ff.)?

Is it blasphemous of the Westminster Confession to teach concerning God's eternal decree that

God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeable ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established (3.1).

Does the Confession require Presbyterians to blaspheme when it puts on their lips this confession concerning providence:

The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering, and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin (5.4)?

Is it blasphemy of Holy Scripture to say of Absalom's adultery with David's concubines that Jehovah did it (II Sam. 12:11, 12)? ... of Shimei's grievous curse of David that Jehovah God commanded Shimei to curse David (II Sam. 16:10)? ... of all the loss inflicted on Job by Satan and wicked men that "Jehovah hath taken away" (Job 1:21)? ... of the most heinous sin ever committed, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, that the wicked did "whatsoever thy (the Lord God's) hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28)? It should not be overlooked in the last passage that the Holy Spirit extends God's government of sin to His *hand*,

the instrument of working.

It is a departure from creedal Presbyterianism to teach that God still manages to fulfill an original purpose with the creation by restraining antagonistic forces with common grace. To teach that heaven and hell are locked in a titanic struggle, while denying God's providential government of the devil and sin, is dualism. It is dualism even though one is willing to add that "eventually, heaven will be completely triumphant" (BYG, p. 131).

Christianity has renounced dualism. Heaven is completely triumphant. Jehovah God is laughing at the enemies raging against Christ (Psalm 2). "Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Psalm 115:3).

Confusion

If the Presbyterian theologian's attack on Hoeksema's doctrine of providence is completely unwarranted, his treatment of the "organic idea" in the Protestant Reformed theologian is hopelessly confused.

In developing the truth of the idea of the end (goal) of all things, Hoeksema maintains that after the fall all "creatures in the natural sense continue to exist in organic connection and affinity." All men, elect and reprobate, live in close, earthly relationship with each other, "and man ever continues to stand in organic connection with the cosmos, in the midst whereof he moves and develops" (RD, p. 743).

God does not realize His purpose of predestination by physically separating the elect church from the reprobate world. Rather, God realizes His purpose by the process of grace and sin in connection with the organic existence of all things, as this earthly whole — the "cosmos" — is governed by divine providence (p. 744).

From this doctrine of the organic connection of all things earthly, Macleod oddly draws the conclusion that Hoeksema too teaches that God blesses the reprobate wicked so that,

in reality, Hoeksema has no quarrel with the doctrine of common grace.

On this view, evil men receive blessings not because of common grace — not because of any gracious disposition on God's part towards them — but because they are so closely connected with the people of God, socially and organically, that God cannot bless the one group without blessing the other. The tares are blessed only because they are inextricably mixed up with the wheat.... But it is difficult to see any conflict between this and the doctrine of common grace (BYG, p. 132).

This makes Hoeksema out to be not only a blasphemer but also a dunce. After all his strenuous opposition to common grace, he has God blessing the ungodly.

What Hoeksema actually wrote, on the very page in the RD referred to by Macleod, is the very opposite of the conclusion drawn by the Presbyterian:

It will readily be understood in the light of the preceding that we cannot possibly speak of a common grace.... The sinful and corrupt creature can *qua talis* (as such — DJE) never be pleasing to God, but is object of His dislike, wrath, indignation, hatred, and curse.... There proceeds out of the eternal good pleasure of God in Christ an operation of grace upon the elect kernel of our race, in connection with the organic whole of all creatures.... But, on the other hand, the wrath of God abides upon the reprobate shell, outside of Christ. And an operation proceeds from God's wrath, indignation and repulsion and hardening, whereby this reprobate shell becomes ripe for destruction" (pp. 743, 744).

However one may regard the theology of Herman Hoeksema, it is consistent. There is no place in it for the blessing of the reprobate ungodly outside of Jesus Christ, whether that blessing is deliberate or, as Macleod would have us believe, accidental.

One can only hope here that the readers of Macleod's BYG will check the original source.

The views and charges of Professor Macleod treated in this and the preceding editorials are serious enough. But the worst is yet to come. If the teachings of the Presbyterian

theologian that will be examined next represent Scottish Presbyterianism today, or if they influence contemporary Presbyterianism in Scotland, confessional Calvinism is dead, or dying,

in Scottish Presbyterianism.

These are Macleod's teachings on total depravity, predestination, and particular, limited atonement. □

— DJE

Letters

■ More Materials

Can you send me the pamphlet you spoke about in this last issue (August 1) of the *Standard Bearer*, "A Defense of Calvinism as the Gospel"?

Also, do you have any other pamphlet on the issue of common grace? I have been reading about it in your magazine and would like to have a better understanding of it.

I really appreciate your magazine and the information and spiritual food that I receive from it.

(Dr.) Anthony E. Gendill
Monte Vista, CO

RESPONSE:

The materials requested are in the mail.

— Ed.

■ Not Alone in the Struggle

From the Garden of England my wife and I send greetings in the precious Name which is above every Name... the Lord, Jesus Christ our Saviour.

It's good to keep in touch with

other of the Lord's people who have not been caught up in the ecumenical flood, rushing, helter skelter into the arms of the Church of Rome, and so, when the *SB* comes through our letter-box it helps us to feel that we are not alone in the struggle. Thank you for the messages it brings so regularly.

It may interest you to know that here, in this town of about 60,000 people, there is not one church where the Authorized Version of God's Holy Word is used exclusively in all services ... *not one!* Further, they are *all* thoroughly dedicated to the Ecumenical Movement. Even one of the local Protestant churches had, some months ago, a poster advertising an "ecumenical mass for unity" in the local R.C. church! Whilst we would dearly love to be able to go to church to worship the Lord with other of His people, this is no longer possible in this town without compromising ourselves, so we worship at home. There is no other alternative! How encouraging it is to read in the *SB* of thriving churches "over there."

With regard to the battle to eliminate the A.V., I am sorry to say that I know of only about four churches in this country where this continues to be used exclusively. No doubt, there are a good many more, but, compared with the general trend towards the (per) versions of the Holy Scriptures, there are very few sound churches over here now. Lawlessness abounds and it is unwise to go out at night. As lawlessness and immorality increase ... so does the country's economic plight worsen and the numbers of unemployed grow ... and so does national godlessness increase. Surely this is the judgment of God? Probably worse is to follow!!

Some years ago a copy of Prof. Hoeksema's booklet, "God So Loved the World," came into my possession. It's good and I'm still finding it very useful. Could you send me a current list of pamphlets you have available, please? Is your own "Modern Bible Versions" still available?

Eric F. Sinclair
Dover, Kent, England

Contribution

Covenant Conference in Ulster: A Report

Mr. William Oomkes

William Oomkes is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, MI and a member of the denominational Domestic Mission Committee.

On August 15, 1992 the conferees set their sights toward the "Stricklands" Conference Center located on the Belfast Lough, in Bangor, County Down, Northern Ireland.

They came from such places as the heart of London, the southern coast of England, the far north of Scotland, the northern part of Northern Ireland, and the United States, to the



Stricklands Conference Grounds in Bangor, N.I.

Belfast area. One thing most of us had in common — we had never met each other before. Another was the desire to know more about the covenant of grace.

After dinner on Saturday night we had a period of introduction and fellowship. Evening devotions were led by Pastor Jim North, the newly elected chairman of the British Reformed Fellowship, sponsor of the conference. Pastor North set the tone of the conference as he opened God's Word to us from Malachi 3:16: "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another...." He expounded to us the Word of God, giving us both the beauty and the benefit as we meet around God's Word. The beauty is that they who fear the Lord are of a kindred mind; and the benefit is that the Lord hearkens and hears that speaking one to another, and He re-

members it in His book of remembrance.

On Sunday morning we had prayer time for about one hour fol-



Song service at one of conference sessions.

lowed by a worship service. In the afternoon we traveled to the Ballymena city hall for a special 3:00 p.m. worship service with between 150-200 in attendance. (The Cov-

enant Reformed Fellowship of Northern Ireland did extensive advertising of this service.)

Sunday evening we gathered for a question time in which questions dealing with doctrine and the practical aspects of living in Northern Ireland were answered. This gave many people the opportunity to learn of the doctrinal positions of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The conference itself consisted of eight speeches in this order: Monday morning, "The Source of the Covenant in God Triune," by D. Engelsma; in the evening, "The Covenant with Adam: A Covenant of Works?" by H. Hanko. Tuesday evening, "The Cosmic Character of the Covenant," by D. Engelsma. Wednesday morning, "The Covenant with Abraham," by H. Hanko, and in the evening, "The Covenant Calling of the Antithetical

Life," by D. Engelsma. Thursday, "The Covenant as a Pattern for Marriage," by D. Engelsma. Friday morning, "The Training and Rearing of Covenant Children," by H. Hanko, and in the evening, "The Covenant and Making Friends," by H. Hanko. Tapes of these speeches are available in the US and Canada by writing to Bill Oomkes, 6299 Wing S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49512 (\$30.00 US for all eight tapes). In Europe, write to D. Callendar, 127 Cregagh Road, Belfast BT6 0LA (about 12 pounds British).

At all of these speeches there were visitors, the number of which varied depending whether it was a daytime or nighttime speech. Some of these visitors were people who traveled one hour each way. This



Conference leader plied with questions informally.



The British Reformed Fellowship

gives evidence of the Macedonian call and the need for preaching the Reformed truth in Northern Ireland. Both Prof. Engelsma and Prof. Hanko gave four lectures and preached two sermons in an eight-day period. Both of these men were seen going off to the "Quiet Room" or just taking a walk in the company of one or two of the people who had questions or desired counseling.

Lest you think that all we did was listen to speeches, we must add that the Fellowship was determined that we see the Emerald Isle. Monday afternoon was spent at Carrickfergus Castle, where King William of Orange, the Dutch conqueror, set foot on Northern Ireland to rescue the island from Catholicism (there were those from America who were quick to point out that if it were not for a Dutchman, Northern Ireland would still be under the Catholic rule). Tuesday, an all-day bus tour took us to the beautiful north coast and Giant's Causeway. Wednesday afternoon was spent at the Folk Museum in Bangor. Thursday was another all-day bus tour to the Mourne Mountains and the beautiful resort city of Newcastle on the Irish Sea. Friday was an interesting experience in the heart of Belfast with its ever-present soldiers and armored cars. This was a shopping experience that was unique, with a helicopter hovering about 5,000 feet above the city, photo-

graphing all the activity below, and with armed soldiers, armored trucks, and security checks located everywhere. Yet you walk the streets with a greater sense of security than in any of the major US cities.

The British Reformed Fellowship is to be commended for a very well-balanced conference. Every activity was well thought out. Some of the comments from the attendees ranged from, "I never heard preaching like this in my life," to, "This was a taste of heaven." This conference was well received, much Reformed literature was sold and distributed, and many hearts were strengthened,

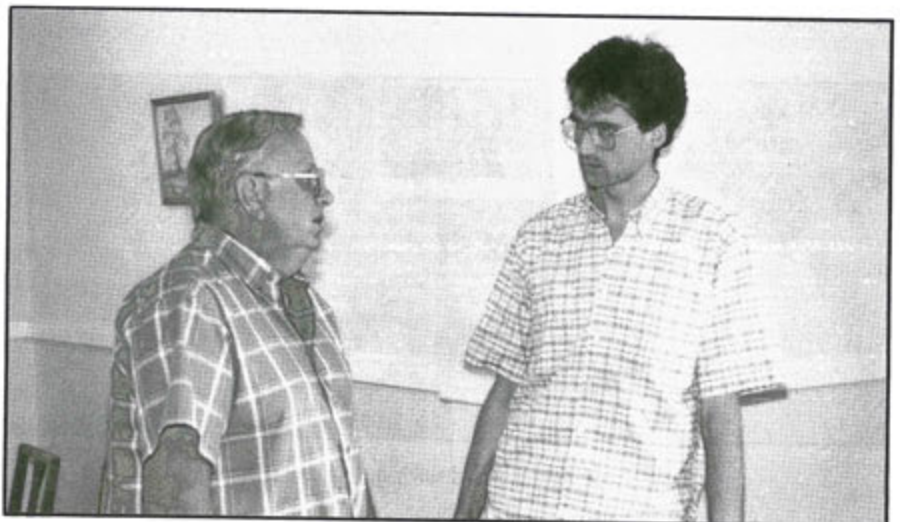
giving evidence to the truth of God's Word in Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10a: "Two are better than one; because they have good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow...."

A note is also in order about the Covenant Reformed Fellowship. They literally went out of their way after the conference, on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday morning, to get all 16 Americans and 2 Englishmen to and from church, taking us to their homes for Sunday dinner, taking us to the airport, and providing a joyous time of fellowship as we parted ways after church on Sunday evening. For over a year this conference had been the center of their conversation, and now it was "complete." It showed in their enthusiasm. Many tears were shed as we had to say good-bye to God's people with whom we had lived the last nine days and whom we truly came to know and love.

The Lord surely has given us much work to do on this island, and He has many sheep that desire to be led in the green pastures of His Word. Our prayer has become much more fervent that the Lord of harvest will send forth His laborers in this field, soon.

P.S. Did I hear Edinburgh, Scotland in 1994? □

Bill Oomkes and Englishman Keith Burden converse.



The Bible and Your Faith (1)

In our last article we considered your struggle with doubt. We concluded that all doubt must be faced and must be resolved, and that the resolution of that doubt comes by going to the Bible for the answers to our questions. It seems to me, however, that to stop there is not sufficient. For there are those who may in fact have doubts about the Bible itself, its authenticity and its authority.

Especially those of you who go on to college will find your Christian faith under attack from an intellectual point of view. Those attacks, quite generally, are leveled against the authority of Scripture. The inspiration and authority of the Bible is called into question, and rejected. Sad to say, it was my own experience and continues to be my observation that those attacks come most vehemently on the campus and in the classrooms of many of the so-called Christian colleges.

It is my purpose, therefore, my young brother or sister, to consider with you the particular place that the Bible has in the practical life of the Christian. Some of what follows may require you to put on your "thinking cap." But this is a matter worth thinking about. The world does not require you to think. They just want you to reject the Scriptures, and receive without thought the opinions of men. The world wants you to drink in the doctrines of devils without thinking. I wrote to you before: Satan would have you reject the truth to which your faith holds, and deny the certainty of that truth. For that very

reason, I want you to think through your faith and to see its certainty.

While the authority of the Bible is very much disputed in our day, there is a testimony within Scripture itself that cannot be ignored.

Scripture's Self-Testimony

I refer not merely to the classic proof texts of II Timothy 3:16: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God," and II Peter 1:20, 21: "No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

*... the evidence of
its divine origin
is sprinkled throughout
the contents of the Bible.*

Those texts in themselves are powerful testimonies to the believer. For they speak of inspiration not merely in the sense that Bach was "inspired" to compose great concertos and chorales and other music. These texts do not speak of inspiration in the sense that Mark Twain and other classic authors were "inspired" to write their novels. For the word translated "inspired" in these two texts actually means "God-breathed." The divine origin of Scripture is emphasized.

But our belief in the inspiration and authority of Scripture rests upon much more than a couple proof texts from the Book which itself is called into question by many. The fact is that the evidence of its divine origin is sprinkled throughout the contents of the Bible. The testimony of a multitude of people was that the Scriptures were God's own authoritative Word

or proclamation. And this multitude of people included not just a few ignorant folk who followed Jesus, but several highly intelligent and well-regarded men, prominent men among the nations. These men all viewed the Scriptures as God's own Word, authoritative for their own lives on a practical and daily basis. The apostle Paul, a highly educated man, prominent in the nation of Israel and highly regarded even among many heathen, wrote to the Corinthians in I Corinthians 14:37, 38: "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant."

It is rather remarkable that when later writers of Scripture quoted from other parts of the Scriptures which had been written centuries before, they frequently quoted it as words spoken by God Himself. Texts throughout the Bible show an absolute identification of "Scripture" with "the speaking God." Jesus Himself gave a sweeping endorsement of the Old Testament and its authority, when He said (John 10:35), "the scripture cannot be broken."

The Bible, you see, can stand on its own.

The Spiritual Dimension

There is another element, however, that must also be considered. Those who attack your faith and the authority of the Scriptures substitute another authority. Their authority is man's mind. Man's mind is the standard for all things. So says the rationalist. Now, obviously, we have not proved the inspiration and authority of the Scripture to the rationalist. Have we then failed? Not at all! For there is also a spiritual dimension to our

belief that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God.

To this point we have been arguing the truth of Scripture's inspiration and authority, while ignoring the fact that every person has not only a mind, but a spirit. Every person stands in a relationship to God. That also is a part of this whole picture of what you think about the Bible. That relationship to God is either one of

hatred toward God, or one of love.

Sin has turned us against God. Sin causes a person to hate and to deny the truth of God. Only the God-given bond of faith changes that. Only by being born again are you brought into a relationship of love toward God. And the nature of that spiritual love is that it puts you into living, real contact with God. It unites you with Christ.

When you belong to Christ, you hear His voice, also as He speaks to you through the Scriptures. You who are in Christ Jesus do not need to prove to an unbeliever the truth of the Scriptures. For you the testimony of the Bible itself is enough. The spiritual knowledge given you by God stands firm even when the Scriptures are called into question by unbelief.

□

Search the Scriptures

Rev. G. Lubbers

A Brief Overview of I Timothy

My plan is to publish two "study helps" for each of the six chapters of I Timothy. After consulting with Prof. Engelsma, Editor-in-Chief, I saw the fitness of writing a short "Overview" before writing the study helps.

We must keep in mind that these study helps must be brief, yet comprehensive of the main thrust of the letter. Furthermore, we must bear in mind that this letter is, in the deepest sense, issued by the risen Christ from His throne at God's right hand. It is no human letter, but it is an official letter from the highest office in the churches. It is from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ. He was appointed to be a *Kerux* (minister), apostle, and teacher of Gentiles who were once outside "the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world..." (Eph. 2:12-22).

We shall attempt to write two lessons for each of the six chapters. May the Lord grant us wisdom and insight into this timeless letter of Paul. It should become abundantly clear that it is the foolish and ungodly folly

of unbelievers to prattle about the Bible as if it has lost its relevancy for the "enlightened" twentieth century church world.

Let us, first of all, take note of Chapter 1.

In this chapter there are two matters which are dealt with. The first is the error of some men, Hymenaeus and Alexander being in the forefront. The error is that of certain "law-preachers." These avow that we must not have the preaching of Christ crucified, dead and buried, and risen the third day from the dead. We must preach the law to sinners, they say, apart from sovereign grace! Paul rightly calls this preaching of law as a way to salvation without grace a wholly "other doctrine." In this teaching of law is horrible ignorance of the "end of the commandment." The true end of the new commandment in Christ is "love out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and unfeigned faith." In a different connection Paul teaches that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes, the Jew first and also the Greek" (Rom. 10:4).

The second matter is that there is a great word of truth in all the Scriptures worthy to be accepted. It is that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners. Paul is truly the great

example that real sinners are saved as vessels of mercy. Paul is a chosen vessel. Jesus Christ was revealed in him. He is the great picture of the truth that, where sin abounded, grace abounds still more. Paul revels in this grace. He boasts on the good conscience in Christ by faith (see I Tim. 1:11-17). Only where there is such a love out of a pure heart is the reassurance that one will see God, according to the gospel of the glory of the most blessed God. Hence, the doxological praise, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever, Amen."

Let all those who deny this blessed gospel be Anathema! Paul has delivered such over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme the gospel of elective love and mercy! They were men who did not sin ignorantly in unbelief, as had Paul. Even when he persecuted the church he had a good conscience. But he received mercy!

We now turn our attention to Chapter 2:1-20.

Here the Holy Spirit teaches us what the will of God is toward all men, Jew and Gentile. It is to save "all men" and to have them come to the saving knowledge of gospel-truth. In Chapter 2 we see the church militant

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in the great task of which Jesus spoke to the disciples on the mount of Olives: "...and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Not every believer is such an official witness of Jesus. But the believing church, men and women and children, must incessantly be praying. They must, according to the will of God, be busy in supplication and prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks (I Tim. 2:4).

God will have *one* church, which the Son of God gathers, defends, and preserves out of the whole human race by His Word and Spirit. There is one Triune God, one Mediator of God and man, Jesus Christ. Only in such a savior can and will God unify all the nations. These nations are not composed of every man, woman, and child, but they are the one church of which Christ is the Head. Now there is one church in the new dispensation. All are to be a mighty army of prayer warriors.

In I Timothy 2:4 there seems to be solid biblical ground for the erroneous Arminian teaching that Christ's death on the cross is the expiation of the sins of every man, woman, and child in all the world. But does the Holy Spirit teach such rank universalism? We will need to read this Scripture and others carefully! It will serve us well to compare Scripture with Scripture. Just an example: compare John 17:9, 24-26 with I John 2:2, 3. Contradiction? Does I Timothy 2:6 compared with Matthew 7:21 shed a clear light on the difference between "all" and "everyone"?

God is not the author of confusion. He has a "law" according to which the services in the New Testament must be regulated (I Cor. 14:34, 35). But does not Galatians 3:25-29 truly equalize men and women in the church of the living God? Is the theology of feminism really constructed upon solid ground?

Let us read and study all the Scriptures, both the Old Testament and the New Testament. We must be of a noble bent of mind, as were they of the Berean church (Acts 17:11).

Let us now turn to Chapter 3.

We notice just a few salient points. In the first place we notice that Paul plans to return to the Ephesian environs, as soon as this will be possible and feasible. He asserts that what he now writes could not wait until such an eventual necessary visit.

In the second place, the conduct of the entire congregation must befit the very house of God, yea, the sanctified church of the living God. The Bible is very instructive concerning God's *house*. Here is the very holy place, the very house in which God makes His abode. Here men should dwell in full assurance of faith. Here we dwell with God, and God with us. It is the place which belongs to Immanuel, God with us. Amen!

Here the Chief Shepherd has His appointed under shepherds. It is interesting to read in I Peter 2:25 that Jesus, who died to save His people from their sins, is called both the Shepherd and the Bishop of the sheep of His flock. Here we are dealing with the mystery of godliness that is great. It is God, the incarnate Son, who is this great Shepherd and Bishop. He has ordained that there be also underlying bishops. Blessed are all they who long for fulfilling such a holy task, being constrained by the love of Christ (I Tim. 3:1). The high calling of undershepherds requires that they be men who have been tried. They must be such who hold the mystery of faith in a pure conscience! Did not Jesus say to Peter: if you love me keep, feed, and shepherd my flock?

Chapter 4:1ff. lifts the veil on a prophetic word. Paul speaks of what the Spirit says expressly in the Scripture concerning the latter times. Here we hear the keynote of Old Testament prophecies. It is such as we hear from the lips of the dying Jacob on his bed as he scans the ages (Gen. 49:1ff.).

Perhaps you have noticed that Paul mentions the rising of "some" who will deny the truth of Genesis 1:4, 10, 13, 18, 21, 25, and the climactic approval of the good creature by God in Genesis 1:31. They destroy the very foundation of all the articles of our undoubted Christian faith. These

are the very emissaries of the abyss of hell. These have lost every working of a good conscience. Not *one* God in Christ, the *one* Mediator, do they teach, but pagan, Satanic dualism.

Paul also underscores that all the ministers, elders, and deacons must be "good ministers." In this field our professors must be able men, who can lay the enemy low. There is need for all ministers to make a great endeavor to be workmen who rightly divide the Word. It is a constant and holy polemic in which the Word of the Cross shuts the mouth of all who oppose the teaching of the full counsel of God.

When we turn to I Timothy 5, we learn some very important details of how the church of the living God must care for the flock of God, both young and old. Each must be shepherded according to his place and station in life. This is a very spiritually-delicate task. All ministers must tremble lest they offend one of these little ones. There is a singular need of elders. The churches must give double honor to such, particularly to those who labor in the Word and in the doctrine. Such rightly divide the Word. The term "word" refers to the teaching of the full counsel of God; the doctrines are all the structural truths of the Christian faith that were revealed in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament.

Twice Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4: "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn." (Read I Cor. 9:9-11 and I Tim. 5:18.) This should not be read as if it could also mean: do not withhold the benefits of the harvest from the fatted ox. Here it refers to the words of the Lord Jesus, "for the workman is worthy of his hire (Matt. 10:10). Yes, the harvest is truly plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.

The Holy Spirit does not overlook the sad fact that even office-bearers still are beset with faults. Think of the faults of a Peter as recorded in Galatians 2:11-15.

The last chapter is very climactic. It deals with the spiritual attitude of all Christians toward the world's goods. Even Timothy receives a needed admonition to live up to the great directive: that "godliness with contentment is great gain." Sometimes we ministers do not really have the courage to preach on this with a good conscience. Shame on us! Only when we pursue with single hearts do we flee these worldly goals. We don't have sermons which we can preach with the good conscience. But when ministers before God flee all love for money, and follow after righteousness, they set a worthy example of laying hold on eternal life. Thus do

they really fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life. Such preaching has holy glow in the hope of glory.

But here we walk the footsteps of Him who was made poor for our sakes, that we might be rich. Think of it, says Paul, how the King of kings and the Lord of lords stood before Pontius Pilate and made the good confession that His kingdom is not of this world. There He stood in shame and reproach. He had brought nothing into this world and He of all men carried nothing out of this world. That was His "time" of nothingness. But now this Christ will have a differ-

ent time (*kairos*). Presently He shall show who it is that is the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, who only has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man has seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen.

What glorious doxological heights Paul is led to express repeatedly. May we study this grand pastoral letter with the burning hearts of those who have the Scriptures interpreted! Let us not be spiritual and intellectual dullards. Let us press on to perfection. □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

Credentials, Instructions, and Voting

Those who are delegated to the assemblies shall bring with them their credentials and instructions, signed by those sending them, and they shall have a vote in all matters, except such as particularly concern their persons or churches.

Church Order, Article 33.

This article concerns three things: credentials ("Those who are delegated to the assemblies shall bring with them their credentials..."); instructions ("...and instructions..."); voting ("...and they shall have a vote in all matters...").

CREDENTIALS

Credentials are the official letter of authorization of the delegates to

our broader assemblies, both classis and synod. Credentials properly signed serve as proof of the official authorization of the delegates.

Although credentials are often treated as a matter of formality, in reality they are of the utmost importance. In our relatively small denomination and in times of peace in the churches, the credentials are taken for granted. But in the past, when close contact between Reformed churches was difficult, so that ministers and elders were often not very familiar with each other, or at times when there were serious difficulties in the church, the matter of proper credentials took on a whole new importance. One of the very earliest Reformed synods of The Netherlands, the Synod of Emden, 1571, felt it necessary to emphasize the importance of proper credentials at the broader assemblies in order to guard against imposters.

The verification and approval of the credentials must take place at the

commencement of the meeting of the broader assembly.

At the classical level, the last serving president reads the credentials. A motion is adopted approving the credentials. Classis is then declared to be legally constituted. Article 41 of the *Church Order* states:

The classical meetings shall consist of neighboring churches that respectively delegate, with proper credentials, a minister and an elder to meet at such time and place as was determined by the previous classical meeting....

At the synodical level, the last serving president reads the credentials from the various classes, noting *prima* and *secundi* delegates present. A motion to adopt the credentials and seat the delegates is approved. Synod is declared legally constituted.

Delegates are to have their credentials "...signed by those sending them...." Credentials are to be duly signed by the president and the secre-

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tary of the delegating body. This makes the credentials official.

This stipulation that the credentials be signed by the body sending the delegates was added to Article 33 with the deliberate intention of preventing government interference. Early in the history of the Reformed churches in The Netherlands, city and government officials would sometimes sign the credentials. Our fathers, however, feared state domination and objected to this. They insisted that the delegating ecclesiastical body sign the credentials. The Synod of Dordt, 1574, adopted the following resolution: "It is decided that ministers who are delegated to the synod shall bring with them credentials from the consistory and the classis, not from the government."

INSTRUCTIONS

Article 33 also refers to "instructions": "Those who are delegated to the assemblies shall bring with them their credentials and instructions...." "Instructions" are particular matters that a consistory desires to be treated at classis, or a classis desires to be treated at synod. Such instructions may not come to the assembly from the delegates personally, nor may they be brought orally. But they must come from the assembly sending the delegates, must be black-on-white, and must be signed by those sending them. This guarantees accuracy and authenticity.

One other reference to "instructions" in the *Church Order* is found in Article 46:

Instructions concerning matters to be considered in major assemblies shall not be written until the decisions of previous synods touching these matters have been read, in order that what was once decided be not again proposed, unless a revision be deemed necessary.

This article is usually understood to prescribe that no assembly is to make a decision without consulting the decisions of previous assemblies. And this certainly is a valid implication of

this article. Nevertheless, the article is actually referring to the writing of "instructions" by a minor assembly for the consideration of a major assembly.

This provision of Article 33 dates back to a time when there were no regular mail services, typewriters, photocopiers, computers, or fax machines. The agenda for the major assemblies was by and large determined by these "instructions" that the various delegates brought with them to the meeting. The result was that often delegates were unaware of what the agenda would be until they arrived at the meeting, and were unable properly to prepare themselves. Often the result was also a meeting of undue length. For the most part, these "instructions" have been replaced by a published agenda compiled by the stated clerk of the assembly and made available to the delegates well in advance of the assembly meeting. The classis and synod have rules regarding the deadline for materials to be placed in the agenda.

Matters that are included in the "instruction" today are: matters of discipline, where advice is sought by a consistory for increase of censure; a request from a consistory for help in the government of its church under Article 41; nominees of delegates for synod; approval of wage compensation for elder delegates to the broader assemblies; invitation to host a future classis or synod.

VOTING

The rule of Article 33 is that only those who have been properly delegated to the broader assemblies and have their credentials in hand may vote. "Vote" here refers to a decisive, determinative vote on the issues and motions before the assembly. Such a decisive vote is limited to those officially delegated to the assemblies. The Synod of Middelburg, 1581, rules: "Those delegated to the assemblies shall bring along their credentials and instructions, signed by those who delegated them, and these alone shall be entitled to vote."

Besides the decisive vote, there

is also what is usually referred to as "advisory vote." Advisory vote is the privilege of the floor, the right to speak before the assembly. Advisory vote may be granted by a major assembly to: professors of theology, emeritus ministers, missionaries, officebearers from sister churches, those directly involved in a matter being treated by the assembly. *Church Order*, Article 42 provides that in the case of a church having more than one minister, the minister or ministers not delegated to a given classical meeting shall also have the right to attend classis "with advisory vote." Such ministers have the right to address the classis on any issue before it. They do not, however, have a decisive vote.

The Synod of Middelburg, 1581, responded to the question, "Whether other ministers and elders than those who are delegated may appear in the classis?" by stating, "Yes, and when they are asked, they shall be allowed to give advice, but they shall have no vote."

An exception to the general rule that the professors of theology be granted advisory vote was made by the great Synod of Dordt, 1618-'19. This Synod gave the theological professors the unique privilege of casting decisive votes. But this is the one exception to what historically has been the rule in Reformed churches.

Sometimes the question arises whether it is proper for a minor assembly to mandate its delegates to the broader assembly to vote in a certain way. Generally this is undesirable and even wrong. This violates the authorization of the "Credential Letter" itself which mandates the delegates "... to take part in all deliberations and transactions of Classis regarding all matters legally coming before the meeting...." Such handcuffing of the delegates undermines the deliberative character of the broader assemblies. It effectively precludes the possibility of discussion of the issues. It is very well possible that something new comes to light during the deliberations of the broader assembly that gives delegates an entirely new perspective on an issue.

Mandating delegates to vote in a certain manner also binds the conscience, whereas every man ought to be free to make his own judgment and vote his own conscience before God.

Only under extraordinary circumstances ought delegates to be bound in their voting by the minor assembly that has delegated them. Delegates may be instructed how to vote when an item on the agenda of either classis or synod is obviously illegal, or when a matter is clearly contrary to the Word of God. In these cases further deliberation is unnecessary and there is no room for change of opinion. This was the case at the Synod of Dordt, 1618-'19, when some of the particular synods instructed their delegates to vote against the Arminian position.

This does not prohibit a consistory, for example, discussing the agenda of the upcoming classis or synod. This certainly may and ought to be done. Delegates ought to know the sentiment of the consistory as a whole and ought to be benefited by the insights of other consistory members.

A VOTING RESTRICTION

One restriction to the right of delegates to vote is included in Article 33: "... they shall have a vote in all matters, *except such as particularly concern their persons or churches.*" Delegates are not to vote in matters that directly concern themselves or the congregation they represent. They may participate in the deliberations, take part in the discussion. But they may not cast a vote; in this case they must abstain.

VanDellen and Monsma explain correctly that this is

... a matter of common sense and fairness. It is very hard for us to judge calmly and objectively when we ourselves are concerned. yet every decision should be objective. And so the churches have wisely agreed in the interest of the kingdom, that those who are directly involved in a matter before an ecclesiastical gathering shall not vote. Let the other delegates decide and then let all abide

by the opinion of the majority. (*The Church Order Commentary*, p. 152.)

If the broader assembly is treating a protest that is authored by an attending delegate, he must abstain. If the classis or synod is treating a protest by a member against a decision of his consistory, the delegates from that consistory must abstain. If the broader assembly is considering the merits of an overture from a consistory, delegates from the consistory out of which the overture has originated must abstain. As far as the classes are concerned, it is even wise that men not be delegated to synod if a critical issue involving them or their consistory is going to be treated at the synod.

Often it is asked: "Should the president of a major assembly vote?" Robert's *Rules of Order* states:

He (i.e., the chairman) is entitled to vote when the vote is by ballot, and in all other cases where the vote would change the result. Thus, in a case where a two-thirds vote is necessary, and his vote thrown with the minority would prevent the adoption of the question, he can (sic) cast his vote; so, also, he can (sic) vote with the minority when it will pro-

duce a tie vote and thus cause the motion to fail. (Spire Books edition, p. 78.)

In distinction from government, social, corporate, and fraternal organizations where the president *may* vote, in ecclesiastical organizations he *ought* to vote. In the assemblies he is a delegate among other delegates. He has been "... instructed and authorized ... to take part in all deliberations and transactions ... regarding all matters..." before the assembly ("Credential Letter"). He is not just a president who guides the discussion and keeps the assembly at order, he is also an officebearer and delegate, and therefore ought to vote. The "Rules of Order with the Rule of Procedure for the Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America" state among the duties of the president the following:

Being a duly chosen delegate to Synod, he retains all the rights and privileges of a delegate. As such he has ... the right to vote on any question before the gathering. He invariably votes when the vote is taken by ballot, in case of a tie, or in cases where a voice vote is so close that a raising of hands is called for. □

CLASSICAL CREDENTIALS	
of the	
PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES	
L. S.	
To the Classis	
of the Protestant Reformed Churches,	
to convene	19
at	
The Consistory of the	Protestant Reformed Church
at	has appointed the brethren:
..... and elder	
as delegates to represent said Church at the meeting of the Classis above referred to.	
The alternate delegates are:	
..... and	
We hereby instruct and authorize them to take part in all the deliberations and transactions of Classis regarding all matters legally coming before the meeting and transacted in agreement with the Word of God according to the conception of it embodied in the doctrinal standards of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as in harmony with our Church Order.	
INSTRUCTIONS:	
	By order of the Consistory
 President
 Clerk
Done in Consistory,	19

Fasting

We read of fasts for the most part in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word means to cover the mouth, to keep the mouth shut, to fast. The Mosaic law prescribed only one fast, what Leviticus 16:29-31 calls "afflicting of the soul," on the great day of atonement. Later, the Israelites had the practice of fasting in hard circumstances, in the midst of bereavement, and whenever God threatened judgment. Still later, they fasted on certain days to commemorate outstanding events in their history, such as the capture of Jerusalem. Fasting was often accompanied with other visible signs, such as the putting on of sackcloth, casting ashes upon the head, and tearing of the garments. Even under the Mosaic law, these outward activities were to be consistent with the inner afflicting of the soul in recognition of one's unworthiness and in the renouncing of one's will. Whenever Israel demonstrated exactitude in the keeping of outward signs and a lack of sorrow in the heart, hypocrisy resulted, so that their holy God rebuked them with the words, "Rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God" (Joel 2:13).

In the New Testament the Greek word means to abstain from food, to be empty, to fast. The Pharisees were sternly rebuked by Jesus for their hypocritical fastings, which not only went far beyond what was required once a year, but also lacked the inner contrition of the heart. They went about with a sad countenance and disfigured their faces that all might know they were fasting. Jesus said, "When thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." When the disciples failed to heal a man's son who was lunatic and sore vexed, Jesus rebuked them for their unbelief and said, "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." From this passage and many others, we see that fasting was engaged in as a preparation for prayer, for spiritual work, and for a revelation from God. Thus Jesus Himself fasted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, just before His triple temptation by the devil, in order that He might be spiritually sharpened and quickened for that great battle. That fasting enabled Him to experience to the depths of His soul every aspect of the temptations, and to resist them in the Spirit.

Although the strict observance of fasting is abolished amongst Christians, "yet the truth and substance of it remain with us in Jesus Christ, in which it has its completion" (Belgic Confession, Art. 25). Fasting is no longer obligatory with us, although what fasting represented is upon us with as great an urgency as ever with Israel. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17). And, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (II Cor. 7:10). It ought also be remarked that all afflicting of the body, all asceticism, all abstaining from meats on certain days, *a la* Rome, is worthless as far as spiritual benefit is concerned and is soundly condemned by Scripture (Col. 2:21).

There are several New Testament passages which set forth fasting as a voluntary practice. Have you ever fasted? We are not talking about dieting, the purpose of which is physical, but fasting, the purpose of which is spiritual. There are passages which speak of fasting in the context of prayer (Acts 14:23; I Cor. 7:5; II Cor. 6:5). The idea is that our prayer life can suffer if our intake of food is too great. Too much food can make us feel sluggish, can dull the mind, can rob us of the ability to concentrate on unseen, spiritual things. We have all experienced this: we simply cannot follow a prayer-thought to its conclusion, or we fall asleep while we are praying. Our prayers suffer. It has been suggested that when we eat, and especially when we overeat, the blood supply concentrates in the abdomen, robbing the brain of the blood it needs to function properly. Perhaps. At any rate, God tells us that there are times when it is profitable to abstain from using His good gifts, in order that our spiritual life may be improved.

A parallel example is given in I Corinthians 7:5, where the child of God is encouraged to abstain from the good gift of sex for the same reason we have been discussing above. After stating that the wife and the husband do not have power over their own bodies, but that they possess their bodies mutually, Paul writes, "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency." Clearly, it is possible that the use of good gifts can hinder our prayers. If we observe this, we are to abstain from the use of these gifts that our prayers be not hindered. When things have been properly balanced once again, we are to resume our use of that gift we have given up for a time. Fasts in themselves have no spiritual benefit; but we may engage in fasts as an aid to a richer spiritual life of prayer and watching. □

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

A Shadow of a Coming Blessedness (2)

In the beginning of the history of mankind, our God revealed the truth in His grace; but He also in His infinite wisdom and almighty power displayed His love and mercy. We do well to bear in mind the fact that, although man was created in the image of God and was a most wonderful creature (in fact the most wonderful creature here on this earth), he could not, at the beginning of his life on this earth, do some of the things he can do today.

Adam could and did know God. He heard God speak, and he spoke unto God. It is true that nowhere in Genesis do we read of Adam speaking unto God; but we do have clear evidence, even after the Fall of mankind into sin, that man did have God speak to him, and that he spoke to God. In fact we have this presented to us even in the life of an ungodly unbeliever. God, we read, rebuked Cain for killing his brother Abel; and Cain responded to God with his lips. Cain said unto God, "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13). What Cain did after the Fall reveals that, before that Fall, and before mankind came under the curse, man could and did speak to God and hear Him speak to mankind.

What without a doubt is true is

that, in the early part of the history of mankind, men and women could not read or write as fully and richly as they can today. Some men, like Moses, who was brought up and trained by Pharaoh's daughter, could read and write. But so many of those living in the day of shadows could not and did not have schools for their instruction and training. Think, for example, of the Israelites in their forty years in the wilderness, and in their travel from place to place.

But the point to make here, in this part of the day of shadows, is that our God spoke to mankind, and in this way revealed the truth to them through speech, before books could even be written by men, and before they were read by any of them. Today we ought to be thankful that we do have God's written Word, the Scriptures, which not only give us information, but give us also rich promises and basic foundations for faith and hope.

What we should consider, out of this written Word of God, in connection with its comforting and wonderful truths, is what God spoke to Jacob after his flight away from his brother Esau, as found in Genesis 28. There we read of what our God revealed to Jacob when he was on his way to escape from his brother's hatred.

Jacob was on his way out of the land of Canaan, to be protected from his brother Esau, who made known that he planned to kill Jacob after his father died. Indeed, he was sent there also to get a wife; but here we have a shadow of God's grace as it will be

fully revealed when Christ returns to bring us with body and soul into the new Jerusalem.

In a dream God promised Jacob a rich blessing, an absolute comfort; and we, as spiritual descendants of Jacob, have here in the day of shadows a glorious and comforting truth. Our God gives here His promise to all the elect children; and He teaches us here what lies ahead for us, even though the Esaus of the coming antichristian world will soon not allow us to buy or sell, because we by God's grace will refuse to take on our right hand or forehead the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:15-17).

Let us take note of the fact that in Jacob's dream he saw a ladder set up on the earth and reaching up into heaven. On it angels ascended and descended. Above it God stood and gave Jacob a beautiful and rich promise. He told Jacob that He would give him that land on which he was lying. He promised him seed as innumerable as "the dust of the earth" — thus, far more in number than he or we can count.

Note then, in the first place, that He assures Jacob that his life is going to be spared. He is absolutely safe, no matter how much his brother hated him, and no matter that his brother planned to kill him. In fact, Jacob is not only going to get seed "as the dust of the earth" in number, but he will be "spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south." He is told that "in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Yes, here we have a divine promise of becoming Jacob's seed in a spiritual sense. Our God does not go into detail and speak unto Jacob in words which we today can understand. He does already cause Jacob to see the shadow of the reality that is today before our eyes, and we can see and spell out in much more detail.

First of all, take note of the fact that our God here promises a church with members out of every nation, tongue, and tribe. Jacob was still in the land of Canaan; but he is assured that — although directly west of him was the large Mediterranean Sea — he is going to have a spiritual seed, that is, those who believe in God, here in our land as well as in that land of Canaan. In other words, that statement of such seed west of Canaan, east, north, and south, refers to elect children of God living all over the world. And although we, even as was true for Jacob, cannot count them all, and are in different countries and nations, we can see that in the Old Testament dispensation there was a shadow of what is real and coming to pass.

But the striking and most comforting truth in this promise of our God to Jacob is that all the families of the earth shall be blessed. In fact, our God declares to Jacob that "in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This reveals that in God's church there will be Gentiles. We have this presented to us in the New Testament, but it was already promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:3; 18:22:18, and to Isaac in Genesis 26:4.

What is extremely important for us, and presented for our comfort, is the fact that we see what casts this blessed shadow. It is not presented to us, or to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, literally in these passages; but the shadow of our Savior's coming was there in the Old Testament. Note, first of all, that in this dream our God declared, "I am with thee." For our God gave us our Savior by coming into our flesh, and causing a virgin to conceive and bring Him forth in our flesh. There we have a wonderful fulfillment of that truth that "I am

with thee." That His church would have members out of every nation, tongue, and tribe is then so very, very sure.

But go back now to what is called the Mother Promise, and indeed is the first presentation of God's promise of salvation for His elect. In Genesis 3:15 we read of a sharp distinction in the human race. There will be and there are seed of the serpent and seed of the woman. There is enmity between these two groups, and — by all means get this — among the seed of the woman is Christ, who died on His cross for our salvation. He, indeed, is the Seed of the Woman, being born of that virgin Mary. His "heel" was crushed, while the "head" of the seed of the serpent will be crushed.

Now the idea here is not that Christ's suffering is no more than the mere crushing of a heel. He did suffer at the hands of the seed of the serpent. He was crucified by them; and Cain's killing of Abel likewise revealed the enmity between those two seeds. But the point here is that the seed of the serpent will hurt the seed of the woman, because our gracious God changes, redeems, and causes His elect to be born again. For that reason they will be hated by Satan and all his seed. Soon, Scripture teaches us, the seed of the serpent will insist that we put the mark of the beast on our right hand or forehead. And when we refuse, we will not be allowed to buy or sell. Thus we will starve to death! Some will be killed by Satan's seed of the serpent; but all the rest will suffer that hunger at the hands of the Antichrist (Rev. 13:11-17).

Here then, in this dream that Jacob had, we have the assurance that every elect child of God shall, in those days of the coming Antichrist, suffer physically at the hands of those in Satan's kingdom. Christ had His "heel crushed" — that is, He died on His cross for our salvation. And because of what He accomplished thereby, we will leave this life, which is a continual death, and be brought into God's promised land, namely, the Kingdom of Heaven, where Christ is our King.

Jacob is instructed concerning this "Mother Promise," and is assured that he belongs to those given this blessed promise. We should take hold of that truth. As Jacob had a brother who intended to kill him, we have a world of children of the devil that will crush our "heels." But by God's grace they will not crush our heads. We will continue to believe in God and fight the good fight of faith, because of this promise which He gives us through Jacob.

We do well to take note of what we read in Genesis 28:14. There our God says to Jacob, and to us, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." For here is the promise of Christ's coming and of His realization of salvation for us. "In thee and in thy seed" does not present Jacob to us as the one who blesses us. It is Christ, who indeed in the physical sense is one of the seed of Jacob through Mary, and who brings blessings upon us. He removed all our guilt, and by His Spirit makes us spiritually alive and holy.

Jacob is promised a certain return to Canaan; and this return is a shadow of our absolutely sure entrance with body and soul into the Kingdom of Heaven with all its blessedness, when Christ returns. Therefore also David, one of the seed of Jacob, did conquer that whole land of Canaan west, east, north, and south, as a shadow of what will happen when Christ returns.

Here is a beautiful shadow of what lies ahead for us. We will not return to the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve had a blessed life before they fell into sin. But we will by Christ be brought into the new Jerusalem, the Holy City, wherein Christ is King, and where we will have a most blessed fellowship with God.

Here, indeed, is a most certain and truly comforting shadow of what by God's grace is in store for us. □

The Problem of Viewpoint

*Look not every man on his own things,
but every man also on the things of others.*
Philippians 2:4

I was quite surprised when, after the publication of my last article, I received a call expressing dismay at what I had written. It came from a former member of the Liberated churches who felt I had not represented them fairly.

It bothers me, for I have no wish to misrepresent anyone; but perhaps it is to be expected, and to a degree unavoidable. When one describes events of recent history, while some who participated in them are still living, and especially when they were on the opposite side in a matter of conflict, almost invariably what one says will bring the accusation of misrepresentation. And, to a degree, perhaps, this is always true. After all, we always see things from our own point of view; and God has given to none of us the full and perfect wisdom necessary for a complete understanding of even the most minute of matters. It is only over periods of time, if God will give us the grace to work with humility and perseverance, that gradually we come to an appreciation of what He has brought about.

But it does not come easily, and it does require a humble and honest effort, not only in reviewing one's own memory of what has transpired,

but also in listening to that of others. Repeatedly one must lay out what he remembers and understands, and then listen to the response of those who, from a different viewpoint, can suggest another understanding of the matter. It requires Christian communication with others, if we are to continue to grow in an appreciation of that which God has privileged us to experience in His working with His church. Not only do the Scriptures instruct us to do this (as in passages such as Eph. 4:1-3 and Phil. 2:1-5), but we have also the example of the early Reformers. It is striking that, in spite of many and serious differences, they unceasingly continued to correspond back and forth in search of each other's opinions and advice in all kinds of matters both doctrinal and practical. It is something which we should never fail in our efforts to emulate. Differences will always be there, sometimes too great to allow us to work together in certain areas; but never is there a child of God in whom the Spirit dwells with whom we can not profitably communicate for one purpose or another, and especially so when they share with us a common love of the Reformed faith.

Through the years I have tried to do that — particularly, having grown to maturity myself through the controversy of the early fifties, with those who have experienced the same from other points of view. This includes those who participated in it as members, or former members of the Liberated churches. Not only have I read what material is accessible to me (and in recent years some most interesting publications have appeared regarding these matters, also in English); but I have tried at various points to search out and share viewpoints with such

people both in our country and in Canada and Australia, always in an attempt to grasp the true nature of the breach that stands between us.

Back in my Lynden days, for example, there were a number of such people whom I came to know. One couple, I remember well, had belonged to our congregation in Hamilton when it was first organized. With them we visited often; and I tried to gain a feeling for their view of what had transpired.

And then there was the man who had carried on that correspondence with Prof. Holwerda which finally evoked the letter which was distributed among the immigrants in Canada, and then published by Rev. Ophoff. Many times we reviewed those days, and I have little question that his understanding of them differed little from mine. And, in time, he joined our churches again.

In fact, if any recall the early articles in this series, they may well remember that they were written with the purpose of bringing out the area of agreement which we and the Liberated had in our disagreement with the followers of Abraham Kuyper, and the resultant attraction which we had toward each other.

And still, all of this is said with no intent of claiming complete accuracy and objectivity for myself in these matters. All of these inquiries, no matter how extensive they may have been, could not be expected to compensate for the fact that I passed through the experience of those days as a member of the Protestant Reformed Churches. And from that point of view, for an understanding of the Liberated view of these matters, it would be better to hear from someone other than myself.

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

But that is not to say that there is not a reason for and a value to the Protestant Reformed viewpoint being expressed once again on these matters. Those events which transpired affected the development of the Protestant Reformed Churches immensely; and there are now many who have since grown up with no direct memory of what took place and why. What happened to our little denomination in those days was a major disruption, sad and unexpected; and it did much to mold the nature of what we are now. But time has passed; and we have not spent as much time recalling them as might have been expected. The result is that many, if not most, have only a limited awareness of what those events were all about. It is primarily for them that I have been writing; and, as is to be expected, I write from the viewpoint of my own experience.

But still, I was surprised, not so much that there were objections, but from where it came. I had expected them more, if they were to come, from those who left us and experienced them from the viewpoint of "the DeWolf group."

Through the ensuing years I have tried to understand them as well; and I know that many of them see what happened quite differently than do we. Some of them, indeed, have returned to our churches (and for this we are happy); but, even for them, painful memories do remain. Others there are who have not returned; and they hold some very mixed feelings toward us and the history which divided our churches so deeply. Some indeed (and this is perhaps the saddest of all) have left sound Reformed principles to become among the most liberal of those with whom they have joined. Of us they seldom think; and for us they have little sympathy anymore. But there are others whose heart has never strayed far from the Reformed principles which once they shared with us, even though they have never found it possible to return to us again. For them, perhaps, the memory of those days is the most painful of all; and they simply do not

see why the matters with which we were concerned could have been so important as to warrant the formulating of the Declaration of Principles, and finally the splitting of our churches as they did.

For many, from the very beginning, it had always seemed that the conflict was little more than a question of terminology, a question of whether the word "condition" could have a proper use in Reformed theology or not. Back and forth the battle raged: can the covenant of God in any way be considered conditional, and/or are there any conditional elements within it?

I can remember well the endless wrangling which went on over this, as though it were the only real thing which separated us from the Liberated. Dictionaries were brought out, definitions minutely examined, and old writings searched for some indication that the word "condition" can have some proper use in our theological language. If only this could be demonstrated, the reason for our differences would be taken out of the way; and for that proof endless searches were made. To this day there appear to be those who think that the problem that divided our churches was not deeper than that.

But it was; and, once the historical framework has been laid out, I would like to try to get into that. As Rev. Ophoff tried to bring out at the time, words do have import, and one must be responsible, not just for what he wishes to say, but also for the thought conveyed by those words to others. And, as Rev. Hoeksema pointed out many times, there was something more basic and more important in that controversy than even that of 1924.

* * * * *

But the call spoken of was not the only response we received. It was just a few days later that I received a letter concerning my articles. This was from a man who had been rather centrally involved in the controversy of that day. He left us when the separation came, but has continued to follow the progress of our churches

ever since, and not without occasional expressions of approval. His expressions were generally appreciative of what I wrote (even if, I assume, he did not agree with me completely); but he had one suggestion. That was that this matter should be traced back several centuries in the history of the church. It is a worthy suggestion for, I too, have come to the realization that what we were debating in the early fifties was hardly a new question. It is something that has divided the churches, especially in England, practically from the time of the Reformation on. And, at least within the limits of my scholastic abilities, I would like to deal with that as well. □

SABBATH JOY

Isaiah 58:13, 14

If on the sabbath you will
turn
From doing your own pleasure
And keep it holy to the Lord,
Your joy will know no measure.
Sabbath you'll call a great
delight;
You'll honor God the Lord;
Not seeking ways or words of
self
But ever looking toward
The Holy One of Israel;
And He'll cause you to ride
Upon the lofty places of
The earth — and there abide
With Jacob, as your heritage.
For, lo, His mouth has spoken
And it shall surely come to
pass;
His word cannot be broken.

Thelma Westra
Faith PRC, Jenison, MI

The ABC's of Assurance, by John H. Gerstner. Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1991. 112 pages. Paper. \$7.95. [Reviewed by the Editor.]

Literally.

Dr. Gerstner treats the biblical doctrine of the Christian's assurance of salvation by chapter headings that follow the alphabet: "Assurance of Eternal Salvation"; "Beating the Body"; "Captain of Our Salvation"; etc. In short chapters, usually three or four pages, and in simple language, the book explains and defends the precious truth that the believing child of God can and must be sure of his or her eternal salvation. All of the glorious doctrines of salvation by grace alone, upon which assurance rests, come up for consideration.

Attacks on assurance are answered. Biblical passages that seem to deny assurance are explained. Gerstner's explanation of the perishing of many members of the nation of Israel is excellent:

God had not rejected Israel, for the calling and election of God are without repentance. The Apostle explains that God never called all Israel to eternal salvation, but only some within Israel (such as the 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and Paul himself). The principle was that not all are Israel who are in Israel, Romans 9:6 (p. 32).

The reason why so many churches and people lack assurance is pointed out: The 16th chapter is entitled, "Free-will Makes Assurance Impossible."

Assurance belongs to true faith. It is sin for a believer to lack assurance, just as it is a "crime for non-Christians to have assurance" (p. ii).

The publisher should take note of a serious typographical mistake in

the chapter, "Question: Can You be an Unsure Christian?" The important reference to II Peter 1:10 ("make your calling and election sure") is persistently misstated, first as II Peter 2:10 and then as I Peter 2:10. The reader will not agree with Dr. Gerstner's interpretation of Scripture in every instance, e.g., that Jesus' choice of Judas as a disciple is to be explained as the choice of His human nature, which was ignorant of the state of Judas' heart (cf. pp. 28-32).

This little book is a fine, popular treatment of a truth that is vital for every child of God. ■

The Shepherd Psalm, by F.B. Meyer, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1991; 139pp., paper \$8.95. [Reviewed by Rev. Richard Moore.]

This book is a devotional commentary on the twenty-third Psalm. It is written by a certain F.B. Meyer, who was born and raised in London, received his theological training in the Regent's Park Baptist College, and was a minister during the late 1800s and early 1900s.

This book serves to set forth in a very attractive style an exposition of the twenty-third Psalm. It sets forth the Psalm in a very spiritual way, to lead us to contemplate the wondrous care of God over His sheep. The strength of this book is in the many references to other passages of the Scriptures when applying the instruction of this Psalm to the lives of God's children.

The language used is such that it will lead the one reading this little book to contemplate the deep love that God has for His children. And, if read from the perspective of a strong biblical and therefore Reformed point

of view, it can be profitable as a devotional tool for us in our daily life.

However, the weakness of this book is that the free-willism of the author shows through and detracts from an otherwise fundamentally sound setting forth of the Scriptures. In speaking of the daily provision that God gives to His people, for example, the author writes with colorful language this: "All sentient things depend upon His sustaining power. Not a seraph cleaves the air but what derives his power of obedience from his sovereign Lord; and not a mote of life floats in the sunbeam, flashing in the light but it is dependent upon the light and life of the central Sun, before whom angels veil their faces." On the other hand we have the author saying, in speaking of the care of Christ over the church, that "the one question is whether you have so completely handed over the responsibility of your lives to Him as to make Him the sole custodian and safeguard of your being, both for this world and the next."

The author's ability to use the English language, and his obvious familiarity with the Scriptures and the use of the same, make this book a pleasure to read; and if, in his mind, one changes the statements that are free-will in nature or that embrace an idea of common favor to all men to Scriptural concepts, then the majority of this book is spiritually helpful and comforting. It is too bad that the writer could not see the contradictions that come into his own writing because of the free-will theology to which he bound himself. But for the discerning reader this book is worth reading. □

Report of Classis West

Classis West met on Wednesday, September 2, 1992, in Loveland, CO. Classis finished its work at about 3:00 p.m., that same day. Rev. R. Moore served as President of the meeting and Rev. T. Miersma led Classis in opening devotions.

The main item of business was a letter from the Isabel, SD, congregation informing Classis of difficulties in that congregation. The result of those difficulties is that Isabel has no Consistory of its own at present.

Classis, therefore, decided to put the congregation of Isabel under the care and government of Doon's Consistory according to Articles 38 and 39 of the Church Order. Doon's Consistory is to report to the next meeting of Classis West with recommendations concerning the future of the Isabel congregation, i.e., either to reconstitute the Consistory of Isabel according to Article 38 of the Church Order or to disband the congregation.

Classis also approved and scheduled classical appointments for Isabel,

and for Sovereign Redeemer Fellowship of Boise, Idaho. In addition, a request for permission to ask for building fund collections in Classis West, from Covenant PRC of Wyckoff, NJ, received the approval of Classis.

The expenses of Classis were \$7,573.61.

The next meeting of Classis West will be in South Holland, IL, on March 3, 1993.

Rev. R. Hanko
Stated Clerk

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACTIVITIES

The Young People's Societies of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, this year's host of the annual young people's convention, invited their congregation to a special "get together" on Saturday evening, August 15th, at their church. This "get-together" was intended to show the young people's appreciation for the congregation's support of the recently completed convention.

A slide presentation of the convention was shown, as well as video footage taken during the convention. All those with memorable photos of the convention were invited to take them along for viewing as well. Refreshments were served by the young people.

EVANGELISM ACTIVITIES

The September issue of "Closer Look," the newsletter of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, contains an interesting article about an on-going

evangelism project, "Bible for Ghana," written by Hudsonville's pastor, Rev. G. VanBaren. Rev. VanBaren writes by way of introduction that "Eight letters arrived in the mailbox today for the Men's Society from individuals in Ghana. Each letter was a plea for a Bible...."

"Mr. Tom Spriensma, on behalf of the Men's Society, has been answering these letters. He has sent used Bibles contributed by individuals, extra used Bibles of Hudsonville Church, and Bibles purchased at the Reformed Book Outlet.

"One cannot know for certain what happens to these Bibles once they arrive in Ghana. The assumption is that, even if the individual who requested the Bible does not use it personally, it probably gets into the hands of someone who can make good use of it."

Rev. VanBaren concludes his article by informing his congregation that in a recent decision their consistory has decided that the collections taken this year in catechism will be used for Bibles for Ghana. This will involve the children directly in this work of distributing God's Word.

On Friday, August 28, Rev. Steve Key, pastor of the Randolph, WI PRC, spoke in the auditorium of the

Loveland, CO PRC. He was the featured speaker at a public lecture sponsored by Loveland's Church Extension Committee. Rev. Key spoke on the subject, "Proper Christian Self-Esteem."

CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Around the first of July an announcement appeared in the bulletin of the Pella, IA PRC informing their congregation that their piano needed to be replaced and that donations were being accepted. This announcement appeared each week until August 9, when the congregation was encouraged to begin looking for a good used piano; and then, in the August 23 bulletin, there was a note to notice the fine used piano purchased that week. It is reported to be an improvement both in looks and in sound.

In August all the families of the Hudsonville, MI PRC received letters from a Steering Committee asking for their response, by returned postcard, to the question: Would you be interested in forming a new PR congregation in the Georgetown Forest area (a subdivision north and west of Hudsonville)? This committee was formed by Hudsonville's consistory to look into this possibility. Presently

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

THE STANDARD BEARER

P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI 49468-0603

SECOND CLASS
Postage Paid at
Grandville, Michigan

Hudsonville is near capacity level, and it is also apparently the Lord's will that Hudsonville will continue to grow, given the large number of young families and young children.

DENOMINATIONAL ACTIVITIES

This year's Convocation Service of the Protestant Reformed Seminary saw a near-capacity crowd gather at the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI on the evening of August 26, to hear Prof. D. Engelsma speak on the topic, "Have You Heard Anything New Lately?"

You might also be interested to know that this year seminary has an enrollment of seven students. Five are preparing to serve as PR ministers, and two are studying to become pastors in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. There are also three men who are taking either Dutch or Greek at the Seminary with a view to attending seminary in a year or two, the Lord willing.

We extend our congratulations to Rev. and Mrs. Mitch Dick on the occasion of the birth of their first child, a boy, David Anthony, born August 9.

On Tuesday, September 1, the day before the convening of Classis West in Loveland, CO, an officebearers' conference was held under the theme, "Shepherding God's Flock."

MINISTERIAL CALLS

Rev. C. Terpstra declined the call he had been extended to serve as pastor of the Grandville, MI PRC.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Prayer is my chief work, and it is by means of it that I am able to carry on all the rest."

Thomas Hooker □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church expresses its sincere Christian sympathy to Sadie Knoper and family in the sudden death of her husband,

MR. DONALD KNOPER.

Don Knoper was also the brother of Mrs. Gerald Bouwkamp. We express our Christian sympathy to the Gerald Bouwkamp family also at this time.

May they find comfort in God's words: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Timothy 4:8).

Henry Boer, President
Gerrit Holstege, Secretary

TAPE OFFER!

What must be our motivation for the instruction of our children?

What is the heart of the instruction we are to give them?

What confidence may parents have in that sacred calling and privilege?

These questions are answered in a sermon preached on August 22, 1992, in the Lynden PRC entitled:

The Fathers to the Children.

Based on Isaiah 38:19, this message expounds the indispensable foundation for all biblical nurture of covenant children, namely: *thanksgiving to God*. It calls covenant parents to the confidence they must have in their task.

Order from:
Lynden PR Church Extension
315 N. Park
Lynden, WA 98264

NOTICE!!!

You are invited to attend a conference on "Spiritual Depression," sponsored by the Evangelism Society of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church.

When: Friday, October 9, 1992, at 7:30 P.M.

Saturday, October 10, 1992, at 9:30 A.M.

Where: Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church
1945 84th St.

Byron Center, MI 49315

Speakers:

Friday evening:

Prof. Robert Decker:

"Spiritual Depression -- Its Cause"

Saturday morning:

Rev. James Slopsema:

"Spiritual Depression — Its Cure"

Ample time will be given for questions and discussion. Refreshments will be served.

Please call Terry Kamminga (616) 878-1444 or Bruce VanSolkema (616) 878-9281 if you plan to attend. We would like to know how many to expect. Hope to see you there!

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church expresses its sincerest sympathy to our members, Mr. and Mrs. Ken Vink and family, in the loss of Mr. Vink's mother,

MRS. KATHERINE FLIKKEMA.

May our gracious God comfort them by His Word: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Mr. John VanderWoude, Vice-pres.
David Harbach, Clerk