

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

***A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine***

We all want to learn many things that will be useful for our life. But the greatest things in life that we must learn are the truths of God, the truths of His glory and virtues. We learn these things first of all through the study of God's Word and through attention to the preaching of that Word. In connection with the knowledge of God's Word we also learn through the experiences of our life, especially in the deep experiences of our life.

See "The Christian and Sickness" — p. 104

*Vol. 69, No. 5
December 1, 1992*

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In This Issue...

They are a single-issue church which will not survive its founder. Their theology is anabaptistic, scholastic, and hyper-Calvinistic. In fact, they're not really a church at all, but a sect.

Sound familiar? Most of our readers belong to that denomination, the denomination which, says Mr. Jon Huiskens in a "Special Article" in this issue, has been thus characterized from the beginning of its history. "Caricature of the baldest sort," Mr. Huiskens calls it. And in his article he attempts to demonstrate, from the denomination's history and from the literature produced in it, that this judgment of the PRC is in fact neither accurate nor fair. While acknowledging that there are indeed tendencies among some in the PRC to the kinds of things that give rise to caricature, he denies that the story of the PRC is being told straight. You'll want to read, surely, "The History of the PRC: Learning to Live with Caricature."

You'll also find in this issue an article by Rev. denHartog on the Christian and sickness. After reminding us of our natural desire to "learn many things that will be useful for our life," the writer goes on to affirm that the most important things in life are often, in the good providence of God, learned by us through the deep way of suffering. I'm reminded of what Charles Spurgeon once wrote: "I venture to say that the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health, with the exception of sickness. Sickness has frequently been of more use to the saints of God than health has." What "use" does pain serve in the life of a child of God? And what should be our attitude towards it? For answers to those all-important questions, read, in this issue, "The Christian and Sickness."

D.D.

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: Prof. David J. Engelsma
Secretary: Prof. Robert D. Decker
Managing Editor: Mr. Don Doezeema

DEPARTMENT EDITORS

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
BUSINESS OFFICE
The Standard Bearer
Don Doezeema
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49418-0603

PH: (616) 538-1778
(616) 531-1490

FAX: (616) 531-3033

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
NEW ZEALAND OFFICE
The Standard Bearer
c/o Protestant Reformed
Church
B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

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The Perpetual Debt of Love

Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Romans 13:8-10.

In verses 1-7 of this chapter the church is exhorted to be in subjection to the civil authorities.

This exhortation is rooted in the fact that civil government has been ordained by God. Rulers are the servants of God, given their authority by God to punish the evil doer and protect those that do good. Hence, we must be subject to rulers for God's sake. Those who resist government resist the ordinance of God to their eternal damnation.

This section is concluded in verse 7 with the idea of obligation and debt: "Render to all their dues." "Dues" refers to that which is owed. The perspective here is that we owe something to the civil authorities. We owe them custom, tribute, fear, and honor. Hence, we are charged, "Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor."

Continuing this idea of debt and obligation, the holy Scriptures pro-

ceed to speak of the debt each of us owes to our neighbor. The main point is twofold. First, each of us has a debt of love he owes to his neighbor. Second, this debt is a perpetual debt that can never be paid up, so that each must see it his obligation always to love the neighbor.

This is all set forth in the exhortation, "Owe no man anything, but to love one another."

* * * * *

Owe no man anything.

This has been taken by some to mean that we may never borrow money, thereby incurring a financial debt. Rather we must pay cash for everything so that we owe no man anything.

Such, however, can hardly be the meaning of this exhortation. For instead of forbidding the loaning (and thus borrowing) of money, the Old Testament law regulated it, forbidding usury (Ex. 22:25). Jesus even charged, "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Matt. 5:42). Certainly we would not have this kind of instruction from our Lord were it wrong in the eyes of God to have a financial debt.

To come to a proper understanding of this passage we must bear in mind that in the original we read, "Do not keep owing any man anything." One who keeps owing is a person who never gets around to paying up his debts. He has little concern to pay his debts in the time agreed upon. He is constantly delinquent so that he keeps on owing and owing long after he should have paid up. This is forbidden by the Word of God, "Do not keep owing any man anything."

Except to love one another.

The perspective here is that, in addition to other debts we may have, each of us has a debt of love to the neighbor. We owe the neighbor our love. This includes our spouse, parents, children, brothers, sisters, fellow students, fellow church members, fellow workers, anyone who in God's providence crosses our path. Sometimes the neighbor is very difficult to love. Often the neighbor is inconsiderate of us, takes the other side of an issue against us, has personality traits that annoy us. The neighbor may be a scoundrel. He may even be our enemy, who hates us and seeks our hurt. Nevertheless, we owe him our love.

And this debt of love is a perpetual debt.

A financial debt or even a social debt is something that can be paid up so that you no longer owe. That is not true of the debt of love. This is a debt in which we keep on owing and owing. So long as we live and the neighbor is our neighbor, we owe him our love. Never may we conclude that we have loved the neighbor enough so that we no longer owe him any more. Neither may we say that the debt of love is terminated because of what the neighbor may have done to make himself undeserving of our love. The debt of love we owe the neighbor is a perpetual one.

Keep owing no man anything, except to love one another.

* * * * *

This perpetual debt of love is rooted in God's law.

For he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

To fulfill the law is to perform

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

the duties God has laid upon us in the law. Now if we fulfill the law by loving another, the implication must be that the law requires that we love one another.

This truth is verified in what follows: For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Notice that our attention is called here to the second table of the law. The law of the ten commandments was written by the finger of God on two tables of stone. The first table spells out what duties we owe God; the second table, our duties to the neighbor. Our attention is drawn to this second table of the law.

*God in His law
requires us to
love the neighbor at all times,
so long as we live,
without exception.*

The assertion is made that what God requires in this second table of His law is briefly comprehended or summarized in the saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

If there is any doubt of this, we are reminded that "love worketh no ill (evil) to his neighbor."

There are many evil things that one can do to his neighbor. He can commit adultery with his neighbor. He can kill his neighbor, steal from his neighbor, bear false witness against his neighbor....

Love does not do these things to the neighbor. Instead of working the hurt of the neighbor, love does that which is good to the neighbor.

But that is exactly what God's law requires. It forbids that we hurt the neighbor by committing adultery with him, killing him, stealing from him, bearing false witness against him. And for every negative prohibition

we find in the law, there is implied a positive good we must show to the neighbor.

Can there be any doubt, then, that the summary of the second table of the law is to love the neighbor as self so that love is the fulfilling of the law?

Because this is the nature of the law, we have a perpetual debt of love to the neighbor.

We owe the neighbor our love because God's law requires us to love the neighbor.

Whatever God requires of us in His law we are obligated to do. The summary of what God requires in the second table of the law is to love the neighbor. Hence, we owe the neighbor our love. Were it not for God's law, we would owe no man anything. But God requires that we love. Hence, we owe one another our love.

And this debt of love is a perpetual debt because God in His law requires us to love the neighbor at all times, so long as we live, without exception.

Every day anew we are confronted by God in His law with the calling to love the neighbor and to show that love by doing good to him. That will continue so long as we live. Never will there come a time when we can say that we have loved the neighbor enough and owe him no more of our love. Never will there come a time when we can say that the obligation of love is finished because the neighbor has made himself unworthy of our love. For every day God stands before us with His law calling us to love. And so we owe the neighbor our love and we will keep on owing and owing so long as we live.

Owe no man anything, but to love one another.

* * * * *

Let our motive in meeting this debt of love be gratitude.

How important motivation is. If loving the neighbor is merely a matter of obligation for us, we will never be able to fulfill this spiritual debt. The neighbor is far too difficult to love merely as a matter of obligation.

For that reason we must focus our attention on God's love to us.

God has loved us with a love that reaches all the way back into eternity. God loved us not because we first loved Him. God's love was first. In fact, God loved us when we were unlovable. He loved us even while we were sinners, full of hatred for Him, enemies of His cause.

In love He seeks not our hurt but our good and salvation. God loved us enough to sacrifice His only Son for the sake of our salvation and eternal welfare. How great is the love of God!

Those who have tasted of this saving love in Jesus Christ are filled with gratitude. It is impossible to know the love of God and not be overwhelmed with thankfulness.

And the grateful Christian seeks above all to do the will of God.

Before such a soul God stands with His law and says, "Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your neighbor by seeking his good. Love your neighbor in the power of the cross and thus reflect my love to the glory of my name."

Let us who have tasted the love of God in Christ Jesus so show our gratitude by honoring our perpetual debt of love to the neighbor. □

*There is still time
for a
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Reaping Your Carnal Things

From the Council of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois, appointed by Classis West to oversee the financial support of Rev. Audred Spriensma while he waited for a call, comes word that no more contributions to this fund are needed.

I have received the following letter from South Holland:

Greetings in the name of the sovereign Head and King of the Church, Jesus Christ!

This letter comes to you to inform you that contributions for the special "Classical Minister Support Fund" for Rev. Audred Spriensma and his family are no longer needed.

As you know, Rev. Spriensma has accepted the call to our Grandville congregation and will begin his labors there on November 20, at which time Grandville church will take over his financial support. As of this date we have sufficient funds to support him and his family through November.

We wish to take this opportunity to thank you for the contribution you may have made to this special need and for your willingness to help sup-

port this worthy cause. We as a Council have witnessed the communion of saints in the churches through this, and we know Rev. Spriensma and his family have experienced this as well.

If you may have just taken a collection for this fund, or if you have one scheduled and wish to give your members the opportunity to contribute to it, we leave it to your discretion whether to go ahead with this and send your offering in to our treasurer. We will have a surplus of monies in this fund and will be making a decision in the near future with regard to the use of these monies. This will have to be approved by the next meeting of Classis West in March of 1993.

Again we thank you for your assistance in this matter.

In Christ's service,
The Council of the
South Holland Protestant Reformed Church
George Vroom, Clerk

Our Protestant Reformed people, as well as friends outside the Churches, I understand, have obviously responded to the need, giving

liberally for the support of Rev. Spriensma and his family.

It is a joy to see this expression of the communion of the saints.

It is encouraging to observe that our people faithfully carry out the decisions of the major assemblies, in this case the decisions of Classis West with the concurrence of the synodical deputies.

It is also heartwarming to notice the esteem that our people have for the office of the ministry of the gospel among them. By their ready, generous support of this minister who was temporarily without a pastorate, our people demonstrate their agreement with the apostle, that it is no great thing that those who sow to them spiritual things reap their carnal things (I Cor. 9:11).

God will bless it!

Rev. Spriensma has now been installed as pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan. May the King of the church bless his work in Grandville and give him a long and fruitful ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches. □

—DJE

The Death of Confessional Calvinism in Scottish Presbyterianism (6)

The recent book, *Behold Your God (BYG)*, by Scottish Presbyterian theologian Donald Macleod is a passionate plea for the doctrine of com-

mon grace. Three of the sixteen chapters are devoted to common grace explicitly. A fourth consists of the application of common grace to the

saving will of God and the atonement of the cross.

Macleod's defense of common grace involves the denial of the Re-

formed doctrine of total depravity. For common grace keeps the unregenerated from being completely defiled by sin.

The Presbyterian theologian defends his denial of total depravity in three ways. First, he redefines "total" to mean merely 'in every part.' Fallen men are depraved "in every part," but they are not completely depraved in every part. Second, he misrepresents the Westminster Confession of Faith to make it teach both that "total depravity" is merely depravity 'in every part' and that unregenerated sinners are capable of performing good works.

We have examined these attempts to vindicate the denial of total depravity as orthodox Presbyterianism in previous editorials.

"Absolute Depravity" and "Total Depravity"

A third way in which Professor Macleod tries to establish the denial of total depravity effected by his doctrine of common grace is the invention of a distinction between "total depravity" and "absolute depravity." According to Macleod, the doctrine of "total depravity" is the teaching that unregenerated sinners are defiled in every part of their being, although they also remain somewhat good in every part of their being by virtue of common grace. The doctrine of "absolute depravity," on the other hand, is the teaching that every unregenerated sinner is as developed and hardened in evil as he can possibly be.

The former, of course, is the teaching of Professor Macleod. He would like the reader to think that this is also the teaching of the Presbyterian confessions. The latter—absolute depravity—is allegedly the strange, foolish teaching of Herman Hoeksema and of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The argument of Professor Macleod is simple. Since these are the two alternatives and since "absolute depravity" is obviously false, it must be Presbyterian to hold that the unregenerated sinner is merely de-

filed in every part of his being, although remaining also somewhat good in every part of his being because of common grace.

The refutation of the argument of Professor Macleod is also simple. There is a third alternative: All unregenerated sinners are *completely* defiled by sin in every part of their being, although there are degrees of wickedness among them and although there is development of wickedness both in the individual and in society.

Because this distinction between total and absolute depravity is widespread among those who propound common grace and because it is commonly used by them to falsify the theology of the PRC (which is not so important) and to corrupt the Reformed doctrine of total depravity (which is very important), we may profitably allow Professor Macleod to carry on at length:

Theologians who ... advocated the doctrine of common grace ... distinguished between total depravity ("wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body," *Westminster Confession*, VI.III) and absolute depravity. Hoeksema is well aware of the distinction (*Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 252) but denies that it can give any help to the exponents of the idea of common grace. It is difficult to follow him in this. Absolute depravity means such a degree of hostility to God as admits of no progression or variation. This is not the way the Bible portrays man. Human beings are not devils. Nor is any man so advanced in evil that he could not possibly become worse. Nor again does human society present a uniform level of degradation and depravity. It would be absurd to minimize, let alone deny, the difference between Hitler and Gandhi, Pharaoh and George Washington, Judas Iscariot and Pilate's wife. It would be equally absurd to maintain that Romans 1:18-32 gives an accurate description of human society in every age and every place. The theology of the Reformation was well aware that "some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others" (*Shorter*

Catechism, Answer 83). To conceive of all men as standing together on a flat, undifferentiated moral plateau is to exclude from theology altogether the doctrine of judicial abandonment. All men are depraved. But not all men are "hardened" or "given over to a reprobate mind." Not every prison is an Auschwitz or every city a Sodom. Many men are capable of natural affection, fidelity and even of heroic self-sacrifice. The doctrine of common grace recognizes this and insists that such qualities are gifts from "the Father of lights" (James 1:17) (*BYG*, pp. 128, 129).

"Absolute Depravity" an Absolute Fiction

The opening statement in the lengthy paragraph quoted above is true: The distinction between "total depravity" and "absolute depravity" is the invention of the theologians who have advocated common grace. They invented it in order to discredit Hoeksema's teaching of total depravity and in order to promote their own denial of total depravity in the doctrine of common grace.

The distinction did not originate with Herman Hoeksema. He did not accept "absolute depravity" as the description of his doctrine of the depravity of the natural man. He positively rejected the notion of "absolute depravity," that is, as Macleod describes it, "such a degree of hostility to God as admits of no progression or variation."

... no one has ever taught
"absolute depravity."
"Absolute depravity"
is a fiction.

The PRC today repudiate the distinction between "total depravity" and "absolute depravity." It is not biblical. It is not confessional. It is not part of the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition. It is not even useful for understanding the real issue at stake in the controversy over the spiritual condition of fallen man. The great

conflict for the Reformed faith in history has not been between "total depravity" and "absolute depravity." In fact, no one has ever taught "absolute depravity." "Absolute depravity" is a fiction. It exists only in the minds of the advocates of common grace.

The Real Distinction: Total or Partial Depravity

There is one important distinction to be made as regards the spiritual condition of unregenerated man. This is the distinction between "total depravity" and "partial depravity." "Total depravity" is the doctrine of fallen man's complete sinfulness without any good whatever. "Partial depravity" is the doctrine of fallen man's wickedness in all parts of his being while retaining some good in all parts as well, whether because of a limited fall or because of the operation of common grace.

The PRC confess total depravity.

Total depravity holds that all sinners are alike completely wicked and wholly devoid of all good. As respects the *extent* of inherited corruption, there is no difference among unregenerated sinners. Gandhi was as completely sinful as Hitler. On the supposition that George Washington was unregenerated, he lacked all goodness as much as did Pharaoh. The Bible says so: "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12).

Total Depravity and Development of Sin

But it is perfectly in harmony with the doctrine of total depravity, and certainly the truth, that one sinner is worse than another, even as one sin is worse than another sin. The apostate from the faith is far more wicked than the pagan (cf. Matt. 11:20-24). The professing Christian who abandons his wife and family is worse than an unbeliever (I Tim. 5:8). Both the unregenerated husband who faithfully loves his own wife and the unregenerated husband who commits adultery against his wife are completely depraved. Both the faithful

love and the adultery are sin, and nothing but sin. But the adultery is worse sin, and the punishment of the adulterer will be more severe.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism says that "some sins ... are more heinous in the sight of God than others" (Q. 83). It does not say, or imply, that some deeds of the unregenerate are good in the sight of God.

Degrees of wickedness among unregenerated persons are to be explained in terms of greater and lesser knowledge; the circumstances of their lives; their own more or less intense development of their sinfulness; and the degree to which God hardens them and gives them over to their reprobate mind.

The spiritual difference among the unregenerated is a difference in degree of wickedness. It is not a difference in extent of goodness.

The doctrine of total depravity, as held by Herman Hoeksema and the PRC (and by the Reformed and Presbyterian creeds), does surely allow for "progression or variation." There is development of sin in both individual and society. But this development is not development from partial depravity to complete depravity, that is, from more goodness to less goodness or no goodness at all. Rather, it is development of *sin*.

The completely depraved person, in whom is no good from birth, develops and works out all the possibilities of his depravity during his lifetime, according to his circumstances. Baby Judas was as completely depraved as was adult Judas at the moment that he betrayed Jesus. But the adult traitor had made "progress" in the intensity and expression of his depravity.

The development of sin in the world throughout history is similar. Things do not go from good to bad but from bad to worse. What is now taking place in Western civilization is not the becoming bad of a society that formerly was somewhat good but the increase of lawlessness.

The figure that accurately pictures the development of sin in the unregenerated sinner and in the world

outside of Christ is not that of the sick man who gradually dies. But it is that of the dead man who gradually decays and stinks more and more.

As for Professor Macleod's objection that the doctrine of total, that is, complete, depravity makes devils out of men, the answer is at hand. I suppose that even Professor Macleod would acknowledge that unregenerated men and women in hell are at last completely depraved. No longer is there an operation of common grace within them causing them to be somewhat good in every faculty and part, filling them with "laudable qualities," and enabling them to perform good works in theology, ethics, science, and art. At long last, they are dead in sin. But surely Professor Macleod would admit that these wretched persons are still humans, and not devils.

Man always remains man. He remains man when he falls into spiritual death. But now he is totally depraved man.

All of Scottish Presbyterian Macleod's arguments in support of his doctrine of partial depravity and against the Reformed doctrine of total depravity fail.

The doctrine of total depravity stands: Unregenerated men and women are completely sinful, devoid of any good. All of them. All of us, by nature.

This doctrine is fundamental. It is fundamental to the whole system of truth known as Calvinism. Deny this doctrine, and the whole of Calvinism is demolished.

The doctrine is basic to the gospel of grace. Total depravity is the judgment — the searing, humbling, offensive judgment — of the gospel upon us in the interests of the good news of sovereign mercy in the cross of God Incarnate (Rom. 1:16-3:30). Deny it, and the entire gospel is subverted.

But this is the present position of Professor Macleod and, I fear, of Scottish Presbyterianism.

Because of the doctrine of common grace. □

— DJE

An Apology

This letter is written in response to your article in the *Standard Bearer* of the 1st September, 1992 ("A Brotherly Request that the RCUS Prove Its Charge against the PRC") in which you stated an offense against the Reformed Church in the United States. You were offended at statements in our Home Missions Committee Report, reprinted in our Abstract, which you took as charging the Protestant Reformed Church with hyper-Calvinism.

As both author of that report and chairman of that committee I take personal responsibility for what was published. I wish to offer you my unreserved apology for any offense

that I may have given. What I wrote in my report was at best ambiguous; certainly, I failed clearly to express myself. It was also entirely inappropriate for a document intended for public consideration.

I would ask that you not hold these statements against our denomination. As you are well aware, a Synod deals with many documents and reports. Had any member of Synod spotted this statement, I am certain it would have never seen the light of day. The same is true of the Home Missions Committee members. The statement you took offense to was part of a very lengthy report. As I'm certain you appreciate, the members of the Committee are busy men

with many responsibilities. The fact that no one objected to what I wrote does not imply anything except that my prose was obviously less than riveting.

As I have said, I make no such excuses for myself. I ask that you will accept my apology and extend forgiveness.

With warmest Christian regards,
(Rev.) David A. Dawn
Chairman,
Home Missions Committee
Reformed Church in the United
States

Response:

The apology is gladly received.
— DJE



The Christian and Sickness (2)

The greatest of all comforts for the Christian who is lying on a bed of illness is the knowledge of the truth that sickness is in the hands of his loving heavenly Father. Sickness does not come to us by chance, it is not just something inherent in being human, and certainly it is not the workings of the devil with which God has nothing to do. Sickness, and all our diseases, are entirely under the sovereign control of God. Furthermore, because of the cross of Christ Jesus, God's grace

and mercy is upon us. Even in times of sickness God is dealing with us in love and mercy, and for our good and salvation.

We said in our last article on this subject that there are many mysteries in God's providential dealings with man. We always want to know the reason why God deals with us in certain ways, especially when our way is hard and grievous. But God does not always make His way plain. Often His ways are so deep that they are beyond our understanding. In times like these the Lord calls us simply to trust His goodness and wisdom without doubt and wavering. But God has not left us entirely in darkness concerning His purpose in sending us

sickness. In fact, He has told us in His Word much concerning the purpose for which He sends suffering and sickness. We need to know the Lord's purposes that are clearly revealed in His Word.

To understand the goodness and wisdom of the Lord in sending us suffering and affliction, we must remember that God's purpose with His saints is spiritual. Though the Lord also takes care of our physical well-being in this life, He has a higher, spiritual purpose for us. It is not true that God's purpose is that we be always physically well, healthy and strong. To think this is utter foolishness. God sends us sickness and suffering for a higher, spiritual pur-

Rev. den Hartog is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

pose. Through sickness God teaches us profound spiritual lessons that we could not learn if we were always strong and healthy. So, for example, He sends us sickness to make us realize our own great weakness and our complete dependence upon the Lord. In times of health and strength we are so prone to imagine that our strength is in ourselves. Sickness humbles our pride and destroys our self confidence.

How beautifully this was illustrated in the life of the great apostle Paul when God gave him a "thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him." The apostle tells us in II Corinthians 12 that this thorn in the flesh was given to him of God in order that he would not be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelations given to him. Paul's thorn in the flesh prevented him from becoming proud. Pride is a great evil unto which all of us are so prone. God so loves us that He sends us things in our life to keep us from this ugly sin. In the midst of sickness and suffering the Lord teaches us humility and dependence on the Lord. Paul earnestly prayed that the Lord would remove the thorn in the flesh. God did not remove it, in spite of these prayers. God answered Paul's prayers with the words, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." As a result, Paul made the beautiful confession, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

*The Christian
can glory in infirmities,
trials, and sickness
because of God's
good purpose in them.*

What an amazing statement! The Christian can glory in infirmities, tri-

als, and sickness because of God's good purpose in them. In sickness the Lord makes His saints spiritually strong, through faith in Christ Jesus. Spiritual strength before the Lord is more important than physical strength.

In the midst of sickness and trials God teaches us the power of His grace, the greatness of His love, and the faithfulness of His mercy. As Christians we must not despise these great spiritual lessons. We all want to learn many things that will be useful for our life. But the greatest things in life that we must learn are the truths of God, the truths of His glory and virtues. We learn these things first of all through the study of God's Word and through attention to the preaching of that Word. In connection with the knowledge of God's Word we also learn through the experiences of our life, especially in the deep experiences of our life.

It is God's purpose that His saints testify of His grace and goodness. Some of the most powerful and beautiful confessions of all are made by saints of God in the midst of affliction. Consider for example how many of the psalms are confessions which saints of God made during and after great trials and after much suffering.

Sickness helps the Christian identify with Christ in His suffering. Christ suffered more than we all. Even in our most dreadful suffering we do not approach the fearful depth and awfulness of the suffering of Christ. The suffering of Christ was a unique suffering because his suffering was that of the Holy Son of God and because it was an atoning suffering. Our suffering is never an atoning suffering. God does not send us suffering to punish us for our sins. We do not and cannot pay for our sin by suffering. Any such false notions must be driven far from our minds. Christ fully paid the penalty of our sin through His suffering, and He merited perfect righteousness for all His saints. Yet our suffering brings us nearer to Christ in His suffering. It is good for the Christian in the midst of suffering to meditate on the suffering

which Christ endured in order to save us. We are partakers of the suffering of Christ especially, of course, when we suffer for His name's sake. But in all our suffering we have fellowship with His suffering.

*Sickness in the church
gives us a great occasion
to reveal that our religion
is genuine.*

Though it is true that God does not send us suffering to punish us for our sins, nevertheless we learn, from our sufferings, something regarding our sins, and something of the mercy of God. If God would deal with us according to our sins, then we would deserve to be destroyed. Our sins are so great that we deserve eternal torment in hell. The Christian does not foolishly say in the midst of suffering, "What did I do to deserve this?" We know that our sins are so great that we deserve only judgment and no mercy. The wonder however is that God in His sovereign mercy in Christ Jesus delivers us from all our misery and suffering.

God sends us sickness and infirmities also in order to teach us about death. Every sickness and disease speaks of death. We do not like to think about death. But it is a fact that if the Lord tarries we will all have to die some day. The Christian needs to think about his death. We may not live in the vain imagination that we shall never die. We need to prepare for death. When we are strong and healthy we usually do not think about death. For the Christian equipped with the knowledge of the Word of God, thinking about death (not only the death of others but especially his own death) has a sanctifying effect on his whole life. We walk in the shadow of death all our life long. The Christian need not be terrified with the thought of death. Christ has removed the sting of death and destroyed the power of death. He has delivered us from the fear of death. Because of the

perfect work of Christ Jesus on the cross we have been delivered from the awful reality of eternal death that we once deserved. For the Christian, death is a passage from this life of suffering and misery into eternal glory and blessing. Death will destroy this vile body of sin in order that we might receive a new and glorified body fashioned after the glorious image of Christ.

All of our sickness and suffering in this present life prepares us for our place in glory. This is an astounding truth. The apostle teaches us this truth in II Corinthians 4. There is a vast difference in the measure of suffering that God sends His saints. Some must endure far more suffering than others. The place that God has prepared in glory for His saints will not be the same for every one of His children. Somehow our suffering in the present life is related to the place God has prepared for us in glory. Those who suffer much in this life will have a very special place in glory. Furthermore, the Bible teaches us that the sufferings of this present time cannot be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. Compared to God's eternal weight of glory, the sufferings of this present time are always light. We will fully understand all of that only when we get to heaven. Then, through all eternity, we will with great joy realize how our suffering prepared us for glory, and how relatively small even the most dreadful and prolonged suffering of this present time was, compared to the eternal reward of glory.

If we understand something of all of this by faith in the midst of our suffering, we will not be discouraged and we will not pray that God will always take away all our sickness and suffering. How could we do such a thing if we know what a great purpose God has in our suffering? God's purpose is not earthly but heavenly. The suffering of this present time causes the child of God more and more to long for his final redemption and the heavenly glory that awaits him. This is good.

In the light of all these things it is

terribly sinful to murmur and complain against the Lord because He sends us suffering. Because of our sinful nature we are prone to do exactly this. We need to pray earnestly for grace and faith to endure sickness and suffering. Because there is a very close relationship between our spirit and body it often happens that sickness of our body is accompanied by depression of our spirits. As Christians we must understand this and be prepared for this. Pastors and elders need to visit the sick because it is especially in time of sickness and suffering that the Christian becomes very discouraged and depressed. At such times, more than ever, the child of God needs the comfort of the Word of God. When we are sick we need especially to spend time reading the Word of God and in prayer. And if we are not able to do that ourselves, we need to call for the elders of the church, as James tells us in chapter 5 of his epistle.

Because of our sinful nature it is easy for us, when we are sick, to become very self-centered. When a spirit of self-centeredness takes over, the person who is sick will be filled with self pity. Such an attitude is sinful and will only make a person more and more miserable. Such an attitude will cause a person to weary those who come to visit him with endless talk about his ailments. When a Christian does this he must realize that he is really complaining against God. He is in fact doing the very opposite of what the Lord calls us to do in sickness. Rather than murmur and complain, the Christian must rest in the grace of God and steadfastly look unto the Savior. It is only in this way that he will experience the goodness and mercy of God. Only as the child of God experiences by faith and quiet trust the mercy of God will he be able to testify of the goodness of the Lord and glorify the name of God. This is one of the chief and most beautiful purposes for which God sends trials and afflictions.

God sends trials and afflictions to His saints also for the good of the whole church. In the body of Christ

we are members one of another. If this is truly realized by the members of the church a beautiful thing will take place. When one member suffers, all the members will suffer with him. The suffering of the members of the church will bring them closer to each other and bind them together in the bond of love and peace. Everywhere God's Word commands the members of the church of Jesus Christ to visit the sick and the afflicted. According to Matthew 25 one of the great things the Lord is going to ask each one of us is whether we have visited the sick and afflicted. Only those who have faithfully done that will enter into the joy of heaven. The sickness of the members of our church must keep us from the great evil of self-centeredness in which we think only of our own welfare. The sickness of our fellow saints is one of the greatest opportunities the Lord gives us to exercise and reveal the love of God in our life. Pure and undefiled religion is revealed when the saints in love care for one another. Sickness in the church gives us a great occasion to reveal that our religion is genuine. □

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

II Corinthians 4:8-10

Proper Christian Self-Esteem

Do you, my younger brother or sister, have a proper view of yourself? That is a question that is biblically based. The Bible often speaks to you personally, calling you to self-examination. Obviously, then, there is a way in which you must consider your own life, your own nature, your own gifts, your own behavior, and your relationships with others and with God.

But when I ask, Do you have a proper view of yourself, it is with purpose that I phrase the question that way. Because whether or not you have a proper view of yourself is determined by only one standard — and you are not the standard. God is the Standard. More concretely, He is that Standard as He sets Himself before you in the Bible.

An Important Subject

Self-esteem is an important subject for young people, also for many church youth. Several times in my pastoral labors I have observed a preoccupation with self-esteem. When I have asked a question such as, "What do you view as one of the most difficult problems you face," or, "What do you think is the problem," I have heard young people lament, "I guess I have a low self-esteem."

It is no wonder that self-esteem would be such an important subject. The society in which we live has put great emphasis on self-esteem in recent years. Books on the subject abound. Articles on the subject have

been written for publication in magazines of every sort. Politicians speak of the concept. Educators have applied their ideas of self-esteem in the areas of school curricula and principles of teaching. Psychologists evaluate the self-esteem of their clients as a prime indicator of psychological stability. And many preachers mold their sermons around this key concept. And all of this emphasis is rather recent.

But it is because of the recent nature of all this emphasis on self-esteem that I want to caution you to be careful how you evaluate yourself. It seems that sometimes we accept the ideas of modern psychology, and of such prominent men as James Dobson and Robert Schuller, without evaluating these ideas in the light of Scripture.

An Old Subject

The concept of self-esteem is not new. It is in fact much older than is formal education, such as we have it today. The concept has been discussed for many years prior to the introduction of the field of psychology, and it is certainly older than modern medicine. It is true that the emphasis that modern psychology has placed on self-esteem is of recent origin. And the emphasis on this idea in the church world has been largely increased by such men as Dobson and Schuller. But self-esteem is dealt with quite extensively in the Bible.

I was first intrigued by the subject personally more than a decade ago. Before entering the ministry, and during my seminary days, an elderly saint from First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, gave me a few books from

her small library. She was moving into a retirement home and kindly offered me most of her books. I took the books home, and later was browsing through one of them when I came across an old church bulletin. The date was from some time in the 1930s. It was long before self-esteem became the well-known topic of discussion it has become today. The Reverend Herman Hoeksema, the bulletin noted, was to preach a sermon that day from Romans 6:11: "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The title of his sermon was "Proper Christian Self-Esteem."

Self-Esteem: A Biblical Concept

I found it fascinating that Rev. Hoeksema, at that time pastor of one of the largest Reformed congregations in America, would be using such a theme back in the 1930s. To me the concept of self-esteem had not been so much a biblical concept, as a theory developed by our modern-day educators and psychologists. That church bulletin, therefore, called my attention to the subject of self-esteem as a biblical concept.

If self-esteem is a biblical concept, we need to examine that concept in Scripture. God's Word alone is authoritative for doctrine and life (II Tim. 3:16, 17). That being established — and I trust it is established in you, my Christian brother or sister — our interest becomes more focused. I am interested in what ministers and educators, psychologists and physicians are saying about this subject, only to compare their views with the instruction God gives in His Word. If the modern perspective on this subject is

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

correct, we must not hold on to views from the past simply because we are comfortable with them. If what the Dobsons and Schullers — as well as the unbelieving psychologists and educators, etc. — are saying about self-esteem can be demonstrated as correct *biblically*, then we must change our old conception of things and begin anew. The question is: How does the modern self-esteem movement hold up to Scripture's view of man, of sin, of self-love and self-esteem.

The Historical View of Self

You should know that the modern theory of self-esteem differs substantially and drastically from that view of self that has been taught in the church historically. Whereas the modern idea of self-esteem is to promote a feeling of positive self-worth, a feel-good-about-yourself attitude, that idea runs contrary to the historical view of the human condition. In the past, were one to say, "I'm OK," the response would be, "No, you are not OK; you are a sinner." Historically, the church has presented the human condition as one most humiliating. Man is sinful through and through, incapable of doing any good and inclined to all wickedness. You and I are born dead in trespasses and sins, spiritually dead and dying day by day. We stand before a holy and righteous God, who hates all sin and destroys the wicked.

Man, being spiritually dead, cannot save himself. He must be born again by the Spirit and made one with Christ by faith. For Christ is the Son of God, God become flesh, who went to the cross to die as satisfaction to God for the sins of His own people, those chosen by God from eternity. And seeing oneself in Christ, we may know that we are saved, that we are of great worth in the sight of God, that we are loved by Him and created to serve Him with whatever gifts He has given us, no matter how few or small those gifts may be. Thus, you and I must humble ourselves, confessing our sinfulness before God, and must find our salvation in Jesus Christ alone. That, very briefly stated, is the

church's historical presentation of man's condition and the way to proper Christian self-esteem.

This view can be found in many of the writings of the Puritans of old. In my study of this subject, I ran across some striking quotations from churchmen of old. I will quote one, Horatius Bonar, a 19th century preacher in Scotland. He said,

In all unbelief there are these two things: a good opinion of self and a bad opinion of God. So long as these things exist, it is impossible for an inquirer to find rest. His good opinion of himself makes him think it quite possible to win God's favor by his own religious performances.... The object of the Holy Spirit's work, in convicting of sin, is to alter the sinner's opinion of himself, and so to reduce his estimate of his own character that he shall think of himself as God does....

Now, I emphasize, that has been the *historical* position of the church as a whole. In our day you will find very few churches maintaining and proclaiming such a presentation of man and salvation.

The prevalent emphasis on self-esteem in our day has taken a very different approach. How often is not

the root of all problems thought to be found in "a negative self-image." New Age thinking, becoming more and more prevalent in today's society, teaches that you can consciously choose to cleanse your mind of any negative self-images. If you have a problem, or if you do not like your circumstances, you can make them go away by clearing them out of your mind, and consciously replacing those negative images with images of what you would like reality to be. Reality is, then, what you create in your own mind. New Age thinking thus totally ignores the problem of sin and rejects the church's long-standing remedy for sin.

But such teachings as contrast with the church's historical position are not confined to philosophical movements, nor to the field of psychology. There is today a different presentation right within the church itself. That becomes a matter even more dangerous for you young people. You must be conscious of the fact that there is a right way and a wrong way of viewing yourself. For your sake, and for your spiritual health, I long for you to view yourself and evaluate yourself in the right way — God's way. □

A WATERED GARDEN

A Brief History of the
Protestant Reformed
Churches in America

"Thou
shalt be
like a
watered
garden..."

Isaiah
58:11

Gertrude Hoeksema

Illustrated by
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Hugh Latimer: Reformer and Martyr*

Reformation in England

God works in mysterious ways, and the wonders of His providence sometimes leave us gasping in surprise. The Reformation in England is illustrative of this truth. While in Germany and Geneva God brought about the Reformation through the work of mighty men of God such as Luther and Calvin, in England the Reformation turned on the lust and fornication of a king — Henry VIII, known throughout history as the man of many wives, some of whom he murdered.

About the lust of Henry we must say a few words because the work of the noble Hugh Latimer cannot be understood without the background of a fornicating king.

Henry, a Tudor king, was married to Catherine of Aragon. Henry wanted to be free of this marriage, partly because Catherine had not succeeded in giving him a male heir to sit on the throne, and partly because Henry had his lustful eyes upon Anne of Boleyn, a girl of the palace who would not sleep with Henry unless he married her.

The pope would not release Henry from his marriage to Catherine, and Henry, in a fury against the pope, cut all ties between England and Rome, rejected the ecclesiastical and civil authority of the pope in England, made himself head of the church in England, and refused to allow any money to leave England's shores to find its way into papal coffers.

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

Under these circumstances, Reformation came about in England. It was not as if Henry himself was interested in reforming doctrine. He hated it, remained all his life devoted to Romish heresy and superstition; persecuted and killed those who promoted Reformation truths; and was determined to keep his church in England loyal to the doctrine of the Roman church. But his determination to get rid of papal rule in order to marry Anne Boleyn opened the door to Reformation efforts.

In Germany, Geneva, and other parts of Europe, reformation had come about through separation from the church of Rome. This was never to happen in England. In this country, reformation was attempted by efforts to change the church of Rome itself into a Protestant church. England still bears the effects of this today.

Latimer's Early Life and Conversion

The date of Hugh Latimer's birth is not known, but apparently took place somewhere between 1475 and 1490. He was born of a prosperous farmer in Thurscoton in Leicestershire. Recognizing Hugh's great abilities, his father gave him every educational opportunity and, when Hugh was 14, sent him to Cambridge. There he studied, became a fellow of Clare Hall, took a degree, entered into a study of theology with a view to devoting his life to the service of the church, and established ties with Cambridge which would last throughout much of his life.

Cambridge was in ferment, partly because the teachings of John Wycliffe had never been lost in En-

gland; partly because the writings of Luther had come into the country and were avidly read, studied, and discussed in Cambridge's halls; and partly because Erasmus had seen to it that his edition of the Greek New Testament was circulated in England's intellectual circles.

Although Latimer showed great intellectual abilities, profound insights into theology, and powerful oratorical gifts, he devoted his time and abilities to do all he could to combat anything that faintly resembled the Reformation. He was a bitter opponent of the Scriptures and ridiculed a colleague who expounded the Scriptures in his classroom. Latimer even used the opportunity of his dissertation for a divinity degree to attack the views and teachings of Philip Melancthon.

But God brought Hugh Latimer to the service of the Reformation, though in a rather remarkable and even humorous way. A group of men, one of whom was Thomas Bilney, was accustomed to meet to discuss ways of promoting the Reformation to which they were deeply committed. Bilney had seen Latimer's great potential and had long pondered ways to persuade Latimer to join the movement towards reform. Finally he hit upon a clever, though under God's blessing, successful way. Pretending to desire to make confession and be absolved from sin by Latimer, he used Latimer's naivete

* An excellent biography of Hugh Latimer is: Douglas C. Wood, *Such a Candle: The Story of Hugh Latimer*; Evangelical Press, 1980.

and pride (Hugh Latimer thought Bilney was about to make confession for his devotion to the Reformation and ask for forgiveness) to describe for Latimer his own conversion from the comfortless doctrine of work righteousness which Rome taught, to the blessed peace of faith in the perfect sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of God. Latimer was moved as never before, and, humbled before God, he cast his lot with the Reformation movement.

Latimer the Reformer

Latimer's considerable gifts were now devoted to the cause of reform, and he became an ardent and eloquent preacher of reform. His life was, from that moment on, a life on an ecclesiastical roller coaster — sometimes full of success, sometimes loaded with heartbreak, apparent defeat, and suffering.

As his preaching attracted more people, the bishop of Ely, Dr. West, began to take notice. While first rather tolerant of Hugh and inclined to be sympathetic, he was moved to anger when he heard Hugh preach against the great sins of bishops — a sermon which Latimer preached on the spur of the moment when, about ready to preach on another passage of Scripture, he saw the bishop of Ely with his retinue enter the building. Bishop Ely did not take kindly to such open criticism and forbade Latimer to preach in his diocese.

A sympathetic prior from a local monastery of the Augustinian order, whose monastery was free from the supervision of the bishop, opened his pulpit to Latimer, and the crowds were larger than ever.

But greater triumphs awaited him — and greater troubles. When Cardinal Wolsey looked favorably on Latimer, all the pulpits in England were opened to him. When Cardinal Wolsey, England's most powerful man under the king, fell from favor, Latimer's enemies smelled blood. When King Henry was favorably inclined toward Latimer (partly because Latimer, foolishly, approved the king's divorce of Catherine of Aragon), he came under the king's

protection, felt sufficiently free with the king to plead for some easing of the persecution of protestants, and received from the king the benefice of West Kingston, where he preached Reformed doctrine. When the king had his back turned, occupied with other matters, Latimer was summoned before the bishop of London, harshly and incessantly questioned over many days, and finally excommunicated and condemned. He was restored to favor only by appealing to the king and agreeing to 14 points of Romish practice and worship which included approval of Lent and the lawfulness of crucifixes and images in the churches.

This moment of weakness was, by his own admission, the low point in Hugh's life, a black day indeed, a sin which he confessed before his God, but a crucial point in his life: he resolved that, come what may, he would never do such foolishness again. It was a resolution which would be sorely tested.¹

His life of ups and downs continued. Through the favor of Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cranmer² Latimer received the bishopric of Worcester, where he spent several happy and fruitful years preaching reform, but sufficiently far from the public eye that he attracted little unfavorable attention. But the Lord was not ready to leave Hugh in obscurity and, as his fame spread, he was summoned to preach at the opening of Parlia-

ment in 1536 and, in the same year, at a Convocation called to confirm Henry VIII as head of the church of England. In both sermons, Latimer preached strongly in favor of reform and pleaded with the assembled dignitaries to bring about reform as swiftly as possible.

While it seemed as if his pleas were well-received, an event of another kind spoiled it all. Lutheran theologians came from Germany to discuss union between the two countries and cooperation in the Reformation. When the Lutheran theologians were understandably unwilling to accept the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation³, Henry became increasingly stubborn and not only insisted on the doctrine, but threatened any who denied it with the direst punishments.

Latimer, fully aware that he could never teach such doctrine, resigned his bishopric. He would probably have escaped punishment if it were not for the fact that a tree fell on him and caused injuries which brought him to London for medical help. He was immediately imprisoned, thrown into the Tower of London, and remained there for six years until Henry, having exhausted himself with all his wives, died.

Edward VI, the son of Anne Boleyn and the only male heir, took the throne. Edward was strongly in favor of the Reformation and offered Latimer his bishopric once again, which offer Latimer refused on the grounds of his advanced age. But he did continue to preach, for he had always been, and continued above all to be, a preacher of the gospel.

Latimer's Martyrdom

But Edward soon died and Mary came to the throne. This is the Mary who has rightly earned the name by which she has been known since her death: "Bloody Mary."

Arrested and thrown again into

¹There is some question concerning whether Hugh Latimer signed these 14 points, signed only two of them, or signed none at all. It seems clear that he did in fact sign them. It is interesting and of some comfort to us who fear persecution that three of England's outstanding Reformers (Thomas Bilney, Thomas Cranmer, and Hugh Latimer) all recanted under torture in some measure, and later repented of their sin, only to die a noble martyr's death.

²We shall examine the life of Cranmer in a later article.

³That the bread and wine of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper actually become the body and blood of Christ.

the tower, Latimer was deprived of even a semblance of creaturely comforts. He was tormented and questioned, threatened and mocked, while every effort was made to get him to recant. Though now past 80 years old, he remembered the shame and confusion of his earlier weakness and steadfastly maintained his confession of faith in his Savior Jesus Christ. His response to the taunts and ridicule of his tormentors was: "I thank God most heartily that he hath prolonged my life to this end, that I may in this case glorify God with this kind of death."

Imprisoned with Ridley and Cranmer, fellow Reformers, Hugh Latimer was sentenced to be burned at the stake with Ridley. On October 16, 1555 both were led from the prison to a place outside the north wall of the town, a stone's throw from Balliol College, with Latimer lagging a bit because of his feebleness. Kneeling together before the pile of faggots, they both prayed and, rising, submitted themselves to the will of God and their captors. They were tied to the same stake with a chain around their waists, leaving their hands and arms free. The faggots were piled around them, but, prior to their being lit, a sympathetic onlooker tied bags of gun powder about their necks to speed their death. The faggots were lit and the pain began. It was then that Latimer uttered those immortal words which have rung down the centuries of time: "Be of good comfort, master Ridley, and play the man: we shall

this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

The flames quickly reached the gunpowder tied about Latimer's neck and he died with little suffering. But the case was not so with Ridley. The wood was wet and burned only around his legs. His agony was great and all but unbearable. His legs were completely burned away before an onlooker removed some of the higher faggots to permit the flames to rise higher and explode the gunpowder which ended his life as well.

The triumph was the victory of faith; the everlasting shame and reproach remains Rome's.

All Latimer's contemporaries spoke highly of him. He was eloquent in speech, perhaps England's most powerful preacher. He was a man of impeccable moral conduct. He was kind, honest, enthusiastic about the work, given to many works of mercy, and wholly devoted to the cause of the spread of the gospel.

One writer says this of his sermons:

... The sermons of Hugh Latimer ... although in style essentially medieval, belong in thought and intention to the days of reform. Racy, full of anecdote, reminiscence and humour, rich in homely English words like "ugsomeness," "dodipoles" and "belly-cheer,"⁴ these sermons are an indication of the vigour and courage and outspokenness which belonged to the New Age. Latimer has hard words to say about the pope—"that

Italian bishop yonder, the devil's chaplain"—and about the falseness of images and relics, of the Roman doctrine of the Mass, and about the contemporaries, especially bishops and others who neglect the ministry of the Word and become "unpreaching prelates." Bishops, he says, "are so taken up with ruffling in their rents, dancing in their dominions, ... munching in their man-gers and moiling in their gay manors and mansions" that they have no time for preaching, while the devil "the most diligent prelate and preacher in all England" is busy poisoning the hearts of men.⁵

Hugh Latimer was "one of the most distinguished prelates of the Church of England, undoubtedly one of the ablest, if not the ablest ecclesiastic among the English reformers of the 16th century ... the John Knox of England, the bearer of a name that 'now shines over two hemispheres, and will blaze more and more till the last day.'"

Latimer, while dying, spoke of a light in England that would never go out. If today it has indeed not gone out, sadness fills the souls of those who must admit that it is now little more than a small and flickering flame. □

⁴Words so expressive that no dictionary is needed to know their meaning.

⁵J.R.H. Moorman, *A History of the Church of England*, (Adam & Charles Black: London, 1963) p. 183.

Decency and Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

The Office of the President

Rev. Cammenga is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.

The office of the president is to state and explain the business to be transacted, to see to it that everyone observe(s) due order in speaking, to silence the captious and those who are vehement in speaking; and to properly discipline them if they refuse to listen. Furthermore his office shall cease when the assembly arises.

Church Order, Article 35.

Introduction

This article describes the office, or duty, of the president of ecclesiastical assemblies. The article originated with the Synod of Embden, 1571. Originally it concerned only the president of the particular and general synods. It was the Synod of Middelburg, 1581, that revised the article so that it referred to the duty of the president in all the assemblies, including consistory and classis.

It is worthwhile to compare our Article 35 with recent revisions by other Reformed churches.

Article 32b of the *Church Order* of the Christian Reformed Church reads:

In every assembly there shall be a president whose duty it shall be to state and explain the business to be transacted, and to see to it that the stipulations of the *Church Order* are followed and that everyone observes due order and decorum in speaking.

Article 35 of the *Church Order* of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches reads:

President. In all assemblies there shall be a president whose task it is:

- a. To present and explain clearly all matters to be dealt with;
- b. To ensure that every one observe due order in speaking;
- c. To deny the floor to those who argue about minor things or who let themselves be carried away and cannot control their strong emotions;
- d. To discipline those who refuse to listen.

In major assemblies the office of the president shall cease when the assembly has ended.

The duties of the president are referred to in other articles of the *Church Order*. Article 37 treats the duty of the president of the local consistory. Article 41 deals more extensively with the office of the president of the classical meetings. Mention is also made of the duties of the president of the major assemblies in the Rules of Order both of the classes and of the synod.

Stating and Explaining the Business

The first duty of the president is "...to state and explain the business to be transacted...." This duty of the president was especially important in the days when no printed agenda was handed out to delegates in advance. Today delegates have a rather thorough knowledge of the business coming before the classis or synod from the agenda. Even though this is the case, certain matters included in the agenda may need elucidation and explanation. When this is necessary, it becomes the responsibility of the serving president.

This implies that it is the duty of the president to be sure that the delegates have a clear understanding of matters being treated on the floor of the assembly. If it becomes plain in the course of discussion of a certain issue that there is misunderstanding on the part of any delegate, the president ought to do his best to remove the misunderstanding and clarify the issue.

The president ought also to be sure that motions presented to the assembly are clearly stated and not open to misunderstanding. No ambiguous motion ought to be allowed to stand.

Enforcing the Rules of Order

The second duty of the president, according to Article 35, is "...to see to it that everyone observe due order in speaking...."

This is the main task of the president at our major assemblies — to regulate discussion and debate. The president is to see to it that there is an orderly transaction of the business. He is not to force the discussion in a certain direction, or influence the discussion to his own personal ends, but he is to direct the assembly so that there may be a free, open, and sufficient discussion of the issues. In sum, it is the president's special duty to safeguard the deliberative character of our major assemblies.

This duty of the president includes several things:

1. Giving everyone who desires to speak the opportunity of the floor.

2. Preventing one or two from monopolizing the discussion.

3. Seeing to it that speakers address only the subject under discussion, cutting off those who speak on unrelated subjects.

4. Cutting short those who go on and on.

5. Seeing to it that delegates use good manners and show proper courtesy when speaking.

6. Insisting that speakers address the chair, and not other delegates.

7. Not allowing discussion without any formal motion.

8. Seeing to it that motions are carefully and properly formulated.

9. Preventing unduly prolonged discussion and bringing the discussion to a close by calling for the question.

10. Maintaining proper solemnity, preventing the assembly from becoming lighthearted or even raucous.

11. Making sure the stipulations of the *Church Order* are followed.

12. Enforcing the rules of parliamentary procedure.

This does not prevent the president himself from addressing the assembly on a given issue. If he feels the need to do this, however, he must relinquish the chair to the vice-president. In this case, the vice-president retains the chair until after the assembly has disposed of the issue. When the president does this, he addresses the assembly not any longer as its president, but as an ordinary delegate.

Silencing the Captious

The third duty of the president mentioned in Article 35 is "...to silence the captious and those who are vehement in speaking...."

Two different sorts of persons are in view here. "Captious" persons are those who are sharp in their speech, who make sarcastic remarks, who are caustic when referring to others, whose talk irritates and offends. "Those who are vehement in speaking" are those who lack self-control and do not exercise appropriate restraint when speaking. They lose

their temper and blow up, or are unable to control their emotions. In the language of James 3, they do not know how to bridle their tongue.

These types of individuals the president is to "silence." Usually an exhortation from the president to the offending party will be sufficient. In some instances, it is not. In this case, Article 35 gives the responsibility to the president "... to properly discipline them if they refuse to listen...." What this means is that the president, in the name of the assembly, forbids the individual to continue to speak. That is the "discipline" Article 35 has in mind, not discipline in the sense of formal church discipline, the exercise of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. In certain cases the president may even call for a motion of disapproval and censure from the assembly. In extreme cases, the individual may be banned from the meeting.

Duties of the Vice-President

Nowhere in the *Church Order* are the duties of the vice-president set

forth. The *Church Order* does not even require that the assemblies have a vice-president (cf. Article 34), although neither does it forbid the election of a vice-president. All our assemblies, consistory, classis, and synod, elect vice-presidents.

Generally, the duties of the vice-president include all the duties of the president when he is called upon to act in the place of the president. This may be either because the president relinquishes the chair temporarily, or because for one reason or another he is unable to function in his office.

When not occupying the chair, the vice-president is to assist the president in every way possible. He should assist the president in determining whose turn it is to speak, especially when there are several who desire the floor. He should remind the president of any item on the agenda that may have been overlooked. And he should assist the president in enforcing the rules of procedure and debate.

Term of Office

Article 35 states that the office of

the president "... shall cease when the assembly arises." The president is not a permanent officer of the assembly, but only the presiding officer at that particular meeting of the assembly. This is a necessary safeguard against hierarchy. When the assembly is adjourned, the office of the president ceases. However, it is the case that the last serving president of classis and synod functions at the beginning of the next meeting of classis and synod to the point that the assembly is legally constituted and the newly chosen officers can function.

The only exception to this provision is the president of the consistory. His office as president of the consistory is not temporary but permanent, according to the stipulation of Article 37 of the *Church Order*. A new president of consistory is not chosen at each new meeting of the consistory, but the serving pastor is automatically the president of the consistory. In case a congregation has more than one pastor, they preside over the consistory meetings by rotation. □

Special Article

Mr. Jon Huiskens

History of the PRC: Learning to Live with Caricature

[The text of a lecture given to the Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies (A.A.D.A.S.) held at Hope College on September 20, 1991. The topic of the conference was "The Dutch and Their Faith." The conference was sponsored by the Joint Archives of Holland. This lecture was repeated at the Protestant Reformed Seminary on March 26, 1992, and, at the editor's request, submitted for publication in the SB.]

Mr. Huiskens is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan and registrar at Hope College.

We often wonder how others perceive us. This relates to many areas of our lives: personal appearance, effectiveness on the job, personal relationships, educational background, status within our profession, to name just a few. In all these areas,

if one is seeking to know how others perceive him, he generally wants an honest, solid, well-evidenced analysis and evaluation. This is also true with regard to one's religious beliefs. If criticism or praise is to be given about our beliefs, they ought to be

based upon sound evidence, not personal bias or prejudice. It would be reasonable to expect that, given the importance of religious belief and given the highly personal nature of those beliefs, it would be doubly important that the analysis or evaluation given be based on the facts at hand. If that is not the case, then the result will be a distortion of a person's beliefs. And, when those distortions are the results of exaggerations of certain points of doctrine, then the result is caricature, not truth.

It is my contention (and experience, I might add) that this is what has happened and is happening when the story of the Protestant Reformed Churches is being told. You will be happy to note — right up front — that I will apply this to both sides of the fence: to those who have presented the doctrines and persons of the PRC for ill, and to those who are more kindly disposed — mostly PR's themselves — to the telling of that history and of describing its notable persons.

So, when asked by my colleagues (often, I might add) about what I was going to do with this topic, my response has been that, first, I would like to ask whether the analyses and evaluations given about the origins and subsequent history of the PRC have been accurate and fair? A good test of that will be subsequent history. Has subsequent history proven or disproven some of the analyses that have been made? Second, my purpose will be to give my own personal reactions to representations of our history. I have lived through some 40 years of our 67-year history; I have come to know quite well the leaders of our denomination, including the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema. I have heard them preach; I have read the literature, both pro and con. And, I have found that, for the most part, I have had to learn to live with caricature, not fact. Much of what I have to say will, of necessity, focus on Herman Hoeksema, the founder of the PRC; but I think it will become evident quite quickly that the caricatures have extended far beyond him.

My problem today, of course, is

time. I cannot possibly relate the whole of our history in this brief space. But let me begin by sketching briefly our origins. My emphasis today will be on theology — not persons — although understandably persons and personal feelings enter into every dispute, be it secular or ecclesiastical. And, of course, I am going to have to refer often to Herman Hoeksema, the founder of the PRC. It was against him and his teachings that charges were leveled and caricatures made, so we have to deal with that. But I believe it fair to say that, even when Hoeksema was involved, the arguments were primarily theological, not personal. The only incident, an incident which actually precedes the history of the PRC *per se*, that might be more personal than theological was the flag incident in the 14th St. CRC of Holland, Michigan. All the big guns, including Gerrit Diekema himself, were brought out against Hoeksema, and he was nearly tarred and feathered. Treason and Nazi were words often used against him in that controversy. Where's Jay Wabeke when you need him?

The official beginning of the PRC was 1926, when the CRC Synod of that year did not sustain the protests of Hoeksema and the Eastern Ave. consistory. His deposition was made final by that gathering. But, a separate existence began already in 1924 and, in fact, the periodical, the *Standard Bearer*, in which Hoeksema, Danhof, and Ophoff carried on their controversy with the CRC, was already established in 1924. In 1925, the three congregations involved adopted an Act of Agreement, temporarily organized as the Protestant Christian Reformed Churches, and in 1926 organized permanently as the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

There were two issues of primary importance in the 1924-26 struggles. The theological issue was common grace with its concomitant spiritual-ethical-moral issue of the relation of the believer to the world and secular culture. The antithesis was discussed at length. The church political issue was whether the local

consistory was autonomous. Could, in fact, a classis or a synod suspend and depose a minister and his consistory? The answer of Hoeksema and his consistory was that suspension and deposition could only be done by a consistory. The fact in Hoeksema's case, however, was that the suspension and deposition occurred at the discretion of the classis and synod. This, by the way, accounts for the distinction in the names of the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church in America, and the Protestant Reformed Churches. Churches, not church, say the PRC. A distinction which is lost on many today.

This history, however, must be put into context in order to understand the reaction of the CRC to Hoeksema and his cohorts Danhof and Ophoff. James Bratt in his book, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, sets the context fairly well. There were two cases preceding the 1924 Hoeksema/Common Grace case which figure into the demise of Herman Hoeksema in 1924 in the CRC: the Bultema case and the Janssen case. The Bultema case, sometimes known as the Maranatha case, dealt with eschatology and Bultema's leanings toward premillennialism. The Janssen case dealt with higher criticism and Janssen's alleged denial of the miracles in Scripture. Hoeksema figured prominently in both of these cases. He served on both of the synodical committees, and he authored most of the synodical committees' reports in these cases. He was now a marked man. And, when he continued his writings against common grace after the Janssen case, the protests against him began. The conclusion of the matter was that the Three Points of Common Grace were adopted by the CRC Synod of 1924. The result for Hoeksema personally was his suspension and deposition along with Danhof and Ophoff. And so it was that the history of the PRC began.

The beginning of the history was also the beginning of the caricature. Gross exaggerations of the PRC theology and of its moral stances

abounded. I cannot be complete here, but let me give you some of the most glaring examples:

1. Right out of the box was the charge that the PRC was not a church, but a sect. Its theology was so lopsided that it was a single-issue church. Its leader, Herman Hoeksema, was so dominant that what was begun as the PRC was the mere following of a man and therefore had no right of existence. St. Herman and Pope Herman were a few of the choice epithets hurled his way.

But, this was caricature. Subsequent history has shown that this charge, made in 1924 and repeated often in subsequent years, was not correct. Herman Hoeksema has been dead for 25 years — and we are still here. In fact, there are no Hoeksemas occupying positions of leadership in the PRC today. Common grace certainly occupied the mind of the PRC, but much positive development of doctrine was achieved, particularly in the area of the covenant of grace. 2. Then there was the immediate charge in 1924 that Hoeksema and his followers were anabaptistic in their view of culture and the world. J.K. VanBaalen led the charge in this regard and accused Hoeksema of being separatist and of promoting world-flight — a classic anabaptist.

But, again, this was caricature. And, again, subsequent history is the determinant. Hoeksema, good Calvinist that he was, certainly was a proponent of the antithesis, but never did he promote the world-flight of the anabaptists. His detractors heard only the negative part of the antithesis, the believer's "no" to the world; they did not hear the positive teaching of the "yes" to God. That is the true presentation of the antithesis. Therefore, a full, active, spiritual life "in the world" was absolutely necessary.

*We believe in a reasonable,
rational faith, just as
many other Calvinists do.*

3. Next there was the caricature of the PR theology as scholastic. Hoeksema and Danhof were, in fact, already characterized by the Synod of 1924 as men who were thoroughly

Reformed in their preaching and teaching but with a tendency to oneness, the oneness of logic and reason. He was accused of placing his own reason above the authority of the Word of God. Hoeksema's theology was "single track," emphasizing the sovereignty of God in salvation; but he needed to be "double track," emphasizing the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Hoeksema, it was said, destroyed the scriptural paradox of sovereignty and responsibility, and he did this by human reason alone. And, to top it off, to make matters even worse, he was one of those supra-lapsarians who argued continually from the viewpoint of the counsel of God.

Someone who argues this about Hoeksema and PR theology, however, simply has not read enough about us. We believe in a reasonable, rational faith, just as many other Calvinists do. Doctrine, however, all by itself, simply will not do. Faith without works, says the biblical writer James, is dead. This we teach and believe. We take seriously the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 39: When confronted with the question of the catechism as to why we must do good works, we confess along with all Reformed believers "that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us; also, that everyone may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruit thereof; and that, by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ." And, as Herman Hoeksema himself wrote in his pamphlet, "The Christian and Culture," "... (the believer's) calling in this present world is to represent the cause of the Son of God always and everywhere, in the family, and in the school, in society and in the state, in the laboratory and in the shop.... He strives for a Christian family, a Christian home, a Christian life in society, a Christian school, a Christian university, a Christian state, and is a living member of the Christian church."

4. And, finally, I call attention to the caricature of the PRC and its theology as hyper-Calvinism. Particularly, this label has come about because of the PRC's denial of the well-meant offer of the gospel. That this is caricature is evident from the book

of A.C. DeJong, *The Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel: The Views of H. Hoeksema and K. Schilder*. The origin of this book was DeJong's doctoral dissertation on this subject for none other than G.C. Berkouwer. And the thrust of the work is to paint Hoeksema as a hyper-Calvinist of the baldest sort. Berkouwer, in turn, spread this caricature in his own dogmatics. He refers to DeJong's book as an authoritative, reliable analysis of Hoeksema's teaching on the offer and preaching.

*Not hyper-Calvinism
of the baldest sort,
but caricature
of the baldest sort.*

The spin from all of this is that the PRC, as hyper-Calvinists, preach only to the elect and, further, take pains to make sure that that's all they do. This, of course, precludes all mission preaching, and, in fact, the PRC have been characterized as having no interest in missions at all. This also leads, of course, to the label of being a Post Toasties church — better than anybody else and, of course, the old, old charge that only PR's will be in heaven — singing Dutch psalms, of course.

By now, you have guessed the response. Not hyper-Calvinism of the baldest sort, but caricature of the baldest sort. There are those who believe that only the elect should be preached to and that mission preaching is non-essential at best and wrong at worst. But that is not what the PRC believe and teach. The PRC endorse the teaching of Canons, II, 5 that preachers ought to preach promiscuously and without distinction and to command all humanity to repent and believe. The question for us has not been whether we should preach to all or call all to come to Christ, but the question has been whether God is gracious in the preaching to all, indeed loves all, and wishes to save all.

And missions, what about missions? Currently the PRC, in addition to home mission work in the U.S., have mission projects in Jamaica, Singapore, and Ghana.

And Post Toasties? I think it is

abundantly clear to those who listen well to what we say and write, that we clearly believe in the catholicity of the church.

But I promised to deliver both sides. Our own analyses and the presentation of our own leading persons by our people and in our publications has led to a unique caricature of its own. Let me cite a few examples that come readily to mind:

1. There is first of all the caricature of Herman Hoeksema himself. St. Herman? Pope Herman? Part of that caricature is true. That is the problem with all caricature. Caricature is exaggeration, but exaggeration which is based on what is. And, I have witnessed it for myself. Hoeksema was placed on a pedestal by his followers. He was catered to and was adored. Did he speak *ex cathedra*? To some perhaps. Fact, however, is that Hoeksema was very human. He was, according to some, naive about people; he was gullible. Often he could not discern the truth about those who heaped adoration and adulation upon him. Hoeksema's own last years were marred by those zealots who insisted that their own beloved Dominie Hoeksema could not possibly suffer dementia.

History, however, will sort this out. As generations pass, those who themselves lived the history of 1924 will be gone. Hoeksema as a person will be put in perspective, and focus will turn to his legacy as a theologian.

The absence of peer review of publications also, I believe, hampers our publications. The smallness of our denomination is a factor here. But I hope that we can accomplish some of that in the future. The books and pamphlets we write would serve us much better if additional input were sought prior to publication and if capable editors were to take their red or blue pens to the text before it was published.

2. Secondly, there is the attitude of some in the PRC that we ought indeed be separatists. Any and all discussions have to be done on our terms and with our issues. We have fought the battle against those who insist on the PRC as the only true church, all the rest being apostate or

false. The positive development of the concept of the catholicity of the church has been slow in coming, but it is coming.

3. Finally, there is the matter of the antithesis. We have those who live out of negativism, those who understand only the "no" of the antithesis. There are some in the PRC who have not achieved the delicate balance between the legalist and the libertine. But the believer cannot live out of a negative position. The positive development of the truths of scripture has to be a priority if the believers in the PRC are to lead healthy, full-orbed Christian lives.

So, what do I make of all this personally? Several points, in conclusion, for you to think about — as historians, as theologians, as aspirants to either.

1. Why cannot the story get told straight? Historians are dedicated to accuracy and truth. But historians cannot seem to tell the story of the PRC correctly. And, in connection with this, why cannot historians recognize our existence? True, we are small, but we are part of the Reformed community. I make reference to James Bratt's book particularly. He deals with our origins but does not deal with our continued existence. And as far as theologians go, the opposite seems to be true. They seem obsessed in dealing with Herman Hoeksema. The continental theologians, and Berkouwer in particular, cannot seem to get Hoeksema out of their minds. James Daane, probably one of the more astute CRC theologians of recent time, seemed to be fascinated with Hoeksema and often came to hear him preach. And, the irony in this all, is that of all the theologians that the CRC has produced, Hoeksema has written the most, been debunked the most, been debated with the most, but has never been recognized as the theologian he was by his mother, the CRC. Something, I say, to think about.

The solution to caricature is commitment to truth.

2. To be more personal still. There seems to be something about the PRC

that instills dread in people. Why is it that, when one is thinking of church migration, all the options, whether it be Catholicism or Baptist or Methodist, are acceptable, but if he considers migrating to the PRC he will quickly be told that he will be making a grave mistake? And this dread seems to be passed from generation to generation. The caricature continues. Just recently, for example, I had lunch with a former colleague at the college. We had not seen each other for some five years and, as we were catching up on families and work, the conversation turned to church. Utter disbelief that I was still affiliated with the PRC! How was it possible that I still maintained membership there? Now, he had had no contact with us, but his opinions of the PRC were firmly fixed. And, that causes me to look at myself and at what we as PRC teach and believe. So, from that point of view, the question is an important one. But caricature abounds, and having to deal with that perhaps gives us a sense of defensiveness that shows too much.

The solution to caricature is commitment to truth. For those of you who are interested in the Reformed community and in the history of those denominations that claim membership, I urge you to read critically our history and theology. Analysis and criticism, to be sure, are to be expected; but tell the story straight, and present not only us, but all parties, as they are, not what you would like them to be. And, I reiterate, that cuts both ways. I am reminded of a remark made to one of our professors by none other than Harry Boer. This professor had reviewed one of Boer's books on the doctrine of reprobation. Boer's comment to him was that, while there was certainly disagreement over the contents of the book, he appreciated the fact that his views had been presented accurately. That is what we ask and, I think, what we can expect. □

The Case for Full Subscription to the Westminster Standards in the Presbyterian Church in America, by Morton Howison Smith. Greenville, SC: GPTS Press, 1992. 98 pages (paper). No price given. [Reviewed by the Editor.]

One of the founding fathers of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and longtime Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Morton Howison Smith, pleads for full subscription to their creeds by all officebearers in the PCA. He does this in the face of opposition within that church. The issue is popularly referred to as the difference between "strict" and "loose" subscription to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. As Smith correctly notes, the issue is better described as "full subscription" versus "system subscription."

At issue is the meaning of the "Second Question" of the vows taken by officebearers in the PCA at their ordination: "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures...." Those who argue for "system subscription" hold that the minister merely expresses agreement with the general (undefined) system of doctrine taught by the creeds. This leaves them, they contend, the right to disagree with any number of specific doctrines taught by the creeds. Those who insist on "full subscription," Smith among them, maintain that the "Second Question" binds every officebearer who takes the vow to sincere agreement with the creeds themselves, and that as regards all their doctrines.

Basically, this is the issue that has come up, again and again, in the Reformed tradition as the conflict between those who see subscription

to the "Three Forms of Unity" as merely binding one to the creeds "insofar as the creeds agree with Scripture" and those who view subscription as binding one to the creeds "because the creeds agree with Scripture."

Smith shows that "full subscription" is the Presbyterian position. It is a valuable part of this short book that it traces the fascinating history of the issue of subscription in the history of Presbyterianism in the United States. At a crucial juncture in 1837, the Presbyterian Church spelled out the errors that had actually entered that Church by means of "loose," or "system subscription." They included the denial that God sovereignly governed the entrance of sin into the world (the first error mentioned!); the teaching that election is conditioned by faith (the second error mentioned!); the denial of the federal headship of Adam and original sin; the denial of the substitutionary and penal character of the death of Christ; the denial of irresistible grace; the doctrine that "God has done all that he can do for the salvation of all men, and that man himself must do the rest"; and more (cf. pp. 68-70).

Those doctrines more than any other that the advocates of "system subscription" are determined to oppose are the doctrines of sovereign grace.

History proves that "full" (and I would add, "honest") subscription to the creeds is absolutely necessary for the preservation of a denomination of churches as true churches of Christ. Our own Reformed "Formula of Subscription" is a "full subscription" document:

... we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine, contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the expla-

nation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine, made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, do fully agree with the Word of God.

The Case for Full Subscription reminds us, if we need reminding, that the churches must hold every officebearer to his vow of full subscription. It could well have been added that this implies the necessity of disciplining those who violate their vow. Failure to discipline is the cause of the apostasy of the church. Whereas violation of his vow by the teaching of heresy is the fault of the minister, failure to discipline is the responsibility of the church itself.

Morton Smith does not shrink from indicating the seriousness of the issue in his own church, the PCA. If the issue is not resolved in favor of full subscription, schism is likely (p. 5) and apostasy is all but certain (p. 79).

The book includes an article by John Murray, "Creed Subscription in The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.," that has not been published before.

The Case for Full Subscription can be ordered from GPTS Press, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, P.O. Box 9279, Greenville, SC 29604 (phone: 803-233-0726). ■

The Power Of Prayer: The New York Revival of 1858, by Samuel Prime; Banner of Truth Publishing, 1991; 265pp., \$10.95 (hard cover). [Reviewed by Prof. Herman Hanko.]

The author of this reprint by Banner of Truth was a Presbyterian minister from 1834 to 1885. He was, therefore, a witness to this revival.

The revival of which he speaks began in Collegiate Reformed Protestant Dutch Church on Fulton Street in New York City at a prayer meeting

which began with only six people, but soon included hundreds. This meeting and subsequent meetings became well known under the name: Fulton St. Prayer Meetings.

The meetings brought about a revival of prayer and conversions which embraced the whole of New York City, spread to surrounding areas, eventually reached the extremities of the country, and even was found on board ships plying the oceans and in foreign lands.

The author claims that this revival was the fourth great revival, the first being Pentecost; the second, the Reformation; the third, the New England revival (p. 68). Why the author makes no mention of the revivals under Charles Finney is a bit of a mystery, since Finney's revivals began prior to 1858 and ran concurrently with the New York revival, and Finney was also a Presbyterian minister. It is almost as if Samuel Prime expresses his dissatisfaction with Finney's revivals, although there are some similarities between Finney's revivals and the New York revival. Perhaps Finney was too obviously an Arminian, although he was never disciplined by his church.

The book does not profess to be a theology of revival, but is concerned mainly with an account of the revival and describes a large number of conversions in answer to prayer.

Even without containing a "theology of revival," the book gives abundant evidence of why revivals are never according to the will of God. I have learned that to criticize revivals brings on the wrath of many who consider revivals to be something so sacred as to lie beyond criticism. But the more I read of revivals, the more I become convinced that they are simply contrary to Scripture, and that no Reformed man can truly support them.

The weaknesses of the New York revival are evident on the pages of this book. The Fulton St. Prayer Meetings and the revival they sparked cut across denominational lines without any regard for the truth of Scripture. This revival, along with so many oth-

ers, was an exercise in ecumenism.

There is a flat contradiction in the book (the same contradiction which is found in so many accounts of revivals): the book emphasizes that the revival came spontaneously, unexpectedly, surprising everyone, as a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so much so that other revivals are even somewhat criticized (p. 30); but, at the same time, the whole tenor of the book is that revival comes only when people earnestly pray, continuously bombard heaven with prayers for revival, and fervently seek revival (p. 70).

These revivals too were characterized by an Arminian view of salvation: the unconverted able to pray and long for salvation in Christ (p. 138), the anxious seat — that precursor of the altar call (p. 138), and salvation dependent upon what man does.

As is common with revivals, there are in this revival also post-millennial overtones. If only people would seek revival fervently enough, revival would sweep the whole world and usher in the kingdom of God here below. In fact, the author of this book is so impressed with the fervency of the revival which he witnessed that he suspects the dawn of the millennium any day (p. 194).

While the description of this revival makes it clear that it was not characterized by the excesses of the New England revival and the Finney revival, the chief error of the whole movement lies in its teachings on prayer. The book makes it clear that the chief characteristic of the revival was prayer; but the prayers described were certainly contrary to all that Scripture teaches us concerning prayer.

The main error of the book's theology of prayer is its obvious commitment to the idea that prayer, if offered fervently enough and by enough people and for a long enough period of time, can persuade God to change His mind (an idea all too common today in Presbyterian and Reformed circles). This is explicitly stated in the book. A Presbyterian clergyman is quoted as making the

following remarks at a prayer meeting:

We should remember that all these great revivals were bestowed in answer to prayer. I wonder if my brethren ever think of the *power* of prayer; of the *power* they have to *prevail* over the divine mind. If you ask me *how* this is, I cannot tell you *how*

The Presbyterian then referred to some biblical examples, among whom was Moses. What did God do in connection with Moses' prayer? "Why, he seemed not to be able to withstand the prayer of his servant" And so the church must learn "that God hears and answers prayer, that prayer with God *prevails*" (pp. 69, 70).

No Reformed man can possibly have such a conception of God. Indeed, if it were really the case that our prayers could change God's mind, I would never dare to pray again. But the evil of such a conception is that it denies God's own immutability; it denies the sovereignty of God's counsel; it gives to mere man a wisdom superior to that of God — man knows better than God as to what man should receive; and it makes salvation dependent upon man's work. These are blasphemous notions which no Reformed man can entertain for a moment.

The book is full of "answers to prayer." These "answers" specifically concern themselves with conversions of loved ones and healings from diseases. The book talks about how all these prayers were answered. But what is a pastor going to say to a husband whose wife is taken away from him and from his children even after many fervent prayers. What is an elder in the church going to say to an old saint who has spent hours on his knees praying for a wandering son, when it does not please God to bring that son to repentance? Ought we to say: You have not prayed earnestly enough? You have not prayed with sufficient faith? You have not prayed with enough people? You have not prayed long enough?

Does it all depend on our

prayers? This would rob the child of God of all comfort and hope. It all finally comes down to one simple petition (and yet so desperately difficult to pray) found in the prayer our Lord Himself taught us: "Thy will be done." It is all there. The proponents of revival seem never to have learned how to pray that prayer.

I find it more than passing strange that the book informs us in a Preface that the book is being republished upon the advice of the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. ■

A Cloud of Witnesses, by Alister E. McGrath. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990. 141 pages, \$8.95, paper. [Reviewed by the Editor.]

Able English theologian and popular writer Alister E. McGrath gives us short sketches of the life and outstanding ideas of ten leading Christian thinkers. They are Athanasius (the divinity of Christ); Augustine (the grace of God); Anselm (the death of Christ); Aquinas (faith and reason); Luther, in two chapters

(faith and experience and the justification of the sinner); Zwingli (remembering Jesus); Calvin (our knowledge of God); Jonathan Edwards (the challenge of modern culture); Karl Barth (the "otherness" of God, expressed by McGrath as Barth's insistence, "Let God be God"); and C.S. Lewis (longing for God).

The work is deliberately simple and light. The author writes here not for the theologian but for the layman who desires to know something about these notable theologians and their teachings. Speaking to this audience, McGrath writes:

(This book) is meant to whet your appetite on the one hand, and disarm your fears about theology on the other. Despite everything you may have been told, theology can be *fun*, it can be *relevant* to your faith, and it can be *helpful* in the task of building up individuals and communities in their faith (p. 12).

Each chapter on one of the theologians is only about ten pages long and can easily be read at one sitting.

Despite being aimed at those whom McGrath describes as "poten-

tial theologians," the book is a valuable, and interesting, introduction to the thinking of the ten theologians for pastors. I was particularly struck by McGrath's analysis of the ministry of Jonathan Edwards (pp. 100-110). He sees it as a response to the challenge to the preaching of the gospel by the rise of modern culture. Edwards' congregation contained many "self-made persons" who had no use for the doctrine of justification by faith alone, without works. There were also many nominal Christians who were offended by the notion that they were sinners. Edwards called these attitudes "Arminianism." He attacked them by preaching that human achievements do not impress God and by preaching the full reality of sin. McGrath suggests that the challenge that confronted Edwards is the very same as that which confronts the gospel in the churches of North America today.

Helpful to "potential theologian" and pastor alike are the author's recommendations for further reading at the end of each chapter and at the end of the book. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregational Highlights

Even though the front cover of this issue of the *Standard Bearer* indicates that this is the December 1st issue, I am writing this installment of the "News" in early November, which means that our churches' annual observance of Reformation Day has now just passed. Many of our congregations mark this important event in the life of the church by sponsoring a

lecture. Such was the case again this year.

The congregation of the Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB, Canada sponsored a Reformation Day lecture on October 28 in their church auditorium with their pastor, Rev. M. Dick, speaking on the subject, "The Fire of the Reformation: Is it Still Burning?"

On October 29, Rev. A. den Hartog, pastor of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, gave a speech on the subject, "What is a Reformed Church?" in Hope's auditorium.

On the 29th of October many members from the West Michigan

area PR churches gathered together at the newly completed Faith PRC auditorium to hear Rev. K. Koole, Faith's pastor, give an interesting speech on "The Reformation: Rediscovery of the Harmony of the Gospel of Grace."

The Evangelism Committee of the South Holland, IL PRC sponsored a lecture on October 30 in their church. Their speaker was the former Calvin College professor, Henry Vander Goot, who spoke on "The Reformation and the Gospel of Vocation" (treating the Reformers' idea of the Christian's work in life).

And the Reformed Witness Com-

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

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mittee of the Doon and Hull, IA PRCs, along with the First PRC of Edgerton, MN, sponsored Prof. H. Hanko at a Reformation lecture on the campus of Dordt College. Prof. Hanko spoke on a topic of extreme importance, "The Battle for the Bible."

Evidently the construction of the new church sanctuary of the Hull, IA PRC continues to progress. A recent bulletin announcement from Hull's Building Committee encouraged the congregation to try out several different samples of possible pews to be used in their new church.

And one other note of interest from Hull. Their Christian Fellowship Society added several books to their church library, among which was Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and the Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary.

The congregation of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI met recently to approve plans to upgrade their organ and to purchase furnishings for their new addition.

Not all our churches "build" new structures. Some, like the Randolph, WI PRC, also "tear down." At least Randolph's building committee was looking for someone interested in moving, for their own use, or tearing down the garage of the parsonage. We assume that once removed the garage will be rebuilt.

While Rev. A. Spriensma was preaching in the congregation of the Loveland, CO PRC in mid-October, he found time after the evening service on October 18, to give a special presentation explaining how he and his family came into the PR churches.

Denominational Highlights

I include the previous news item because it serves to introduce another item about Rev. A. Spriensma.

On September 29, Rev.

Spriensma gave a very worthwhile and at times a very emotional speech for the annual Fall Mr. and Mrs. and Adult Bible Societies Mass Meeting. He spoke in the Grandville, MI PRC on the topic "Theological Pilgrimage." In that speech he touched on many of the events in his past which, looking back, were signs of our heavenly Father's infinite love and mercy and His patient leading of Rev. Spriensma and his family into our churches.

Rev. W. Bruinsma spoke to the annual Fall meeting of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) on September 24 at the Hope PRC in Walker, MI. Pastor Bruinsma spoke on "The *Standard Bearer* and the Covenant Family."

The Fall Ladies' League Meeting was held in the First PRC in Edgerton, MN on October 20. Rev. M. DeVries spoke on the topic "Promoting Respect in an Age of Rebellion."

Ministerial Calls

Only one item to report in this issue. Rev. R. Hanko, considering the call to serve as missionary to Northern Ireland, asked for and received a three-week extension. He now will answer this call, the Lord willing, on December 6. □

Food for Thought:

There is no going to the fair haven of glory without sailing through the narrow strait of repentance.

— William Dyer



ANNOUNCEMENTS

TAPE OFFER

Tapes of the conference on Spiritual Depression held on October 9 and 10 at Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church are available by writing to the

Byron Center Evangelism Society
P.O. Box 71

Byron Center, MI 49315.

Tapes include the speeches given by Prof. Robert Decker and Rev. James Slopsma along with the question and answer periods. Total cost is \$6.00.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

The 45th wedding anniversary was observed on November 4, 1992, by

**MR. and MRS. GEORGE
ENGELSMA.**

We, their brothers and sisters, extend to them our congratulations.

May God continue to bless and keep them in His loving care.

"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Ps. 146:5).

Grand Rapids, Michigan

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 13, 1993, at the Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, MI. Material for this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk by December 14, 1992.

Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk