

# *THE* **STANDARD BEARER**

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*A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine*

What happens when the insurance companies can no more pay out on policies because of extensive disasters? What happens to the health system when it becomes overwhelmed with incurable illnesses? What happens to this world when famine affects vast portions of the planet? What happens to a country when it drowns in its own "red ink"?

See "Is He Coming Soon?" — page 69

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*Vol. 69, No. 3  
November 1, 1992*



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### In This Issue ...

For the past several years Rev. Kortering and Rev. Slopsema have shared the Meditations for the S.B. Rev. Slopsema will continue writing for alternate issues; but, after becoming aware of the sheer volume of work demanding his time and attention in Singapore, Rev. Kortering asked to be relieved of his end of that arrangement for this year. Rather than looking for a single replacement, we decided to ask several different ministers for an occasional Meditation. Already you have seen a couple from Rev. Bruinsma. This time we have one supplied by Rev. Mahtani. It may be of interest to know that his article is a condensation of a speech he gave at a prayer meeting in the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore a few weeks ago, and that at the time of this writing Rev. Mahtani is looking forward eagerly to spending three weeks in India, having been invited to speak at a conference of Sindh Christians in that country. The Mission Committee of the ERCS decided to send both Rev. Mahtani and Rev. Kortering, to take full advantage of this rare opportunity.

Both of the Contributions in this issue came, by coincidence, from Edgerton, Minnesota. The first, from Mr. Henry Huiskens, addresses the origin and significance of the name "Free" for the Protestant Reformed Christian School in Edgerton. Having once received a letter from a disgruntled new subscriber to the SB, canceling her subscription because it wasn't "free," as she was apparently led to believe it would be by the name Reformed Free Publishing Association, I can well imagine that some people might conclude that, as a name for a school, "Free" must have some reference to tuition. Mr. Huiskens's short contribution, at any rate, explains what the name really means.

And from Mr. John Hilton, principal of Edgerton's Free Christian School, we received an article in which he comments on tornadoes, in light of what the Scriptures have to say about "whirlwinds" and other violent wind storms. It happens that Mr. Hilton gave a chapel speech for the residents of Edgebrook Rest Center in Edgerton not long after a severe storm system in the area spawned a powerful tornado, the likes of which strike fear in the hearts of men. Mr. Hilton directed the attention of the elderly in the Home to what the Word of God says about that. We're glad that he thought to share his observations with us. The article serves as a complement to "Is He Coming Soon?" — the first article in Rev. VanBaren's new rubric, "Come, Lord Jesus."

D.D.

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# Seek Ye My Face!

*When thou saidst, Seek ye my face;  
my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD,  
will I seek.*

Psalm 27:8

We are not surprised to find this sweet dialogue in Psalm 27, another of David's beautiful Spirit-inspired songs. The psalm extols Jehovah's gracious care for His suffering children. When exactly David penned these words we are not sure. Whether he is presently fleeing from his enemies, or is writing in humble reflection of past afflictions, we cannot tell. But God's people have fallen in love with these familiar lines. "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" (v. 1). "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after..." (v. 4). "For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me..." (v. 5). Verses 7-9 record David's cry to God in prayer, and within this prayer we find the most intimate dialogue of verse 8.

If you pick up your Bible you will find the words, "When thou saidst," in italics. This is to indicate that they are not in the original. The literal reading of the text is quite different: "Concerning thee my heart said: Seek ye my face; thy face, Jehovah, I will seek." David's heart did not only respond, "my heart said unto thee, thy face, LORD, will I seek." Rather, as the original indicates,

David's heart reminded him, in the first place, of Jehovah's call to prayer. "Concerning thee, my heart said: Seek ye my face!" As David was praying already in verse 7, such questions as these flooded his soul: "Why do I pray? What right do I have to disturb God with my cries? Will the LORD hear me?" And do you know what David's heart said concerning Jehovah? Yes, his heart told him that it is Jehovah Himself who has commanded, "Seek ye my face!" The King James does after all translate with the correct sense: "When thou saidst: Seek ye my face!" David's heart was right. He did not come barging into the presence of God, demanding to be heard. Rather, he came as a crying servant, at the beckoning of his Master. If the Lord calls me to seek His face, let the world deride, let father and mother forsake me, but I will seek Him. I will then come to God obediently, joyfully, courageously.

Let us then try to understand this divine call to seek Jehovah. Such a command comes to us clearly in His Word. The very idea of "seeking" is itself an interesting concept in the Scriptures. The verb "to seek" in the vivid Hebrew language literally means to search for something by earnestly looking for that object until it is found. For example, in Proverbs 2:4 we are called to seek wisdom "as silver," and to search for her "as for hid treasures." Psalm 34:14 urges the righteous "to seek peace, and pursue it." Clearly, "to seek" refers to an activity demanding a wholehearted search, with the earnest desire to find the object sought after. The Lord says: "Seek Me!"

When the Scriptures call us to

seek Jehovah, the reference is to at least three things. The most basic idea of seeking Jehovah is the call to serve Him humbly and to obey Him joyfully as God alone. Thus, for example, when Moses brings God's law and precepts to Israel he says in Deuteronomy 4:29, "But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." Psalm 40:16 so beautifully

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*To seek the Lord, then,  
means that we do  
what is pleasing to Him...*

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describes this seeking of Jehovah: "Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, let the LORD be magnified." A New Testament parallel is not difficult to find. In Matthew 6:33 the Lord Jesus admonishes His disciples to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Countless other passages can be quoted to prove that the basic idea of this divine call is to serve the Lord and to obey Him. We know of course what it means by nature to seek self. When we do that we seek our own pleasure, we seek the honor of our own name, and we want it our way. To seek the Lord, then, means that we do what is pleasing to Him, we desire that His name be hallowed, and we seek His way, His will.

But there is also a second and more narrow idea found in God's Word with reference to seeking Jehovah. Frequently the Scriptures call us to seek Jehovah by calling upon the name of the Lord in prayer. Very

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often the divine call to seek Jehovah refers to our duty to pray, to seek the will of the Lord by humbly crying out to Him. For example, when God comes to Israel in captivity He says through Jeremiah in chapter 29:12, 13, "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Another example is the prayer of Daniel in chapter 9:3: "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes...."

It is striking that the words "seek" and "pray" are so very often found in the same breath in Scripture. The clearest New Testament example that refers to seeking Jehovah in prayer is the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 11:9, 10: "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." God calls His people to pray, and no one should expect to experience the blessings of God except through prayer. Our text itself is in the context of prayer. All who would taste of such sweet communion with God ought to realize that David's heart recounts this divine call in the very midst of prayer!

However, there is an even more fundamental aspect to this matter of seeking the Lord which we must always remember. We read in our text that, when the Lord calls us to seek His face, He commands, "Seek ye my face." That is in the plural, and it is important. This call comes not only to David, but to God's people collectively. This refers, then, to the divine call for worship. It is Jehovah, the LORD, who calls out to His people: "Seek ye my face." He is the I Am, the faithful, covenant-keeping God who sends out this call to His people.

Throughout her history, Israel knew that Jehovah was pleased to dwell with her as a people. That was true already in the wilderness so-

jour, long before the temple of God was ever built in Jerusalem, according to Exodus 33:7: "And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass, that every one which sought the LORD went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp."

To seek the Lord clearly meant to enter into His presence, there to bring Him worship and adoration. David, the man after God's own heart, knew this very well. In verse 4 of this psalm he longs for that blessing to dwell in God's house, there to behold the beauty of the LORD and to enquire in His temple. For us, too, seeking the Lord can never be merely a personal, private, individual matter. God calls His church to seek His face. Throughout eternity, in the new heavens and new earth, we shall worship Him with the multitude of saints gathered from all ages and from all nations.

This brings us to the great wonder of our text. For the divine call to seek the Lord contains also a word of revelation. Seek ye *my face*! We understand, of course, that this is an anthropomorphism. It is the way the Scriptures reveal the invisible and spiritual God to earthly creatures. God has no face, no hands, no body composed of flesh and blood. He is a Spirit. But the only way you and I can know and understand His Being and attributes is by God's revealing Himself to us in language we can comprehend.

How else will we know of His might except He describe Himself to us as having a mighty and outstretched arm to save? Figuratively, we are made to know His love when the Bible so beautifully tells us that our names are written on the palms of His hands. We know that these creaturely parts of the body are mentioned with reference to God, only to help us understand the invisible greatness of our God.

Indeed, it would be well for us to remember that, in actuality, our hands, our feet, and all of our crea-

turely virtues are only a finite picture and small expression of the infinite and blessed God in whose image we are all made.

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*The sinner devoid of  
the grace of God  
in Christ Jesus cannot even  
see the kingdom of God,  
much less seek it.*

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Only the child of God can begin to understand this knowledge of revelation. It is true that according to Romans 1:18 also the ungodly can see the power and Godhead of the Creator around them. The apostle Paul at Mars' Hill also preached in Acts 17:27 that God is not far from all of us, for in Him we live, move, and have our being. Nevertheless, the unregenerate can never know God, because by nature he is blind to this revelation of God. The sinner devoid of the grace of God in Christ Jesus cannot even see the kingdom of God, much less seek it. Instead, as the Romans and Acts passages quoted above tell us, the ungodly make gods of wood and stone and bow before them in rebellion against God. Because of the sin and fall of mankind, there is no longer the possibility of knowing God from the creaturely evidence of His Being in and around us.

Instead of bowing before revelation, the ungodly have always sought to make a face for God. This bowing down before an image is to be sharply contrasted with the idea of the face of God in our text. It is heathenish to imagine that we can paint a picture of God and bow before it. God Himself prohibits this in His moral law, the ten commandments. To make an image or idol of God is an abomination in the sight of God. God is a Spirit, and He must be worshiped only in the manner He is pleased to reveal Himself. It is a foolish thing, then, for the Sunday School teacher to imagine that the children when they grow up will forget a picture of Jesus shown to them. It is an abhorrent thing to put such an idol into the minds of children, for they will for-



ever have that mental picture of this man-made face of God.

Instead of such vain idolatry, we must understand the wonder of our text. The Scriptures clearly use the "face of God" as a figurative expression. Through a person's face, we come to identify who the person is. God's face is the glorious revelation of His own Being! He is the Holy One, the glorious and magnificent One, before whom even the holy angels cover their faces. In Exodus 33, from which we earlier quoted, we read of God revealing only His back parts to Moses, for "no man can see God's face and live" (Ex. 33:20). Especially sinful man can never come to the presence of the face of God!

Besides this, it is through the face that one reveals his or her attitude or countenance. A smile on the face, a twinkle in the eye, a willingness to speak face to face, these are all expressions of attitudes one has for the other. Thus, for example, Cain's "countenance fell" (Gen. 4:5) for he was "very wroth."

What kind of countenance does God have towards us? We read in Psalm 34:16: "God's face is against them that do evil...." We know that the holy Father of lights cannot smile upon sinners! He looks down upon fallen mankind, and His countenance is filled with wrath and holy displeasure against us all.

And yet Jehovah says to His people, "Seek ye my face!" The Lord does have a favorable countenance towards His people. In the Scriptures, it is called grace. For while Jehovah's face is indeed against the wicked, His eyes are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry (Ps. 34:15, 1 Pet. 3:12). A man like Noah and a woman like Mary — they both found "grace in the eyes of the Lord." Thus also God's people love to hear the Aaronitic blessing pronounced upon them: "The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Num. 6:25, 26). This is the gracious attitude which Jehovah shows to His own.

Herein lies the thrill for the child of God. It rises above all earthly communion and friendship. The infinitely holy and just God says, "Seek ye my face! My face is not against you! With you I am willing to make a covenant, a bond of friendship. Before my face you will not die, but you shall live, forevermore!"

But how can this be? This is possible only because of the divine revelation of God's grace and favor in the face of His Son, Jesus Christ. It is, after all, the Angel of God's face (translated in this KJV as Angel of God's presence) who comes as Savior to deliver His afflicted people; for in His love and in His pity He redeemed them (Is. 63:9). Of course, the Old Testament saints already saw that by faith. Thus the psalmist could sing of the prospect of "beholding God's face in righteousness" (Ps. 17:15). And thus, in the fullness of time, the Messenger of the Covenant has come into His Temple, and Him we seek (Mal. 3:1). He is the "express image" of God's person (Heb. 1:8), and we have beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14). It is in Jesus that we seek the face of Jehovah our Savior!

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### *To seek Jehovah Himself is our highest calling.*

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Joyfully, thankfully, and most spontaneously the child of God cries out in response, "Thy face, LORD, will I seek!" No, this is not a mere form, parroted by one who simply repeats the divine command. Rather, here is a most beautiful prayer which responds to the clear call of God. It arises out of gratitude for the wonder it contains. Jehovah has directed; what else do I want? Thou hast said, therefore I also say the same!

We ought to learn to pray, then, according to the will of God. If God has not commanded, how dare we pray for it? If the LORD has not so revealed, what right do we have so to worship Him? But if we know assuredly that God has so revealed in His

Word, it is our prerogative and our duty to do the same. Without fear of rejection, without doubt or despair, Thy face, LORD, I will seek! This, after all, is true prayer, and acceptable worship. It is Jehovah Himself who calls us, and through us flows His praise.

Notice too the very personal response of David. Although the call comes to God's people collectively: "Seek ye my face," David beautifully responds, "Thy face, LORD, will I seek." Indeed, there is an important place for praying together as the people of God. There is also the duty of praying in the behalf of one another. But every child of God must be able to respond personally before the face of God. There is no way somebody else can pray this for you.

"Thy face, LORD, will I seek." This is the obedient and determined cry of the psalmist. The rest of the psalm continues to express this sincere response of David. These are not empty words. For we read that he not only continues to cry out to God in verse 9, but also in verse 11 he prays: "Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies." Then David closes so appropriately, in verses 13 and 14, by recounting the goodness of the LORD in the past, encouraging himself to wait on the LORD for the future. Clearly here is a man whose heart sought for the LORD!

For David's is a response of love. It was his heart that said concerning Jehovah, "Seek ye my face!" Now his heart responds in love and devotion, "Thy face, Jehovah, will I seek!" A more beautiful prayer, a more lofty ambition, there cannot be. To seek Jehovah Himself is our highest calling. To know Him and to love Him is our greatest joy. Already now we can enjoy that blessed covenant of friendship with Jehovah our God. But the day will come when we shall see Him face to face in His Son, and we shall hear Him say to us eternally, "Seek ye my face." And we will eagerly respond, "Thy face, LORD, will we seek!" Amen! □



# The Death of Confessional Calvinism in Scottish Presbyterianism (4)

## *Denial of Total Depravity*

Influential Scottish Presbyterian theologian Donald Macleod denies the creedal Reformed and Presbyterian doctrine of total depravity. This is the biblical truth that the natural man, that is, the unregenerated human, is completely sinful. Macleod denies this doctrine in his recent book, *Behold Your God (BYG)*.

The denial of total depravity is clear, bold, and explicit:

Some unregenerate men ... (are) good (*BYG*, p. 130; emphasis, Macleod's). Laudable qualities (are) to be found in the lives of those who are totally alienated from God (*BYG*, p. 117).

Such is the goodness and moral excellence of these praiseworthy qualities in the unregenerated and in the wicked world outside of Christ, according to Donald Macleod, that the apostle of Christ commends them to the believer and commands the believer to think on them constantly. In what must rank as the most extravagant praise of common grace hitherto penned, Macleod ascribes the perfections of Philippians 4:8 ("whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report") to common grace and locates them in

the unregenerated world.

(The objection to common grace) ignores Paul's recognition in Philippians 4:8ff that there are things of good report outside the sphere of grace (*BYG*, p. 127).

Paul indicates in Philippians 4:8ff that there exist, even outside the sphere of redemption, things which are true, righteous, honourable, praiseworthy and virtuous and which deserve the support of the Christian ... (*BYG*, p. 129).

Christians then are to be thinking always on the excellent things in Homer; on the virtuous things in Socrates; on the just things in Roman jurisprudence; and on the lovely things in the latest novel, movie, and piece of secular music.

If the perfections of Philippians 4:8 are indeed found in the unbelieving world (the world judged by the Bible to be a Christ-crucifying world), the Holy Spirit of sanctification is superfluous; the judgment upon the world and all that is in it in I John 2:16 is false; and the call to separation from the world in II Corinthians 6:14ff. is unreasonable.

The truth is that the perfections of Philippians 4:8 are not found in unregenerated men and the system of life that they control. That Paul did not think so is plain in Philippians

2:15 where he describes the world of unregenerated men as "a crooked and perverse nation." The glorious perfections of Philippians 4:8, upon which the saints are always to be thinking, are the perfections revealed in the gospel of Christ and found only in the holy church. As the following verse indicates, the perfections of Philippians 4:8 are "those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me."

According to Macleod, however, unregenerated men, possessing these "laudable qualities," can perform works that are really good: "Fallen man remains capable of both civil good and domestic affection" (*BYG*, pp. 119, 120). Having posed the problem of the flat declaration in Romans 3:12 that "there is none that does good, no, not one," Macleod hedges: "The range of such statements needs to be carefully defined, however." With appeal to the Westminster Confession, 16.7, Macleod then affirms the ability of the unregenerate to do works that are truly, though not "spiritually," good:

But the unregenerate man may still be capable of works which, "for the matter of them, may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others" (*BYG*, p. 129).



These good works of the wicked occur in the sphere of theology; in the sphere of ethics; in the sphere of science; and in the sphere of art (BYG, pp. 133-142).

The cause and explanation of the good works of the man and woman outside of Christ is common grace. In the favor that God has for every human, according to Professor Macleod, He works by the Holy Spirit within most, if not all, unregenerated people, preserving them from being completely depraved; making them virtuous with "laudable qualities"; and enabling them to do much good.

All the blessings enjoyed by the reprobate, all their laudable qualities and all their achievements derive ultimately from this source (namely, common grace — DJE) (BYG, p. 117).

Scottish Presbyterian Donald Macleod denies the Reformed doctrine of total depravity. With the rare exceptions of a Judas Iscariot, a Hitler, the keepers of Auschwitz, and the men of Sodom, unregenerated men and women, although depraved to an extent, are also good (cf. BYG, pp. 128, 129).

### Partial Depravity

Macleod believes and teaches the doctrine of *partial* depravity.

In order to establish the doctrine of partial depravity as Presbyterian orthodoxy in the face of the historic, creedal Presbyterian confession of *total* depravity, Macleod does three important things. First, he redefines the English word, "total." "Total" no longer will mean 'complete.' "Totally," as in "totally depraved," will no longer mean 'wholly,' or 'entirely,' or 'completely.' Rather, it will now mean 'in every part.'

That the unregenerated man and woman are "totally depraved" merely means that there is depravity in every part of their being. Their mind has some depravity or is affected somewhat by depravity. Their will has some depravity or is somewhat affected by depravity. Their body has

some depravity or is somewhat affected by depravity. But there is also some good in their mind, in their will, and in their body. Or, to say it differently, their mind, will, and body are also affected by good — good that comes from God by the operation of the good and Holy Spirit in common grace.

The third objection is that the notion of common grace is inconsistent with the doctrine of man's total depravity. According to both Scripture and confessional theology every function of human personality is affected by sin (BYG, p. 127).

What percentage of every function of human personality is affected by sin, Macleod does not tell us. 90%? 50%? 10%? Is the unregenerated man then 90% good? 50%? or only 10%?

It would be interesting to see how successful this redefinition of "total" would be in everyday life. I tell my insurance agent that my house and its furnishings were totally destroyed in a fire, but he discovers that I mean that the damage extended somewhat to every part of the house so that much of the house and many of the furnishings, in fact, are in good shape.

The redefinition of "total" makes for intriguing revision of Bible history. Saul informs Samuel that he has totally exterminated Amalek, people and animals. When the prophet condemns him for disobeying the Word of Jehovah (to say nothing of lying) in that he spared Agag and the best of the beasts, Saul protests that for him "totally" means 'every part of the nation.'

Peter asks Ananias and Sapphira how much of the money that they received for their land they are giving to the church. They respond, "The total amount." But just before they are to be struck dead, they inform the apostle that to them "total" means a *part* of each payment that they received for the land.

### Partial Depravity and Free Will

The seriousness of this redefini-

tion of "total" for the gospel of grace — the heart of the Reformed faith — appears in this, that now the will of the unregenerated sinner is somewhat good, or somewhat affected by good, that is, somewhat free. When this teaching is brought into connection with Macleod's doctrine that "the sending of preachers is an expression of God's desire that all men should be saved and that it puts men in a position of hope by placing the possibility of faith and salvation within their grasp" (BYG, p. 131), the result is the Roman Catholic and Arminian heresy of salvation by the free will of the sinner.

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### *Denial of total depravity always and necessarily leads to affirmation of free will...*

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Macleod professes to oppose the heresy of free will. But his doctrine favors it. The theory of common grace embraced by Macleod teaches an operation of the Spirit within the ungodly that makes them somewhat good. This is, as such, denial of the Reformed doctrine of total depravity. Denial of total depravity always and necessarily leads to affirmation of free will: The will of the natural man is able to respond positively to the gospel. And the doctrine of free will cuts the heart out of the gospel of salvation by the mercy of God (Rom. 9:16).

In this denial of total depravity is the death of confessional Calvinism in Scottish Presbyterianism.

If Professor Macleod's denial of total depravity represents the view of contemporary Scottish Presbyterianism on the doctrine (as I suspect), Calvinism is already dead in the country that was the mother of Presbyterianism.

If Macleod's denial of total depravity is influencing Scottish Presbyterianism, Calvinism is doomed in Scotland. □

— DJE



## ■ The Reformed View of the "Real Presence"

As a subscriber to the *Standard Bearer*, I have been reading with interest Prof. Hanko's articles in recent issues on Ulrich Zwingli (cf. the *SB*, August 1 and Sept. 1, 1992).

In the most recent article, you mention the problem of the Real Presence. You reject the extremes of consubstantiation (and, I am sure, transubstantiation) and Zwingli's memorialism. But what view lies in between? What is your own view or the view of your church? I have read several books and tracts published by your church, but I have yet to see this issue discussed in any detail.

My interest in this issue is not only personal. I am working on a book on the subject, and I want to convey to the reader an accurate idea of the different positions that one can take on this subject as well as what the various churches believe.

I would appreciate any enlightenment that you could provide.

Jack E. Simmons  
Long Beach, CA

### Response:

The position of the Protestant Reformed Churches on the question of the presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the historic Reformed position as this is defined in the Reformed creeds. Both the Heidelberg Catechism and the Netherlands (Belgic) Confession speak of this matter in detail. Both Confessions were written in the context of the battle which the Reformed Churches had to fight against the consubstantiation of Lutheranism and the transubstantiation of Romanism on the one hand, and Zwinglianism on the other hand. You may expect, therefore, that the position in these creeds is carefully thought out and written. The references are: Heidelberg Catechism, questions and an-

swers 75-79; Netherlands Confession, Article 35. More attention is given to this subject in our creeds than to almost any other doctrine.

Rev. Herman Hoeksema has also written extensively on this subject, and his writings reflect the commitment of the Protestant Reformed Churches to the Reformed creeds. His discussion of Christ's presence in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper is found in *The Triple Knowledge*, Volume II, pages 568-633. This work is a commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism. Rev. Hoeksema has additional material on the question in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, pages 701-726. I urge you to consult this material.

Thank you for writing and for your interest in our *Standard Bearer*.

— Prof. Herman Hanko

## ■ Instrumental Accompaniment in Worship

I have appreciated very much a recent article you wrote on the principle of Scripture alone being the regulator of our worship ("Worshiping God as He Wills," the *Standard Bearer*, May 1, 1992). I have also read with interest your reply to a question directed to you about the application of this principle in worship (the *Standard Bearer*, July 1, 1992). The question was, why do the Protestant Reformed Churches use the organ in worship if they hold to the "regulative principle" of worship?

As one who does not believe it is consistent biblically to use musical accompaniment in the worship of God, I wonder if I could make the following points in connection with your reply to the above query.

If I read you correctly, there is the suggestion in your response that the interpretation of the "regulative principle" by other "Reformed traditions" is different from the historic Dutch interpretation, and that these

other traditions make it apply to "every detail and circumstance connected with public worship." This is, I believe, not correct. The British/Scottish Reformed traditional understanding, for example, is the same as the Dutch Reformed. It is simply a matter of historical record that every divine who wrote on the subject to any extent made the qualification that the principle applies to the matters actually connected to the worship of Almighty God, and not to the circumstances of the worship. It would be wrong historically, I believe, to say or suggest otherwise. The Westminster Confession makes this qualification in Ch. I, vi.; and Dr. W. Young summarizes the historic understanding of the British/Scottish Reformed tradition in an article he wrote, *The Puritan Principle of Worship*. He writes: "The regulative principle does not entail an impossible demand that an indefinite number of minute circumstances concerning the worship of God should be deduced from Scripture. The time and place of worship for a Christian congregation are not minutely prescribed. Yet this does not mean that all circumstances are adiaphora. The circumstances not prescribed by the Word of God are only such as are 'common to human actions and societies' and only some such."

As I understand you, professor, you further suggest that some, together with John L. Girardeau, "misunderstand the principle itself." You give a brief quote from Girardeau's work on the subject, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, and make that quote to be a statement of Girardeau's understanding of the "regulative principle." You find fault with this statement, to the effect that it is a "serious misstatement of the 'regulative principle,'" because it says that "whatsoever in connection with the public worship



of the Church" must have a biblical warrant. It seems you assume that Girardeau's "whatsoever" means "every detail and circumstance" surrounding the worship of God. If this is so, it is simply not true. Girardeau, following those Divines who wrote on the matter before him, spends about twenty-six pages making it clear that he does not mean his "whatsoever" in the sense in which you represent his position, but in the sense in which it has been understood by the divines of the past, including authors of the Westminster Confession of Faith. (See Chapter IV of his work.)

While it is true that the Westminster standards do not use the actual word "whatsoever" in connection with their expression of the "regulative principle," nevertheless, they certainly mean, as Girardeau is simply pointing out, that all that is not a mere circumstance of worship must have a biblical warrant to be introduced into the worship of God. For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith, Ch XXI, I, states, "But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited to His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped ... any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture." (See also the Larger Catechism number 109.) We could also quote from the works of such Westminster divines as George Gillespie, Jeremiah Burroughs, etc. to show that they also understood the matter in that way. See for example, Burroughs' treatise, *Gospel Worship* (pages 13-15), (recently published by Soli Deo Gloria Publications).

You also suggest, professor, that the use of musical instruments in the worship of God is a mere circumstance. I believe we need to ask, should we in the light of the place instrumental music had in the worship of God, as revealed to us in Scripture, see it as a mere natural circumstance? To me, this is the real issue, and the question we need to be addressing.

The Reformed fathers we would both esteem, including famous Continental ones, such as Calvin, Voetius,

and Amesius (William Ames), firmly believed that musical accompaniment in the worship of God was not a non-religious and non-worship circumstance. As they point out (such as Calvin's commentaries on the Psalms which refer to musical instruments in the worship of God), the use of instrumental music was intricately tied up with Temple worship in Scripture. It had a deep connection with such worship, and thus had clear religious significance, and was not treated as a circumstance in the worship of God. This is seen, for example, from the fact it was introduced by divine warrant, and not by the will of man. Such fathers understood that musical accompaniment in worship was a part of those religious types and shadows such as altars, candles, incense, and special clothing vested with a religious meaning, that passed away with the Old Testament worship. It seems to me, that we cannot argue that either the Scriptures or our fathers of the greatest periods of the Reformed faith, even on the continent, believed that instrumental accompaniment to worship was a mere circumstance. Might we not as well argue that candles, incense, vestments, altars, etc. can be used where worship is conducted, and be seen as only aids to worship, not worship itself, and therefore are only natural circumstances? I presume that you would not agree with the use of such things in the place where worship is offered to God, and would see them as badges and suggestions of a false ritualistic worship such as Rome practices. I ask then, if we disagree with incense, candles, etc., how do we keep them out when we let things of the same category be used in the worship services?

I appreciate, of course, that it could be argued that vestments, candles, incense, etc., are also mere items of circumstance. I would agree that they would be, if they were to keep one warm in winter, light the building in the absence of electric lights, or keep the mosquitoes away. But when they go beyond this natural and non-religious use, and are connected to the worship of God, so that

in the popular mind they assume a religious function, and are used to assist the worship of God, they are no more a circumstance. The writings of the fathers we would both esteem are, I believe, clear on this.

I respect it as proper, and one thing, for the Protestant Reformed Churches to order their own spiritual house so that they understand that instrumental musical accompaniment to the praise of God is a thing with no religious or spiritual significance in their worship, even though the denomination I come from, which is a friend to your own, does not. It is however another thing, I would suggest, to say that the Reformed churches in their past understood the matter the same way as your churches. I do not believe that this can be historically verified. Is it not simply a matter of historical record that the original Reformed Synods and Churches of The Netherlands did not see them as a mere circumstance? Was it not only at a later date, as in Britain, when the full-blooded earlier Reformed theology was no longer widely appreciated, that such thinking crept in?

For these above reasons, I find it difficult to see that it can be maintained that the place of instrumental music is in the category of lights and heaters and pews — things of mere circumstance and decency and order in the worship service.

In summary, I believe that, in light of what our Reformed fathers of the early Reformed churches believed from Scripture on this question, the argument that musical accompaniment to singing and prayer in the worship of God is a mere circumstance of worship, and therefore the "regulative principle" is not relevant to the question of its use or not, is very difficult to maintain. For myself, I cannot see, then, as you suggest in your response, that Girardeau, and others who cannot in good conscience accept the use of musical instruments in the worship of God, have "not simply an overly rigorous application of the principle but rather a misunderstanding of the principle itself."

May the Lord graciously con-



tinue to bless His cause in the midst of your churches, and make them a blessing to His true church throughout the world.

(Rev.) Chris Coleborn  
Brisbane, Australia

#### Response:

My response to a question about organs in the July 1, 1992 *Standard Bearer* contended that instrumental accompaniment of congregational singing does not sin against the "regulative principle." The "regulative principle" regarding public worship, as expressed in Q. 96 of the Heidelberg Catechism, requires that the elements that constitute the worship of the church be those, and those only, that are commanded by the Word of God. The church is not at liberty to introduce, as part of her worship, whatever activities please her.

The "regulative principle" does not require that there be biblical warrant for all the circumstances and details pertaining to the church's service of worship. The church has freedom here, although she must take care in this area not to depart from the Word and to cultivate the peace of the congregation (cf. the Belgic Confession, Art. 32).

Regardless of his treatment of the circumstances of worship elsewhere in his book, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (New Covenant Publication Society, 1983), it is essential to John L. Girardeau's condemnation of instrumental accompaniment that he phrase the "regulative principle" exactly as he does: "Whatsoever, in connection with the public worship of the church, is not commanded by Christ ... is forbidden."

The importance of expressing the "regulative principle" in just this way for the condemnation of instrumental accompaniment may not be ignored. Girardeau himself tells us that this phrasing of the "regulative principle" is basic to his entire argument. In the last chapter of his book, "Concluding Remarks," Girardeau writes:

The foregoing argument has proceeded principally by two steps. The first is: Whatsoever, in connection with the public worship of the church, is not commanded by Christ, either expressly or by good and necessary consequence, in his Word, is forbidden. The second is: Instrumental music, in connection with the public worship of the church, is not so commanded by Christ. The conclusion is: Instrumental music, in connection with the public worship of the church, is forbidden (p. 201).

This is misstatement of the "regulative principle." It is deliberate misstatement of the principle (no doubt, sincerely) in order to bring instrumental accompaniment under the ban of the "regulative principle." But it is misstatement. Not one Reformed or Presbyterian confession explains the second commandment as requiring biblical warrant for "whatsoever in connection with the public worship of the church." With one clear voice all the Reformed and Presbyterian confessions explain the second commandment as requiring biblical warrant for the elements themselves that make up the church's public worship (cf. the Heid. Cat., Questions 96 and 103; the West. Conf., 21.1 and 5; and the West. Larger Catechism, Q. 108). Not "whatsoever in connection with the public worship of the church," but the worship itself as regards its elements, e.g., preaching, prayer, singing, and sacraments, must have warrant in the command of Christ.

The seriousness of Girardeau's misstatement of the "regulative principle" (which is the formulation that is necessary in order to condemn instrumental accompaniment) is simply this, that on this formulation of the "regulative principle" every last aspect, detail, and circumstance connected in any way with public worship must have warrant in a command of Scripture. The failure of the worshiping congregation to ground the least detail of public worship, no matter how remotely connected to the worship, in a command of Christ renders the worship violation of the second commandment. "Whatsoever

in connection with the public worship ...."

By this formulation of the "regulative principle," Girardeau meant to condemn the worship that uses instrumental accompaniment as "heresy in the sphere of worship." In fact, he condemned *all* worship as "heresy," since no congregation can keep the "regulative principle" as formulated in this way.

Instrumental accompaniment of congregational singing is not a distinct element of public worship, like preaching or the use of the sacraments. It is not some rite or ceremony which the Protestant Reformed Churches have introduced into public worship in defiance of the "regulative principle." John Calvin notwithstanding, instrumental accompaniment is one of the incidental circumstances connected with worship that is perfectly allowable in the church's freedom. Indeed, to use the language of the Belgic Confession in the article that speaks of this freedom, instrumental accompaniment is "useful and beneficial."

Nor is the organ or piano the only means of assisting congregational singing that falls in the category of the freedom of the church within the bounds of the "regulative principle."

In the Scottish Presbyterian tradition, it is common that congregational singing in public worship be helped by means of a precentor. Often, this precentor helps himself, and the singing of the congregation, by having recourse to a "wee" instrument — a pitch pipe or a tuning fork.

Scripture nowhere commands a precentor, much less a tuning fork. The precentor with his tuning fork is a "whatsoever in connection with public worship" that has no warrant in a command of Christ. For all this, Scottish Presbyterians are not guilty of transgressing the second commandment in their worship. On the contrary.

Just so, for singing Psalms with the help of an organ the PRC are not guilty of the horrendous iniquity charged against them by John L. Girardeau: "They rebel against the



law of Christ, their King."

We forgive him this grossly unjust accusation.

But we do not allow our consciences to be oppressed by it. No, not

for an hour. □

— DJE

*Contribution*

*Henry Huiskens*

## Free Christian School Edgerton, Minnesota

What is "Free"? This question has been asked over and over. The name was suggested by Rev. William Verhil, who was pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton in 1944, the year that the school society was organized. Rev. Verhil was an immigrant from The Netherlands.

In 1834 our forefathers separated from the State Church. The State

Church received aid from the State at that time. The reason they separated was that the State Church had become too liberal and had drifted away from the truth. The State Church gave aid to the church and school, but also had rule over the church and school. In 1834, when our forefathers separated from the State Church, they agreed to be "free" from any rule from the State or from the church.

In those days there were many churches and schools that included "Free" in their names.

We in Edgerton believe it is a good name. Had we included the name of our church in the name of our school, we would have been without a school for ten years after the split of 1953. We believe it is a good thing to keep church and school separate. Our schools are parental schools, not parochial schools, not controlled and ruled by the state or by the church, but by the parents.

May this answer the "What's 'Free'?" question. □

*Mr. Huiskens is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Edgerton, MN.*

*Contribution*

*John Hilton*

## Reflections from the Bible about Tornadoes

On the evening of June 16, 1992, God sent a powerful tornado through an area just east of Edgerton, Minnesota. In the nearby towns of Leota, Chandler, and Lake Wilson, many farms, homes, and businesses were completely destroyed or severely damaged. Damage was estimated at

between forty and fifty million dollars. At least twenty-nine injuries were reported, and one woman later died from the injuries she sustained.

No one who lived near or in the path of the storm could help but be awestruck by such a tremendous display of God's power. People who have lived in the Midwest all their lives, including the newscasters who reported on the storm, said that the storm system of that night was the most powerful and widespread of any that they can remember.

As far as I know, the King James Version of the Bible (which I use) does not use the word "tornado." There are, however, numerous references to whirlwinds, which seem to have the same power as tornadoes. Much of what I will say from the Bible about tornadoes is said literally about whirlwinds. The rest of my comments about tornadoes will come from what the Bible has to say about turbulence in the skies, mighty clouds which the Lord directs to do His will, and storms in general.

*Mr. Hilton is principal/teacher in the Free Christian School of Edgerton, MN.*



## A Picture of the Destruction of the Wicked

The overwhelming majority of references to whirlwinds in the Bible present them as pictures of the destruction of the wicked. Some of these references are Psalm 58:9; Proverbs 1:27 and 10:25; Isaiah 17:13 and 40:24; and Jeremiah 23:19, 25:32, and 30:23. In Psalm 58:9-11, we read: "Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away as with a whirlwind, both living, and in his wrath. The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth."

## A Manifestation of the Power and Sovereignty of God

Some places in Scripture present the whirlwind, or tornado, as one of many types of weather, all of which are under God's control, and which show forth the glory of God. Job 37 is such a passage. Consider verses 2-14. "Hear attentively the noise of his voice, and the sound that goeth out of his mouth. He directeth it under the whole heaven, and his lightning unto the ends of the earth. After it a voice roareth: he thundereth with the voice of his excellency; and he will not stay them when his voice is heard. God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend. For he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth; likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of his strength. He sealeth up the hand of every man; that all men may know his work. Then the beasts go into dens, and remain in their places. Out of the south cometh the whirlwind: and cold out of the north. By the breath of God frost is given: and the breadth of the waters is straitened. Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud: he scattereth the bright cloud: And it is turned round about by his counsels: that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth. He causeth it

to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy. Harken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God."

## A Trial to Work Patience in God's People

If we also consider the life of Job a little further, we can see how God sends trials on His people through tornadoes and other storms. Job was a man "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." And yet when Satan asked permission from God to afflict Job, God allowed Job to suffer. When all of Job's seven sons and three daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother's house, great wind came from the desert and smote the four corners of the house so that it fell on them all and killed them. When the Bible describes the wind as smiting the four corners of the house, I believe we have the description of a tornado.

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*Our response  
to the increase of the signs  
of the coming of Christ  
must be always to draw  
nearer to our God.*

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Such a loss of his family brought untold misery to Job, of course. Romans 5:3 tells us, however, that "... we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience." The patience of Job is proverbial. James 5:11 tells us of Job's patience. "Behold we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."

Job went through a time of intense personal suffering when the Lord took away all his possessions, even all his children. But by the grace of God he could say, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed

be the name of the Lord."

The Lord may allow Satan to sift us as wheat (Luke 22:31), even as He allowed Satan to have power over all Job had, to afflict him (Job 1:12), by taking away his children in a great wind. But the Lord always sustains His people, that their faith does not fail (Luke 22:32). Even though the storms of this life may remove from us all of our earthly pride, God uses these things to prepare us more and more for His heavenly kingdom.

## A Sign of the Coming of Christ

Another important aspect of God's sending such a great storm is to see it as a sign of the coming of Christ. In Luke 21, verses 11 and 26 speak of "fearful sights and great signs from heaven" and "men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken."

Almost everyone agrees that we are seeing an increase of destruction, intensity, and frequency of natural storms in these latter days. We Christians should therefore be increasingly aware that the days are hastening on toward the end of the world, the coming of Christ in the clouds, the destruction of the wicked, and the glorious final redemption of all God's elect. (As further proof of the increased intensity of tornado destruction, we could recall that in April, 1965, forty-seven tornadoes swept across the Midwest in two days, killing 257 people. In February, 1971, tornadoes caused 115 deaths in the Mississippi delta area. And on April 3, 1974, tornadoes swept from Georgia to Ontario, killing approximately 350 people.)

## A Warning to Live Godly Lives

Although as God's people we are exhorted in the Scriptures not to be overly anxious and fearful of the terrible signs of Christ's coming, it is likewise true that we are warned not to be complacent and worldly minded. Our thoughts must not be on this present world, as the people in the days of Noah before the flood came,



giving ourselves to our eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, so that the day of the Lord will come upon us as a thief in the night, even as the great flood came upon the unbelieving world and swept them all away.

Our response to the increase of the signs of the coming of Christ must be always to draw nearer to our God. If destruction touches our property or loved ones we must maintain our patient trust in the Lord, as Job did when he said to his wife, "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10. As Romans 8 instructs us, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, and all things work together for good to them that love God.

If, on the other hand, we are personally untouched by the terrible upheavals in the earth that portend the coming of Christ we must not relax our vigil and live carelessly. Luke 21:34 and 35 tells us: "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it

come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth."

Our salvation is sure; but an important part of our Christian living in these last days is to forsake the things of this present world and set our hope on the things that are eternal. When we see more and more destruction of earthly things we should not sorrow over their loss, and strive all the more to build up our earthly possessions. But we should see the beginning of the end of this present world, and be exceedingly glad that we "have in heaven a better and an enduring substance" (Heb. 10:34). Our lives should "declare plainly" that we "desire a better country, that is, an heavenly," that God be not ashamed to be called our God (Heb. 11:14-16).

Should we find that we are truly scared by all the increase of the fearful signs of Christ's coming, in spite of God's promises, again we must see that our only comfort is to draw near to God and live close to Him. Luke 21:36 tells us, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to

stand before the Son of man." God hears the trustful prayer, and He comforts us in Psalm 91:9, 10: "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."

Finally, above all, we must rejoice, even in the midst of the most terrible of God's judgments in the earth. "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitudes of isles be glad thereof. Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.... Zion heard, and was glad; and the daughters of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments, O Lord" (Ps. 97:1, 2, 8). That same Savior who has removed all curse from us on the cross is coming upon the clouds to show to all that we are His, and that He has earned an eternal, glorious inheritance for us.

"And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your hearts; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). □

## All Around Us

## Prof. Robert Decker

### ■ More Leakage or Hemorrhage?

Since we last reported on the statistics of those congregations which have seceded from the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), seven more groups have formed independent churches. Only three of the previous secessions have occurred outside of Canada. Of the seven which have left the CRC, four are in the United States and three of the four are in West Michigan, long a center of denomina-

tional loyalty. The seven newly formed independent congregations total some 1,400 members. The total number of seceders has now topped 4,000 in twenty churches and shows no signs of slackening.

The two largest seceding churches are Dutton Independent Reformed Church and Lynwood Christian Reformed Church (Independent). Both of these congregations voted to leave the CRC by over eighty percent margins. The Dutton church is located just south of Grand Rapids and numbers over 300 members. Lynwood, with nearly 600 members, is located in a suburb on Chicago's south side.

Both of these churches have long

led the way of the conservative cause in the CRC. Rev. Rein Leestma, recently retired pastor of Lynwood, led the unsuccessful attempt to discipline Dr. Harry Boer for his denial of the doctrine of reprobation. Leestma also helped in the formation of the Alliance of Reformed Churches. Dutton, under a succession of pastors (Rev. Leestma in the 1950s, *Outlook* editor Rev. Peter DeJong in the 1970s, and Rev. Warren Lammers in the 1980s), has been opposing liberal trends in the CRC for forty years. Dutton's current pastor, Rev. Paul Murphy, has been an active participant in the Committee of Concerned Members of the CRC.

Both pastors of these congrega-

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*Prof. Decker is professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.*



tions, Rev. Murphy of Dutton and Rev. Kenneth Eiten of Lynwood, cite the authority of Scripture and its function in the life of the church as the issue causing them to secede.

The other two congregations in Michigan are in Cutlerville (25 families and 190 attenders) and Overisel (80 committed members). Cutlerville is just five miles from Dutton, and Overisel is a bit south of Holland.

The other three churches are in Canada — Emmanuel Reformed Church in Neerlandia, Alberta (150 members), Smithers (72 members), and Agassiz (84 members). The latter two churches are in British Columbia.

More groups are poised to pull out in London, Hamilton, and Ancaster, Ontario.

We commend these churches and their members for taking the difficult step out of the denomination of which they have for so long been a part. What does the future hold for them? Will they eventually form still another Reformed denomination? Will they remain independent? This latter surely cannot be a valid option for a Reformed church. Will they seek union with an existing Reformed or Presbyterian denomination?

And, yes, just one more question: is there any possibility at all that they would be willing to sit down with our Protestant Reformed Churches, as this writer thinks they should, and discuss in a brotherly fashion, on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity, the issues (especially common grace) which currently divide us?

*The Banner  
Christian Renewal  
Reformed Believer's Press Service*

## ■ Mid-America Preparing to Move

Mid-America Reformed Seminary, located in Orange City, Iowa, is negotiating a purchase price on a seven-acre site in Munster, Indiana. Their goal is to occupy a new building on this site by August of 1994. Currently Mid-America has a student body of 18 men. Most of these are

from the Christian Reformed Church.

This semester also marks the return of Rev. Mark VanderHart to the faculty. VanderHart has completed a two-year study leave at the Potchefstroom University for Higher Christian Education in South Africa. VanderHart's replacement, Rev. Raymond Zorn of Australia, has returned to his homeland.

*Christian Renewal*

## ■ Reformed Ecumenical Council 1992

The Reformed Ecumenical Council held its last meeting in Athens, Greece. Among other things, this gathering came close to terminating the membership of one of its charter members, the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN). The GKN has been "under fire" from member churches of the REC for some time because of its approval of homosexuality and other errors. Several denominations, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in North America for example, have left the REC because of its refusal heretofore to oust the GKN. At its meeting in June the REC's interim committee, while strongly critical of the GKN, recommended that there were *insufficient* grounds to terminate the membership of the GKN. A majority of the advisory committee recommended that there were *sufficient* grounds for terminating the membership of the GKN. This failed to gain the necessary two-thirds majority required by the REC constitution. The minority report of the advisory committee (virtually the same advice as that of the interim committee) also failed. The GKN delegation walked out of the sessions in protest. When they later returned they informed the REC that it is likely that the next synod of the GKN will decide to withdraw from the REC.

It is a sad commentary on the REC that it lacks the votes to oust the GKN, which has openly and even defiantly denied most, if not all, of the cardinal truths of the Reformed faith.

*REC News Exchange  
Trowel and Sword*

## ■ All Within Us

With the Editor's permission I include this bit of news that has to do with our own denomination and its seminary in Grandville, Michigan. The seminary community was delighted just this week to learn that two donors have contributed just over \$42,000.00 to our Building Expansion Fund. Total contributions thus far are about \$170,000.00. Synod has authorized the Theological School Committee to proceed with getting construction drawings when \$220,000.00 has been received through voluntary gifts, and to award the construction contract when \$330,000.00 has been received. These goals are now within reach, it would seem, in the near future. The total cost of the project is estimated at about \$430,000.00.

A hearty thanks to all who have contributed! And, to those who as yet have not, will you help *your* seminary reach the goals? The seminary really does need the library-study area and office and storage space.

More news of the seminary will appear, D.V., in the December 1 issue of the *Standard Bearer*. □

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for a  
CHRISTMAS  
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# The Bible and Your Faith (2)

In our last article, I asked you to put on your thinking caps to consider the place of the Bible in your defense of the faith and in resolving your own doubts and struggles. You were able to see, even briefly, how Scripture bears testimony within itself as to its authority. Scripture itself bears witness that it is from God Himself. When you face attacks against your intelligence for believing the inspiration and authority of the Bible, you may be confident that you have a strong intellectual and reasonable foundation for your faith.

But there is another matter involved. There is a spiritual dimension as well in this matter. You must not expect that the testimony within the Bible itself will convince the unbeliever of its inspiration and authority. The unbeliever, especially one with a high regard for his own intellect, has set man's mind as the authority over all things. When you point him to the self-testimony of Scripture, you must not consider yourself a failure when you do not convince him. Nor must you let his unbelief cause you to sway from your position. For there is a spiritual dimension to our belief that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. Only the God-given bond of faith and a personal relationship with the living Christ enables one to hear His voice, also as He speaks through the Scriptures. Herein also lies the necessity that our witness to unbelievers be bathed with our prayers that the Spirit open their blind eyes, if He is willing to save them.

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 Spirit testifies with your spirit, that these things are true. To you the matter of the Bible's authority is as sure as the fact that you came from your mother's womb. If a professor or classmate should question the fact of your origin, you would immediately understand that he is either playing a game with you, or that he belongs in a mental institution. Just as sure is the matter of the Bible's origin and authority to you who are in Christ Jesus.

## The Practical Application of Biblical Authority

"Now," you ask, "what does all this deep thought have to do with my own life from a practical point of view?" Everything! The Bible alone provides a unified answer for all of life. When you put away your rationalism, your worship of your own mind, you will recover the beautiful understanding that is seen in rational Christian thought as guided by the Scriptures. Through the Bible you will see that which embraces all rational thought and raises it to a higher level, the level of true knowledge.

## The Death-blow of Relativism

Let me put it negatively, first of all. If we do not have the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God, absolutely authoritative and determinative for doctrine and life, we have absolutely no standard of right and wrong. None, except the ever-changing opinions of sociologists and psychologists. That is evident in today's culture and society. It is evident that for the most part there are no absolutes in today's society. Rights and wrongs are all rela-

tive. For a young man to shack up with a woman outside the bond of marriage is not necessarily wrong anymore. The rightness or wrongness depends entirely upon the circumstances and maturity of the individuals involved. The Bible's condemnation of such an arrangement as fornication is rejected. That is just one example out of a multitude. Almost our whole society is built upon the thinking of relativism. That is why it has become more of a crime in our country to endanger animals than to murder unborn babies.

## The Life-giving Breath of Scripture's Authority

Only a strong view of Scripture will enable you to withstand the pressure of such wavering and foolish thinking. Without a strong commitment to God's absolutes set forth in the Bible, the early church could never have remained faithful in the face of such severe persecution. Without a strong commitment to the authority of God's absolutes set forth in the Bible, Martin Luther would never have stood in the face of persecution, to restore the church long lost in pagan thought. Without a strong commitment to God's absolutes set forth in the Bible, you will be consumed by doubt and by the doctrines of devils. When the ungodly haul you before the judges of the antichristian world power, and demand you to reject the Scriptures or die, you will stand only in the power of faith, with a strong commitment to the absolute authority of the Bible.

But still more must be said.

## Your Calling Toward Scripture

The Bible is not some magic medicine to heal all diseases and to

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ward off all superstitions. It is not some air purifier that works by lying on a table in your house, sucking away from you and into itself all temptations that surround you and clearing the air of all doctrines of devils. The Bible must be read and understood and believed — by you.

If you do not understand and submit yourself to the truths and standard of the Scriptures, you will not resolve your doubts and you cannot possibly grow in knowledge and holiness. That is why it is so sad that we live in an age when so many are hostile to the Bible and its authoritative teaching. Unresolved doubt develops into error and sin. And one need not look far beyond his or her own life to see the truth of that. Our whole society is permeated with the consequences of the rejection of and hostility toward the Scriptures as the Word of God. And, sad to say, those consequences are often our own experience

because of our own neglect or even rejection of the Word of God.

We are called always to search the Scriptures, even as did the Bereans after hearing the preaching of the apostle Paul (Acts 17:11). God's words of judgment upon Ephraim (Hosea 8:12) are frightful words: "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing."

Yes, it is a sign of great sin in our midst, when we know all about what is going on in the National Basketball Association or we know all the statistics of the major league baseball players, but know not the substance of Jesus' teachings in the gospel accounts, nor the truth taught in Paul's letter to the Romans. It is an indication of our bondage to sin, when we know all about what is going on in Washington D.C., yet are ignorant of the Psalms, or the prophecies of Zechariah and Malachi. "Hear the word of the LORD,

ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land .... My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hosea 4:1, 6).

It may be we have fallen into such sinfulness without meaning to do so. But inadvertent sin is still sin. Let us repent of our sins, and heed the call of Isaiah (55:6, 7): "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Let us hear and obey the authoritative Scriptures. □

*A Cloud of Witnesses*

*Prof. Herman Hanko*

## John Knox: The Reformer of Scotland

God not only calls men to particular tasks in His kingdom; He also suits the man He calls with the personality, gifts, and strength to do the work.

So it was with John Knox, the Reformer of Scotland.

Born and raised in a harsh land, he emerged from his years of preparation a harsh and unbending defender of the faith. With roots deeply sunk into the soil of his motherland, he was fed with the sturdiness of

Scotland's gloomy heaths. Heir of the dour, unbending individualism which so characterized Scotland's populace, he was tempered to stand alone against queens and princes, unmoved by their threats or tears. He was, in God's wisdom, the only one who could bring the Reformation to Scotland.

### Youth and Education

It is quite amazing, and a perpetual testimony of the power of grace, that the Reformation came at all to Scotland. Scotland was known throughout Europe as the most backward, the most superstitious, the most Roman Catholic of any country. And the church which had held sway here

for centuries, unchallenged and unmolested, was a church in which corruption had reached depths found in the few other places. One would think that reformation here would be impossible.

John Knox was born sometime during the year 1505 in the small village of Gifford in East Lothian. His parents were sufficiently wealthy, apparently, to provide him with a good education. He received his early training in Haddington and was then sent to the University of Glasgow. In the university he earned his M.A. degree and was sufficiently proficient in his studies to gain an assistant professorship.

Somewhere near 1530 Knox went

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to St. Andrews, on the East Coast by the sea, just a bit north of the Firth of Forth, to teach. It may have been here that his studies included some of the old church fathers, particularly Jerome and Augustine, and that the first doubts concerning Roman Catholicism rose in his soul. At any rate, he remained a firm Roman Catholic for the present and was ordained into clerical orders.<sup>1</sup>

### Early Reformation and Exile

It was not, however, until 1542 that Knox became a Protestant, under what influences or by what means is not known. So clearly did he begin to proclaim Protestant views that he was degraded from orders as a heretic, and he was compelled to go to the south part of Scotland to find hiding from those who hated him.

While in the southern part of his country, Knox tutored the sons of two nobles and occasionally preached. It was during this period that he met and became a close friend of George Wishart, a bold minister and teacher of Reformation doctrine. Wishart was soon apprehended by the Roman authorities and was taken away to be tried and condemned to burning at the stake. Here really began Knox's commitment to the Reformation. Clinging to Wishart as he was led away, and hoping to die with him, Knox was told by his friend: "Nay, return to your bairns, and God bless you; one is sufficient for a sacrifice."

Wishart was burned to death by Cardinal Beaton of St. Andrews in March of 1546. Nobles, sympathetic to Protestantism, stormed the castle, killed Beaton, and invited other Protestants, including Knox to take up residence in the castle.

Knox lived in the castle for awhile, preaching and teaching, but in July of 1547 the castle was captured by a part of the French navy, Knox

and others were made prisoners of the French, and, after being sentenced in France, Knox was condemned to the galleys as a slave chained to an oar.

Who knows what agony he endured during the nineteen months of his slavery? Who knows how often he questioned the ways of God when, e.g., he could glimpse through the small oar opening the spires of St. Andrews cathedral as his galley rode the waves off the coast of Scotland? He emerged from this ordeal with infirmities which were to remain with him all his life (his own "thorn in the flesh"), but with a faith tempered in the fire of suffering and a stronger then ever determination to engage in the Lord's work.

Knox was released only because Edward VI, Protestant king of England, directly intervened on his behalf with the king of France.<sup>2</sup> It was probably for this reason that Knox did not return to Scotland, but took up residence in England. Here he spent about five years, married Marjory Bowes, often preached every day of the week, worked with the reformers in England, and was offered a bishopric. This offer he declined, partly, it seems, because he already had some misgivings about the hierarchical form of church government practiced in the Church of England, but also partly because he foresaw "evil days to come."

These days came soon enough with the untimely death of Edward and the accession of Mary Tudor, "Bloody Mary," as she was called, a loyal daughter of Rome and one determined to restore Roman Catholicism to England—even at the price of the blood of the Protestants.

Knox fled to Europe. The year was 1554. He had wanted to stay in England because, as he said with some understatement, "Never could I die in a more honest quarrel." But, prevailed upon by friends to flee, he

began a new work on the continent, in Frankfurt-on-the-Main, in a church of English exiles. Things did not work out well here, for a dispute rose over liturgy, particularly responsive readings, and Knox, with some disgust, resigned his work and took up residence in Geneva.

Calvin was at the height of his powers and influence, and the two spent much time together discussing theology and, more particularly, church polity. Knox pastored an English congregation and spent the happiest time of his life on the shores of Lake Lemman, beneath the shadow of the Alps, and, to use Knox's own words: "in the most perfect school of Christ that ever was since the days of the apostles."

His stay in Geneva was interrupted by a rather hasty trip back to Scotland. It is not entirely clear why Knox went; nor is it clear why he returned to Geneva. During his stay, however, he preached, taught, and visited day and night. His influence was great, especially on some of the nobles. The result was that events began to favor the Reformation, and the first National League & Covenant was sworn to in 1556.

Some have charged him with cowardice for not staying in his native land; it is most likely true that if he had stayed he would have been killed. Immediately after his flight he was condemned *in absentia* and burned in effigy.

Two things resulted from his stay in Geneva: he was thoroughly equipped to establish a complete reformation in Scotland, not only in doctrine, but also in church polity and liturgy. He also authored a pamphlet entitled (in characteristic language): "First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regime of Women." The pamphlet was written primarily against Bloody Mary (although no names were mentioned), but it got him into endless trouble with Elizabeth, queen of England, and with Mary, queen of Scotland.

In 1559 Knox returned to Scotland for good, and with his return the work of reformation advanced rap-

<sup>1</sup> Knox holds a certain distinction in this respect: he was a priest in the Roman Catholic Church, a prelate in the Church of England, and a minister in the Church of Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> The date was February, 1549, and Knox was 44 years old.



idly. It was evident that the common people hungered for the pure preaching of the gospel, a hunger created by a mighty work of the Spirit of Christ. Romanism was abandoned, superstition was condemned, the chains of Rome were broken, and the nation moved steadily in the direction of becoming a Protestant country.

A few of the outstanding events and characteristics of the progressing reformation are the following:

The Protestants began to be called "The Congregation" and the leaders, "The lords of the Congregation." A presbyterian system of church government, which Knox had learned in Geneva and which was markedly different from that in England, was instituted.<sup>3</sup>

As Protestantism advanced, especially in some areas in south and east Scotland, particularly in Perth, riots broke out during which images, Romish liturgical trappings, monasteries, and altars were smashed and burned by runaway multitudes of those who had come to see Rome's idolatry.

When war was threatened by a possible invasion from France, and by the decision of England to send troops, a compromise was reached which avoided war and called for the meeting of a free Parliament to settle religious questions. This Parliament, which met in August, 1560, established the Reformed religion, and adopted a confession,<sup>4</sup> a Book of Discipline,<sup>5</sup> and a Book of Common Order.<sup>6</sup>

In that same year, in December, the first General Assembly of the Scottish Church met in Edinburgh in St. Magdalene's chapel.

<sup>3</sup> This difference was to lead to great trouble later during the time of the Covenanters and the persecution under Charles I and Charles II, times called "The Killing Times."

<sup>4</sup> The Scottish Confession of Faith, which was the confessional basis of the Scottish Presbyterian Church until it was superseded by the Westminster Confessions.

<sup>5</sup> It functioned as a Church Order.

<sup>6</sup> A guide for ministers in their work and calling.

In all of these activities, Knox assumed a leading role. Perhaps no more interesting part in all his reformatory work can be found than in his interviews with Queen Mary.<sup>7</sup> Mary wanted nothing so much as to return Scotland to the papal fold. Knox stood in her way. In at least two interviews with him she tried by every means to dissuade him from his course. She argued, pleaded, cajoled, threatened, attempted to move him with her feminine wiles (of which she had plenty, for she was a beautiful woman), and even was reduced to tears. Through it all Knox stood firm and unmovable, to the point where some of his contemporaries and subsequent historians have sometimes criticized him for failure to show proper respect to his queen and for a hardheartedness which bordered on cruelty.

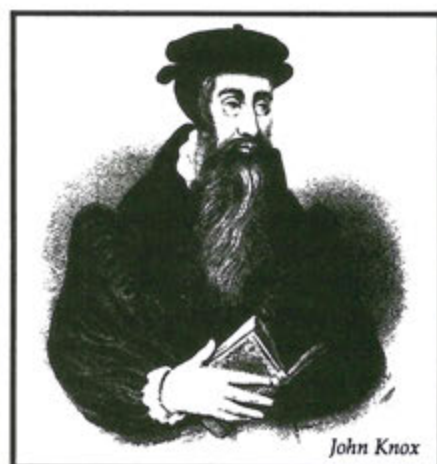
But this was Knox, a man of iron will and implacable purpose; a man who did not know that the word "tact" existed in the English language, or, if he did know, did not know what it meant. He spoke forthrightly and clearly, and worried not an iota whom he offended if it was for the cause of the truth of God.

He triumphed over incredible odds. He was shot at, ambushed, and verbally abused beyond what many others had to endure. Of an archbishop's greed, he wryly said, "As he sought the world, it fled him not." His purpose he himself defined: "To me it is enough to say that black is not white, and man's tyranny and foolishness is not God's perfect ordinance."

As was true of the reformers throughout Europe, Knox was first of all a preacher. Every Lord's day he preached two times, and during the week three times in St. Giles Cathedral.

In 1563 he retired to relative privacy because his forcefulness and uncompromising attitude offended

<sup>7</sup> Not Mary Tudor, called "Bloody Mary," who ruled in England, but Mary Guise, sometimes called "Mary, Queen of the Scots."



John Knox

many. But his influence continued to be felt. When Mary was forced to abdicate the throne in 1567, reforms continued. It was decided, for example, that the ruler of Scotland must henceforth be protestant, and many provisions were made for the support of the clergy. Also under Knox's influence, schools were established. He wanted schools in every parish, a college in every important town, and three universities to serve the nation.<sup>8</sup>

In 1570 Knox was felled by a stroke, from which he partially recovered. He retired to St. Andrews, where his reformatory work had begun, and there preached even though he had to be carried to the pulpit. But he himself spoke of the fact that he was "weary of the world" and "thirsting to depart." On November 24, 1570, at the age of 65, the Lord took him home.

Though he was small and weak, beset since his days in the galleys with many infirmities, he was of a vigorous mind and implacable will. His piety and zeal knew no bounds. He stamped his character on the church which he was instrumental in establishing. In Geneva, Switzerland stands a Reformation Monument on which appear figures of the great reformers. By Knox's figure are written the words: *Un homme avec Dieu est toujours dans la majorite* ("One man with God is always a majority"). Such men the church needs today. □

<sup>8</sup> How striking it is that all the reformers were profoundly concerned with Christian education and did much to advance it.



# The Christian and Sickness

Sickness and disease is a common, fearful reality that we all have to deal with in this sin-cursed world. How many hundreds of different kinds of sicknesses there are! From birth our bodies are filled with an army of germs and potential diseases. Some already afflict the babe in its mother's womb and prevent it from ever seeing the light of a single day. Sickness can afflict man in the strength of his youth and cut him down and leave him languishing on a bed without even being able as much as to move. Other diseases afflict especially the elderly, near the end of their life's pilgrimage. Some diseases are so terrible that men die from them very quickly, in just a few days. Others will torment a man for months and even years. What fear and anxiety are brought on by sickness! What pain and sorrow and trouble. Because God made our bodies and spirits to be one, sickness often causes the deepest depression and despair.

Every man in this world will be afflicted with disease and sickness sometime during his life, some much more severely and terribly than others. If we are not sick now, let us not boast or imagine that we shall never be sick. Our day will come. If the Lord tarries in His coming we will all finally be brought to death and the grave by some dreadful disease, even if that disease is only what is called "old age." The Christian is not exempt from any of the terrible diseases that afflict man.

There are those who teach the false doctrine that God does not want any of His children ever to be sick. Or they teach the idea that, whenever the Christian is sick, God will immediately heal him. Those who teach this false doctrine stand condemned before God. They shall be judged especially for the cases where they by their false teachings have caused true saints of God in times of sickness to doubt and to be cast into the depths of despair.

The Christian who knows the truth of God's Word and the ways of God's providence knows that God's inscrutable purpose is often realized for His saints along the deep ways of fearful suffering, great sorrow and affliction. It is of greatest importance that we have a right attitude and understanding in regards to sickness and suffering and God's purpose in it. If we are not presently afflicted we must prepare ourselves for the times we will be. We need to be armed with the truth of God's Word and the promises of salvation, so that when sickness comes we are not overwhelmed with sorrow and despair. We need to understand God's way so that we will not become envious of the wicked when we are afflicted, while the wicked before our sight prosper and are in good health.

Heathen and ungodly philosophy seeks to come up with various explanations for all the sickness and misery, suffering and death in this world. Heathen religion teaches that there are two forces, two kinds of gods in the world, good ones and evil ones. All prosperity comes from the good gods, and all trouble and affliction comes from the evil gods.

It may surprise some of us how these very same notions are current in

much of what today calls itself Christianity. There are those who call themselves Christians who believe that all sickness is from the devil, and that God has nothing at all to do with it. These are pagan notions, even though they are held by professing Christians. There are others who teach that sickness, disease, and suffering are simply part of the inherent makeup of the world in which we live. It has always been that way and we can do nothing to change it. Those who hold to the theory of evolution are driven to such a conclusion. The philosophy of these ungodly men is entirely pessimistic. There is no difference, according to them, between good and evil. This is a miserable wretched world we live in. The best a man can do in his life is try to get as much sensual pleasure as possible; and, for the rest, he must accept with a stiff upper lip, and stoically endure, the wretched misery and misfortune that life may bring him.

The first important truth that the Bible teaches us about sickness and suffering is that it is all under the sovereign control of God. It is not true that sickness is entirely of the devil and God has nothing at all to do with it. It is indeed the case that the devil works in connection with the sickness and suffering of men. He has terrible power in this area. The book of Job teaches us this clearly. Furthermore, he will often try to use sickness and suffering to discourage and try to destroy the faith of the child of God. But there is only one God. The devil is not god, not even in the area of evil and in the terrible diseases and suffering of men. God rules over the devil, who can do nothing without the permission of the Lord.

Furthermore, sickness and suf-

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fering is actually in the hand of the Lord. He controls it completely. No sickness can ever afflict our bodies without the will of God. God's will is absolutely determinative of all that happens to us, in this life as well as in eternity. Whether we are sick or healthy is entirely determined by God. This is the only ground of comfort for the child of God. If sickness is of the devil we have no comfort in times of sickness. Rather we have reason only to be terrified.

If sickness is something that just happens, without any explanation, or if it is something that is inherent in this earthly creation, then also we have no comfort at all in the midst of our trouble. The true Christian finds the profoundest comfort in times of sickness in the knowledge that God's hand is upon Him and that nothing, not even sickness and suffering, can ever separate us from His everlasting and unchangeable love.

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*If sickness is of the devil  
we have no comfort  
in times of sickness.*

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The second great truth that the Bible teaches us about sickness and suffering is that it came as a result of the fall of man into sin. God did not create a world full of sickness and misery. He created the world good and perfect. He created man's body perfect, strong and healthy and beautiful. Sickness is the curse of God upon fallen man who has made a league with Satan and rebelled against God his creator. Sickness and suffering among men had their beginning with the fall.

This is a very important truth to understand. Again, this truth is denied by the modern philosophy of evolutionism. The curse of the holy and righteous God came upon the world and also upon the body of man because of sin. Even today the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. God, the Holy One, is fiercely

angry with wicked men. He does not love wicked men, nor does He show His favor to all men, as some may imagine. One way in which God reveals His wrath against wicked men is by sending them sickness and suffering and pain and sorrow in this life already. This is a very fearful truth that the ungodly should know. For the ungodly, sickness is a sign of the more dreadful judgment of God that will come upon them if they do not repent from their great wickedness. Few churches today preach this truth anymore. But this is the clear teaching of the Word of God concerning sickness and suffering.

Neither will God hear the prayers of the wicked. He is angry with the wicked every day and will laugh at them in their trouble and distress. It is amazing how wicked men in the world will often pretend to turn to God when they are sick and in trouble. They will even ask others to pray for them. Usually such talk means nothing at all, of course, but let no wicked man imagine that God is suddenly going to hear his prayer just because he is sick, and that God is going to heal him even if he does not repent from his great wickedness. It is not true that God wants to deliver wicked men from their diseases and sickness for their earthly good. When God does heal a wicked man, He does so not in mercy but only in His forbearance. In fact, He Himself, as the Sovereign God, is judging wicked men by disease and suffering and will send them even far more terrible judgments in the life to come.

The third great truth that the Christian knows from the Gospel is that Christ Jesus, through His cross, has redeemed us from the curse of sin and death. This certainly also has great significance for all our sickness and suffering. No, this does not mean that those who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ will never afterward suffer any more sickness and disease. Rather, we understand from the Gospel that Jesus, through His wonderful work, has delivered us from the curse of sin and guilt which is the root cause of all sickness and

sorrow and misery. When Jesus heard that Lazarus whom He loved was sick He made the surprising statement: "This sickness is not unto death" (John 11:4). He said this knowing that Lazarus would die. Because of the cross and resurrection of Christ Jesus, sickness and disease no longer have the power to destroy the child of God. They do not lead us to our eternal death as they do the ungodly outside of Christ.

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*In His perfect wisdom  
He has also determined  
for each of us  
a certain measure  
of suffering....*

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Because of the work of our Lord, sickness and suffering along with everything else in this world and in our life must work for our good and salvation. That is the fourth great truth that the gospel teaches us. Sickness and suffering are still in the hands of God, who for Christ's sake is our heavenly Father and who uses all our afflictions and sufferings to work our salvation and prepare us for our place in glory. This is the solid and sure comfort of the child of God in the midst of all his suffering and sickness, no matter how awful they may seem to be.

God is dealing with us in His good and wise providence when He sends us affliction and suffering. He is never cruel or unsympathetic. He does not afflict us needlessly or because He delights to see us suffering, tormented by pain and sorrow. In His counsel God has determined exactly what is necessary to lead us to our final salvation and glory. In His perfect wisdom He has also determined for each of us a certain measure of suffering that is necessary for us and that is good for us.

When we begin to consider this we will soon realize that we are dealing with deep mysteries. God's ways are very deep. There are many times when we cannot understand the rea-



son for His providential dealings with us. Especially when we are in the midst of the awful pain of a terrible disease, or when we see our loved ones in great anguish, we will ask, "Why Lord, why!?" The truth of God's Word can be received only by faith. Often we must simply believe, even though we do not fully understand the ways of the Lord. One thing is sure, according to the blessed truth of the gospel and according to the wonderful reality of God's absolute

sovereign grace in working our salvation, and that is that God never deals with His children in any other way than in His love. No sickness or suffering, no matter how terrible, can ever separate the child of God from the love of God.

Though we often cannot understand fully God's mysterious way with His saints when He sends sickness and suffering, it is not true that we are left totally without any word of God to explain the good purpose of

the Lord. There are many reasons why sickness and suffering works for the good and salvation of God's people that are clearly revealed in His Word. We want to consider some of these in our next article. We also want to consider something of what the Christian's attitude must be in times of sickness and suffering. Finally, we want to consider what our calling as Christians is toward others who are sick. □

*Come, Lord Jesus*

*Rev. Gise VanBaren*

## Is He Coming Soon?

The closing prayer of Scripture is found in Revelation 22:20: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." The prayer appears to be misleading. Uttered nearly 2,000 years ago, it has not yet been fulfilled. What then was Christ's meaning when He declared, "Surely I come quickly"?

Some claim that the writer misunderstood or else wrongly anticipated the soon-return of the Lord. Yet Christ speaks. His Word is true. The quick return of Christ must not be understood in terms of the span of man's life, but rather it is a reference to the time-clock of God. The last great event was the ascension of Christ to God's right hand. The next event will be His return on the clouds of glory. That latter event will happen quickly — just as soon as all that

which God has determined to take place is fulfilled.

Jesus warned that we must not seek to determine the day or the hour of His return. And what is true of these smaller segments of time is true obviously of the larger segments of "month" and "year" (Matt. 24:36). One surely is not interested merely in determining the day and hour of Christ's return. Why should that be of such great interest? But what cannot be determined with respect to the hour, cannot either be determined with respect to the month or year. Christ teaches that we must not try to anticipate the exact time of His return. Rather we ought ever to watch and pray for that return — living always as those who expect His return soon.

This is not to say that we have no knowledge of the time of Christ's return. On the contrary, Matthew 24 and the book of Revelation, as well as other passages of Scripture, give the signs which precede Christ's return. The signs are seen throughout the New Testament age, but they do definitely increase towards the end of time.

Many in the churches today believe that His return is some time in the far distant future. We ourselves do not often consider the fact that Jesus will surely come soon. Current events seem to be almost expected and ordinary. Consequently, we are not always faithfully watching. Our lives do not always reflect our confession that we must be looking for His return.

The purpose of this rubric will be to point out what ought to be obvious. Strange events are taking place about us. We see and hear this on news broadcasts. We read of it in papers and magazines. Are we looking up for Christ's return? Or are we trying to find some "natural" explanation to the signs which we see?

In following articles I would like to point out both what Scripture has to say and what we see happening about us which is the fulfillment of that Scripture. There are events taking place within the family of nations which are very unusual to say the least. The U.S.S.R. is no more. Yugoslavia has fallen apart. Germany is being torn by riots. Our own country is by no means as stable as many

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*Rev. VanBaren is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*



would have us believe. What does it all mean?

We must take note of the rapid developments in the sciences. Much of what we use today, and a great deal of the work which is done, simply did not exist 50 to 100 years ago. Some still living remember the first appearance of the car and plane; of electricity and phone; of radio and television; of cameras (still, moving, and now video); of computer and fax. We can hardly live today without these inventions. Just consider what happens when we lose our electricity for a time.

We hear of the great "natural" disasters taking place. Scripture has told us that these shall occur. The book of Revelation teaches that at the end these will increase in intensity and number: from one-fourth to one-third and then to one whole. This increase will cause havoc in this earth. What happens when the insurance companies can no more pay out on policies because of extensive disasters? What happens to the health system when it becomes overwhelmed with incurable illnesses? What happens to this world when famine affects vast portions of the planet? What happens to a country when it drowns in its own "red ink"?

We have the infallible, and therefore reliable, Word of God to tell us of these things. We need no outside source of information to confirm the truthfulness of Scripture. Nevertheless, it has been striking how the secular press recently is pointing to unusual occurrences with frank statements. These recognize that present-day events differ in marked ways from those things which occurred several years ago. I quote from a few recently printed articles which express this very fact.

*Time* magazine, September 14, 1992 stated, " 'Natural' is not a word that links logically with 'disaster.' But together the words emphasize how little control humans have over the events they describe. Almost without pause, nature lately has shattered, crushed, and flooded the earth with a series of cataclysms that have killed

hundreds, caused incalculable damage and left survivors shaken.

"On the same day in mid-August, a volcano erupted in Alaska, an earthquake hit Alaska's Andreanof Islands and another rocked Kyrgyzstan in the former Soviet Union. Two weeks ago, Hurricane Andrew hit the Bahamas, then ripped through Florida and Louisiana. Last week the chain of disasters continued. Tropical Storm Polly drenched eastern China and killed at least 150 people. Typhoon Omar, which had earlier raked Guam, headed for the Philippines. In Afghanistan flash floods swept through the valleys of the Hindu Kush, leaving hundreds dead or missing.

"Probably the most spectacular of the week's calamities began with a major earthquake under the Pacific Ocean 30 miles off the west coast of Nicaragua. The temblor spawned tsunamis, commonly known as tidal waves, that towered as high as 45 feet in spots and rolled over dozens of small towns along 200 miles of coast. Surging inland, the waves crushed houses and hotels and swept people out to sea. Nicaraguan civil defense officials said 116 were killed and 150 missing."

In the same issue of *Time*, in an article titled, "Catastrophe 101," the following was stated, "Hurricanes as wicked as Andrew are thought to come along perhaps twice a century. Earthquakes shudder on and off, but the big, continent-cracking convulsions tend to space themselves out over generations. Biblical floods are rare, like killer tidal waves, volcanic eruptions and the other cyclical calls to humility in the face of nature's destructive power. But last week it somehow seemed that the clock was running fast: Typhoon Omar menaced Guam, a tornado attacked Wisconsin, fires burned out of control in California, a four-story tidal wave in Nicaragua dissolved whole neighborhoods, and the residents of South Florida spent Week Two picking up the pieces of their damaged homes and disrupted lives."

The *Grand Rapids Press*, Sep-

tember 15, 1992, reported, "An unprecedented string of natural disasters from Florida to Guam has left the American Red Cross and sister agencies in need of relief themselves.

"Hurricane Andrew was only the most visible of one of the worst strings of natural calamities in modern times. Hundreds of thousands have been victimized by rapid-fire blows from Andrew in Florida and Louisiana, tornadoes in Wisconsin, Typhoon Omar in Guam and the latest, Hurricane Iniki on the Hawaiian island of Kauai.

" 'It's fair to say that this kind of situation is unprecedented,' Red Cross spokesman David Giroux said Monday.

" 'These cataclysmic events are almost Biblical in proportion,' Salvation Army Col. Leon Ferraez said. 'We think there's going to be a real crunch' in resources for disaster relief, estimating the Salvation Army will spend \$40 million to \$50 million on Andrew aid....

"And worse, this marks the fourth year in a row to strain relief budgets.

"National and local Red Cross offices spent a record \$224 million in the 1989-90 fiscal year, which included Hugo and the San Francisco earthquake. The year 1990-91 wasn't much better, with expenditures of \$184.4 million.

"In this fiscal year ending June 30, with Cyclone Val in American Samoa, mud slides in Puerto Rico and floods in Texas, Louisiana and southern California, the national Red Cross alone had committed \$62 million, well over its \$42 million budget....

"The pinch from Andrew, Omar and Iniki is being felt by the government as well. The Federal Emergency Relief Agency said Monday it has suspended about \$80 million in payments to some disaster areas until Congress refills its depleted reserves...."

The same *G.R. Press*, September 14, 1992, stated about the Philippines, "When Pinatubo exploded last year in one of the most violent eruptions of the century it devastated a once-pros-



perous farming and commercial area of central Luzon island, about 60 miles north of Manila.

"Regardless of whether the volcano explodes again, the densely populated area faces a grim future. More than 100 million tons of debris remain on the slopes from the June 1991 eruption.

"With the onset of the rainy season in June, the debris has been washing down the jagged slopes of Pinatubo, thundering along the river basins and valleys, covering every-

thing in its path in a thick layer of hot mud, pumice and stones that hardens like cement.

"Scientists estimate that only a small portion of the debris ... has washed down so far. That means the threat of annual avalanches, or lahars, may persist for up to eight more years."

And so it goes. The secular press recognizes unprecedented disasters striking this earth, disasters of "Biblical proportions."

God has been speaking—loudly

and clearly. Have we been listening? What is our response?

The response of the ungodly is told in Scripture, "And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts" (Rev. 9:20, 21).

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Ministerial Calls

As many of our readers know by now, Rev. A. Spriensma accepted the call he was considering to serve as pastor of the Grandville, MI PRC. Rev. Spriensma was scheduled to fill a classical appointment at Grandville the week after he received the call. So at that evening service he first read his letter of having received the call from Grandville and then he read another letter of his acceptance of that call.

We could also add here, as a footnote to the above, that since Rev. Spriensma's joining our churches back in June, he has been kept more than busy preaching for our different congregations. In fact, Grandville will have to wait until later this month to install him as their pastor due to preaching commitments in Classis West. Rev. Spriensma was scheduled to lead the Lynden, WA PRC in worship on October 4 and 11. In addition, he was asked to preach in British Columbia on October 12 for their annual Thanksgiving Day. After this he was to move on to the Loveland, CO PRC and preach there on October 18 and 25. While in Lynden and Loveland he was also to lead their societies and teach their catechism classes.

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

After Loveland, Rev. Spriensma was scheduled to deliver a Reformation Day lecture at the Central College Chapel in Pella, IA sponsored by the Pella PRC. Then he moves on to the Trinity PRC in Houston, TX, where he was scheduled to present a Reformation Day Lecture on October 30 and preach for them on November 1.

After all this, Rev. Spriensma heads home where Grandville's parsonage should be ready about the middle of this month, with the Spriensmas planning to move in on November 13 and 14. Rev. Spriensma is tentatively scheduled to be installed as Grandville's second pastor on November 20.

### Congregational Highlights

Building Committee news from the Peace PRC in Lynwood, IL indi-

cates that the committee has obtained floor-plan sketches of the proposed church building. They are also in the process of obtaining a three-dimensional, so that everyone will be able to see the kind of building being planned. The Finance Committee has also determined the approximate cost of the project. Peace's Council hoped to be able to present something to their congregation before too long.

You may remember that a couple of issues back we mentioned Pella's new piano. Well, evidently more than enough money was received, thus enabling the congregation in the Pella, IA PRC to spend the surplus to install ceiling fans in the church auditorium. They also gave approval to hire outside help to finish the exterior of their church as well as the outside steps before winter. □

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory and Congregation of the Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church express their heartfelt sympathy to Mr. Allen Hendriks and his family in the loss of his wife,

#### MARIE HENDRIKS.

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

Rev. Michael DeVries, President  
Andrew Brummel, Clerk

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory and Congregation of the Loveland Protestant Reformed Church express our heartfelt Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert R. Griess in the death of his brother-in-law,

#### MR. ROBERT RATH.

May the bereaved family take comfort in the assurance of God's Word, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

Rev. Ron Cammenga, President  
Mr. Robert Brands, Clerk



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## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory of the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church express their sympathy to Mrs. Sadie Knoper, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Lenting, and Mr. James Buiter in the sudden death of husband, father, father-in-law, and stepfather.

**MR. DONALD KNOPER.**

whom the Lord took unto Himself on July 30, 1992.

May the comfort of God's Word live in their hearts. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it" (Psalm 39:9).

Rev. Charles Terpstra, President  
George Vroom, Clerk

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

The Lord willing, on Friday, October 30, 1992, our parents and grandparents.

SIDNEY and IRENE VANDER  
WAL.

will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary.

We are thankful to our covenant God that He has blessed them with these 50 years of marriage.

"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake" (Psalm 115:1).

- \* George and Patricia Nobel  
Leslee and Lisa
- \* Russell and Lavone Smith  
Chris and Melanie
- \* Wayne and Ruth VanderWal  
Paul and Tamara
- \* Louis and Janice VanderWal  
Karlee and Matthew
- \* David and Lois Austin  
Loren
- \* Richard and Ruth Laman

Grand Rapids, Michigan

*Food for Thought:*

"All Christians and churches should be reforming, but the rule for such reform must be the Word of God, not the traditions of men nor the spirit of the age."

J.C. Ryle

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 10, 1992, our dear  
parents,  
**LOUIS and MARTHA REGNERUS**,  
celebrated their 40th wedding anni-  
versary.

We rejoice with them and are thankful to our covenant God for the godly upbringing, love, and care they have given us these many years. May God continue to bless and keep them in the years that He may give them.

**"The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:5, 6).**

- ✱ Ed and Kathy VanderMeulen  
Marisa, David, Tim, Kara
- ✱ Ryan and Nancy Regnerus  
Ryan, Kelly, Aaron, Katie, Mary
- ✱ Homer and Evelyn DeJong  
Courtney, Tyler, Case
- ✱ Bill and Elaine Regnerus  
Kimberly, Bill, Sandy
- ✱ Joe and Marcia VanBaren  
Kyle, Ross, Corrine, Caleb,  
Annelee
- ✱ Lou and Cheryl Regnerus  
Luke, Jade, Leah, Glen
- ✱ Jim and Brenda Regnerus  
Karyn, Stephan, Jana
- ✱ Dave Regnerus

South Holland, Illinois

## "The Battle for the Bible"

*Prof. Herman Hanko, speaker*  
Professor of New Testament in the  
Protestant Reformed Seminary

Dordt College Chapel  
November 6, 1992 8:00 p.m.

**We invite you to attend  
and bring a friend!!!**

Sponsored by the  
Protestant Reformed Churches of  
Hull, Doon, and Edgerton

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

October 30, 1992 marked the 40th wedding anniversary of MR. and MRS. EDWARD OPHOFF, SR.

"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassion fails not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22, 23).

- \* Eric and Marilyn Ophoff  
George, James, Eric, Jr.
- \* Edward, Jr. and Elizabeth Ophoff  
Alisa, Edward III, Erin, Joseph
- \* Mark and Cindy Ophoff  
David, Kristin
- \* James and Faith Noorman  
Alison, Elizabeth
- \* Ray and Joy Schwarz

Grand Rapids, Michigan

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