

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

...are there not
more than a few
battle-scarred people of God
who have heard the stricken words
of our Lord Himself,
"My God, My God,
why hast Thou forsaken me?"
resonant upon their own lips
as they hung comfortless
in the grasp of hopelessness?

**Read "Counseling Hopelessness,
the Heart Sin of Spiritual Suicide" — page 470**

*Vol. 69, No. 20
September 1, 1993*

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In This Issue ...

"Shepherding God's Flock." That was the theme of the officebearers conference held a year ago in Colorado, in conjunction with the semi-annual meeting of Classis West. Because those who attended were convinced that the subject matter warranted further study, it was decided to make the March conference a continuation of the one held last fall. A couple of last fall's sectionals were repeated, for further exploration; and a number of new subjects were introduced. And again the speakers kindly consented to submit their manuscripts for use in the *SB*.

Having fewer manuscripts this time than last, we decided to divide them between a couple of issues. In this issue we carry two: one on the work of "shepherds" in counseling those who lack the assurance of salvation, and the other on counseling in relation to suicide.

Actually there is in this issue a third article which fits well with that same general theme. That's Rev. Haak's Meditation, which, though it does not address directly the work of shepherds, does nevertheless deal with the hurt, the distress, of the sheep which makes that care necessary. All kinds of reasons there are, says Rev. Haak, for being afraid in this life. But Jehovah God says "Fear not!" Why not? Read "Redeemed Souls Freed From Fear."

Mr. Joel Sugg, another speaker at that conference, originally chose for the title of his presentation, "Pastoring Those Who Have Gone Through Suicide." One might be inclined to think that the speaker ought to have been more careful with his choice of words. It should be obvious, after all, that a person who has committed *that* sin is beyond the help of a shepherd. Mr. Sugg, however, meant it just that way. For, his thesis was that the sin of suicide can no more be confined to the outward act than can the sin of, say, adultery or murder. He did however change the topic, to reflect more clearly that "basic premise." You will surely want to read "Counseling Hopelessness, the Heart Sin of Spiritual Suicide."

D.D.

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Redeemed Souls Freed From Fear

"But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine."

Isaiah 43:1

Fear.

How true to our lives! We are so often filled with fear.

Fear of the future, of what will be and what will happen to us. Fears of present troubles and trials which would threaten to overcome us and drown us in sorrow. Fears for our loved ones: children, husbands, and wives. (Will they be able to contend with what they must face now and in the future?) Fear of death, the last and unavoidable enemy who comes for each one of us. Fears of tomorrow, the quaking in our souls that the worse thing, that thing we dread the most, will happen and crush our life in despair. Fear caused by the consciousness of our sins. The devil accuses us, our conscience condemns us, and we can tremble over the question whether God is for us, whether He will help and save us.

The pathway of every child of God in this life is strewn with fears on every side. It is not for nothing that Jesus said, "Fear not little flock," for the truth of the matter is that we can spend the majority of our lives in a sense of gloom and foreboding. The Lord knows that fear is one of the great enemies of His people; for when we are caught in fears we fall into

doubts, become weighed down of heart, and fail to glorify God in lives of holy confidence.

The Word of God is: *fear not!!*

Fear must not hold sway in our hearts! Why? Not because our fears are not real, only figments of an active imagination. Not because our judgment of what those things we fear are able to do to us is a faulty judgment, and therefore our fears are groundless. And certainly not because there is something in ourselves which is bigger than the things we fear and will protect us from them. That's the false bravado of the world which disappears as a mist when once the monster of fear unveils itself and stands before us to swallow us up.

No, our text gives us the *only* reason why we must not fear. It gives us an all-sufficient and abundant reason why fear must be vanquished in our hearts. "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, thou art mine!" Because God has given His Son to ransom us from our sins and death, because we belong to Him by sovereign redemption rooted in eternal love and gracious election — *that is why we need never fear!*

Redeemed souls are freed from fear!

* * * * *

The Present Fears

We all know what fear is. Fear is painful. Fear is paralyzing. Fear is ensnaring; it grips our hearts with strong hands and pushes us down into horror and darkness. We feel we can not escape, for everything is pressing in on us, leaving nowhere to turn for relief.

In the second verse of Isaiah 43,

two examples are given which would cause the most intense and naked fear to arise in our souls: drowning and burning. "When thou passest through the waters ... when thou walkest through the fire...." Have you ever experienced what it is like to drown? You are held under the water, lungs screaming for air, a panic and horror seizes you, your legs and arms ache with weariness. And fire? The flames are on your flesh, causing you to scream in horror, rolling on the ground and beating the flames with your hands in an attempt to extinguish them. Do you know such fears which can cause you nightmares and make you wake up bathed in sweat?

We must understand that although fear is common to man, yet our text is referring to those fears which are unique to the children of God — fears which come upon us exactly because we have been made God's people, real fears which the wicked simply could not understand even if you tried to explain it to them. Isaiah is comforting God's people in the context of the Babylonian Captivity. He speaks of the time when Judah would be placed under the thumb of a wicked nation, chastened for her sin, and persecuted by a world which stood in opposition to God. The fears they would experience are peculiar to them as children of God; they come to them as a result of their present position in the world. Possessing the light of Christ, against which the world knows only hatred, and possessing the life of Christ, which now must be subjected to the purification of the furnace of trial, it is inevitable that we are exposed to fears in this life. You can never avoid them.

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That fear is the present reality for God's people is brought out when God says to us, "O Jacob, ... O Israel." Jacob is "heel-holder," the one who relied upon his own strength. Israel is "prince with God," the one who learned to trust in God for all good. Exactly as Jacob-Israel, as the blessed of the Lord, yet now with our sinful pride and our weak faith, we are prone to fear! And how we can fear — fear as did the disciples, even to the point of the desperate accusation: "Lord, carest thou not that we perish?"

Those fears are, first of all, connected to the present trials of faith to which the Lord is pleased to subject us — our times of perplexity, when we cannot see our way, and when we struggle with the will of God for us. We find our present situation impossible to accept, and we become engulfed in a sea of anxiety. We have times of weariness, when we say we cannot go on anymore, and we feel panic and worry threatening to eat us up. There are times when we dread the next moment, for fear that we will not be able to hold up under the stress and pressures. Always, and that according to the good pleasure and perfect will of our God, we endure many fears in our lives as pilgrim strangers.

But even more than all these fears, our present fear has to do with our sin. A very important question I must put to you? Does your sin make you afraid? Have you ever trembled in horror over your sin? Not just, have you sorrowed over your sin, have you grieved and rent your heart? But, have your sins ever caused you to fear? Have you ever feared that God does not love you; that He will not hear your prayers; that you, who have done and thought such things, cannot possibly be one of His? Have you known moments when you were convinced that you were so worthless and evil that God could not love you? Has the guilt of sin weighed upon your converted conscience so that you feared that God had forgotten you and that the way back to Him was closed?

* * * * *

The Certain Redemption

God says to us, "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee!" That is why we may know with unshakable certainty that our present trials and all our sins cannot drown us, cannot destroy us. We have been redeemed by Jehovah Himself. What wonderful depths of consolation for every fear-stricken child of God is found in that certain fact!

We must not fail to notice the primary reason why we must not fear as stated in our text. "Thus saith Jehovah that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel...." Jehovah is the sovereign originator of His people. Why are we His? Not because of anything in us, but rather because God has created His people out of His own good pleasure. As He created the world and fashioned the earth in the beginning according to His own will, so God also made His people out of His own good pleasure. What is God saying to us? He is telling us that our existence as His children, our life now with all its trials and circumstances, is all of Him. God has made us as His own creation and is busy fashioning us for the day of perfection. And now listen, if there is one thing true of Jehovah it is this: *He never forsakes the work of His hands.* He never leaves His creation undone. Fear not!

Yet more: "I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine."

Redemption? A thousand tongues could not tell or express the beauty and majesty of that truth. To redeem is to buy back, to ransom out of captivity by paying the price for release. It is, thus, to purchase for oneself. Redemption is the truth on which eternity rests, namely, that the gracious Jehovah has purchased for Himself a chosen people with the price of the blood of His pure Son, so that we who desired only the dungeons of despair and eternal ruin, might enjoy Him forever!

"I have redeemed thee!"

Let each word sink in. "I," Jehovah, the Almighty One, have done this out of My own lovingkindness

which was with me always. "Have" — it is done, completed, finished! Nothing can change or alter this fact. "Redeemed" — that is, the price which had to be paid to secure your release from eternal torment has been rendered. "Thee" — personal! You, who by My Spirit know yourself to be utterly unworthy. You, whom I have loved and called to myself in the gospel of My Son.

"I have redeemed thee ... thou art mine!" Do you not see why we shall not fear? No matter what, do not fear! You will not be drowned in your trials and sorrows, you will not burn in the flames of God's wrath, you will never be forsaken, destroyed, left to perish. You are not going to experience something which will succeed in yanking you out of the Father's hand. Why? "I have redeemed thee, thou art mine!"

The Wonderful Assurance

God swears these things to us in the Holy Gospel of His Son. That is our comfort and assurance, our peace amid perplexity.

Fears on every side for you today? Here is the Word of God which is more than equal to all the things which cause you to tremble. "Hear this, O poor in Spirit," the Lord says, "I have already brought you out of the lost pit of sin, I will lead you through the maze of trial. I will bring the blind by a way that they know not. I will bring again Jacob from the depth of the sea." Your way is especially difficult? Our Redeemer liveth. He will guide you even through death. He will lead you through the days ahead, along paths which are unknown to you. And He will cause you to triumph and soon rest forever.

That too is our peace before the terror of our sins. You say, but my sins are too great, surely He will have nothing to do with me? Our gracious God puts an end to those thoughts and tells us to be still, for "I have redeemed thee." He paid the price for you, He will never cast away what was so sacredly purchased. Will you cast away what you purchased with sweat and blood, with all that you had? Much less will the unchange-

able One let go of any He has purchased with the blood of His only begotten Son. The cross stands. The price is paid. The ransom is accepted. The prison doors must spring open. There is no going back with God. His redemption in Christ will redeem, it will secure us unto eternal glory.

With this Word of God hidden in our hearts we may well cease from fear. We may walk with quietness and confidence. We may assuredly believe His words, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee: and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee, when

thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

Oh, let our fearful hearts prize above everything His redeeming love, and be strengthened with the word which proceeds from His own mouth: "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee."

□

Editorial

A Holy Nation

This does not refer to the United States.

The United States never was a holy nation. Some think so. Calling on the citizens to return this country to its roots, they insist that the United States was originally a Christian nation. They are mistaken.

Originally there were Christian influences on the nation, but it was never a Christian nation. Many of the most prominent and powerful founding fathers were infidels. Thomas Paine was a wild-eyed rebel against all authority, mainly God's. Thomas Jefferson, chief author of the Declaration of Independence, denied the Godhead of Jesus Christ and reduced the Bible to the "Sermon on the Mount" (which he explained as mere moralism). The fornication of Benjamin Franklin in his old age astounded even the French.

The foundational documents — the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution — do not establish the United States as a Christian nation. If they did, they would expressly declare Jesus Christ to be the Sovereign; the Bible to be the law; and the glory of the Triune God to be the goal.

The act that gave existence to the nation, the revolution of 1776, transgressed the fundamental political call-

ing of the Christian: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" (Rom. 13:1), or, as Peter puts it, "Honor the king" (1 Pet. 2:17).

It certainly is not a Christian, holy nation today.

Officially, publicly, nationally, the nation declares itself hostile to the Christian faith.

It maintains a system of education from which the God and Father of Jesus Christ has been banished and that trains its citizens to be godless.

It has made lawful the murder of millions of unborn babies. This is murder by the state. This is disobedience to the calling that God gives the state to protect those who are innocent before the law of the land. This is in most cases the state's connivance in the sexual promiscuity of the citizens: Kill the unwanted consequences of fornication so that men and women can go on fornicating freely. This is the state's taking into its own hands the sovereign authority of God the Creator over life and death: In legalizing abortion, the state claims Deity.

All three branches of government cooperate in this antichristianity. The Supreme Court has judged. Congress at the very least acquiesces. One of the very first acts of the current president was to relax all restrictions enacted by previous presidents against easy abortions.

Sinking now to the depths of national decay, the United States is in the process of legalizing homosexual behavior. Congress legislates; the courts uphold; the president advocates, appointing notorious homosexuals to high positions in his administration. With this legalizing of homosexual behavior goes a national program of educating the people in the naturalness, goodness, and necessity of homosexuality, especially by means of the state's schools.

The life of the people corresponds to the unrighteousness of the government. The national life is greedy; mad for pleasure; violent; unfaithful in marriage and family; sexually debauched. The Word of God precisely describes the life of the nation at the end of the 20th century, specifically as regards homosexuality, in Romans 1:32: "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." The people have pleasure in those who commit the abominations that they know bring down upon them the sentence of death. Violence and sexual perversity are their summer reading, their favorite television programs, their movies and videos.

The United States is an unholy nation.

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The United States is an unholy nation.

God does not bless America.

I write this editorial over the 4th of July weekend. I notice that churches, preachers, and patriotic gatherings of Christians assure themselves that God is indeed blessing America and beseech Him to continue to do so. It is an insult to the holy God to ask Him to bless this nation. The just God blesses only the righteous nation, and He blesses it only in the way of its holiness of life. We should *thank* God for the United States. By this nation, God gives us the good gifts of earthly freedom and outward order in society. But we may not ask Him to bless it.

God is sparing still this nation because there are in it yet at least 50 righteous persons — His church — but He is not blessing it.

*It is an insult
to the holy God to ask Him
to bless this nation.*

On the contrary, His wrath is falling on this nation ever more heavily. In wrath, God gives the nation the miserable rulers that it deserves. In wrath, He visits upon the godless education the irresponsible people in business, politics, and family who are the products of that education. In wrath, He gives over the population to the "vile affection" of homosexuality. What is so often overlooked in the debate over homosexuality is that Romans 1:18ff. teaches that the approval and practice of this sin is itself the awful judgment of God upon a people that has deliberately held the truth of God under in unrighteousness. This shameful, destructive wickedness is divine punishment: "For this cause God gave them up ..." (Rom. 1:26).

The United States is not a holy nation. It never will be a holy nation.

No earthly nation has ever been, is now, or ever will be a Christian, holy nation.

For God has not purposed or privileged any merely earthly nation to be a holy nation.

This is reserved for one people and one institution only.

The one, only "holy nation" is the church of Jesus Christ.

Under the old covenant, before Christ, this was Israel: "And ye shall be unto me ... an holy nation" (Ex. 19:6).

Under the new covenant, after Jesus Christ, this is the spiritual body of all those in all the world who believe in Christ and are sanctified by the Spirit, which universal body manifests itself in congregations and denominations that clearly show the marks of the true church.

That the church is now God's "holy nation" is the teaching of I Peter 2:9: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people...." The largely Gentile church is the fulfillment and reality of Old Testament Israel. Peter applies to this church all the titles and descriptions that Old Testament Scripture applied to Israel: "chosen generation"; "royal priesthood"; "holy nation" (cf. Ex. 19:5, 6; Deut. 7; Is. 43). The notion, therefore, that the "holy nation" will be the Jewish race in a future kingdom-state of Israel is gross false doctrine. The hope for such a "holy nation" is a vain dream. The spiritual church is the holy nation.

Similarly erroneous and vain is the hope for a "holy nation" of a restored or reconstructed America or any other earthly nation that will be the kingdom of God in the world, fulfilling the national aspect of Old Testament Israel and even carrying out the judicial, or civil, law of that nation. Whatever "truth and substance" of the civil law of Israel remain in Jesus Christ are executed spiritually by the church. The national aspect of Old Testament Israel is fulfilled in the church. The spiritual church is the kingdom of God, the "holy nation." There is no other.

God is king of the church in the

Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Her territory, her fatherland, her country, is heaven, from which the members of the church militant are presently pilgrims and strangers on the earth. Her constitution is the Bible as expressed in the Reformed confessions and in the church order of Dordt.

Her law is the Decalogue.

The Spirit of Christ is her unity.

Her might is the gospel.

This nation is holy. She is holy. Her holiness is a fact. Her continued holiness is assured. This is great comfort and encouragement to preachers, elders, parents, and all church members in the face of the increasing threat to the church's holiness. In the midst of all the unholy nations on earth, this nation is gloriously and infallibly holy. She has been separated spiritually from the unholy nations, their unholy citizens, and their unholy way of life. She has been separated unto God, to have fellowship with Him and to live His way of life. When a member of this nation falls, as fall he or she can, even deeply, he or she does not justify the sin and continue in it, but repents in order to take up again the holy life.

*The calling of the true church
in the United States,
more urgent than ever
as our earthly nation decays,
is to be what we are by grace:
a holy nation.*

For God has chosen her to be His holy nation in eternal election. God has bought for her the privilege to be His holy nation by the redemption of the cross. God sanctifies her to be His holy nation by the Spirit working through the Word and church discipline. He has not done so with any other nation.

The calling then of the true church in the United States, more urgent than ever as our earthly nation decays, is to be what we are by grace: a holy nation. We must preach, pray for, and practice holiness. Eventually,

this will mean persecution. An unholy nation cannot tolerate the holy nation within her borders. A nation that kills its unborn must silence the nation that calls this murder. A nation that places practicing homosexuals in prestigious and powerful government office will make war with

the nation that excommunicates those who advocate or practice this perversity. For the darkness hates the light of the purity of God. The church to whom Peter wrote suffered persecution (cf. I Pet. 1:6, 7; 2:12; 3:9, 13ff.; 4:1ff., 12ff.; 5:8-10).

But the threat of persecution does

not deter the church from her calling. She is, and cannot but be, holy. God's purpose with her has become her own purpose: "that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (I Pet. 2:9). □

— DJE

Letters

■ Self-Esteem in the Lord

Enclosed is a short poem I recently wrote in response to the many ideas I have encountered concerning "self-esteem."

It seems to me that this subject, which has become so explicit, is so much an implicitly inherent quality of every child of God, that it would be very interesting to have a large number of your readers submit written expressions of their personal experiences of "self-esteem" in the Lord.

As I wrote my poem, it seemed that there were endless scriptural passages that flashed across my mind in this connection, and that God's promises to His people fill them with an infinite variety of ways that they cry out with the psalmist, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (Ps. 139:14).

Although admittedly a very ill-accomplished poet, I found this exercise spiritually rewarding, and thought perhaps other readers might enjoy expressing their thoughts, too.

I can be abased; I can abound. (Phil. 4:12)
I can make plans; Thou dost surround. (Prov. 16:9)
Nothing escapes Thy all-searching eye. (Ps. 139)
Thou givest my thought, and even my sigh.

"I am Thine, save me," my guilty soul cries. (Ps. 119:94)
"Fear not, little lamb," my Savior replies. (Is. 43:1)
"Enemies hate you? They hated Me, too. (John 15:18)
I will destroy them, though suffer you do." (I Thess. 1:4-9)

"For consolation, and comfort, your wife
Will help you always, throughout this hard life. (Gen. 2:18)
Cherish her, love her, as I loved the church. (Eph. 5:25)
Honor her purely; your heart will I search."

"We made you in our likeness (We, One-Three) (Gen. 1:26)
To be lord over the earth, air, and sea."
Mindful of me, O Father, in such love? (Ps. 8:4)
To rule with Christ Jesus o'er all, above? (II Tim. 2:12)

"For all things are yours," the good Scriptures say — (I Cor. 3:21)
(Things now, and things then, through Christ, the good Way).
No glory for flesh; the Lord rules alone.
But those who o'ercome shall sit in His throne. (Rev. 3:21)

John Hilton
Edgerton, MN

All Around Us

Prof. Robert Decker

■ A Day in the U. S. A.

According to the Children's Defense Fund, the following happens every day in the United States:

- * 7,742 teenagers become sexually active
- * 623 teenagers get syphilis or gonorrhea

- * 2,795 teen girls get pregnant
- * 372 teens miscarry
- * 1,106 teens have abortions
- * 1,295 teens give birth
- * 2,556 children are born out of wedlock
- * 135,000 children bring a gun to school
- * 10 children are killed by guns

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

- * 6 teenagers commit suicide
- * 211 children are arrested for drug abuse
- * 437 children are arrested for drinking or drunken driving
- * 1,512 teenagers drop out of school
- * 3,288 children run away from home
- * 2,989 children see their parents divorce

Shocking statistics! Frightening! Tragic! But this is what happens when God's will for marriage and the covenant family and home is so openly and flagrantly disobeyed. Evidence these statistics are of the fact that God is pouring out His judgments on our country. Sooner or later, probably sooner and certainly inevitably, the United States, the world's wealthiest and most powerful nation, will fall just as did the Roman Empire. God is not mocked.

But, let us be warned by all this! As covenant parents let us prayerfully bring up our children in the fear of the Lord. Let us show our children by the words we speak and the deeds we perform how they are to live in obedience to the Word of God. Let us as husbands and wives never entertain the thought of separating or getting a divorce. Rather let us love our wives as Christ loved the church and submit to our own husbands as the church submits to Christ. Let pastors and elders in their preaching and teaching and ruling cease not day and night to warn and instruct the people of God concerning the truth of God's Word as it applies to marriage, divorce, and the covenant family.

Statistics quoted by
The Church Herald

■ Anglicans Defect to Rome

Last November the Church of England decided to allow women priests. In reaction to this decision St. Matthew's, one of the largest Anglican congregations in London, has voted unanimously to convert as a group to Roman Catholicism. This decision was announced after England's Roman Catholic bishops

agreed that they would accept Anglican congregations en bloc along with their priests.

Converting Anglican congregations will be allowed to retain temporarily some Anglican practices during transition. Guidelines adopted by the Roman Catholic bishops emphasize, however, that eventually all Catholic beliefs and practices will have to be accepted. Cardinal Basil Hume offered no compromise to disaffected Anglican ministers and others who may be seeking to join the Roman Catholic Church. Hume made clear that, "The aim for those who seek to enter into full communion with the (Roman) Catholic Church must be their total integration into the life of the (Roman) Catholic community. There is no question of a Uniate Church or a personal prelature.... There is no question, too, of becoming Catholics by accepting the teaching a la carte. You have to take the menu—or go to another restaurant." The bishops' official statement said, "Those entering into full communion with the (Roman) Catholic Church are required to accept the teaching authority of the church in matters of faith and morals, as exercised by the Pope as successor to St. Peter, and by the college of bishops in full communion with him."

St. Matthews is one of ten traditionalist congregations that are expected to join the Roman Catholic Church.

The Church Herald
The Evangelical Times

■ News Briefs

■ Knox Theological Seminary, founded by D. James Kennedy who is its chancellor, and located in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, will open a second campus in September in Colorado Springs. "With the growing number of Christian ministries moving to the Rockies, Colorado Springs has become a center of Christian ministry that needs its own seminary," said Kennedy.

■ A showdown over Freemasonry's incompatibility with Chris-

tianity is coming at next month's Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). At last year's convention, delegates approved an SBC Home Missions Board study on this issue. In March, however, the Home Missions Board issued another report which says, "many tenets and teachings of Freemasonry are not compatible with Christianity," yet, because of the SBC's "deep convictions regarding the priesthood of the believer and the autonomy of the local church, membership in a Masonic order should be a matter of personal conscience." Those opposed to Freemasonry believe the SBC's leaders are afraid of a financial fallout if last year's decision is retained. Well they might! Of the nation's 3.5 million Masons, 1.3 million are Southern Baptists, according to Associated Baptist Press. In addition, 14% of SBC pastors and 18% of deacon board chairs are Masons.

■ Declaring that the faith and practice of the largest worldwide ecumenical and Reformed bodies "are in apparent contradiction to the faith embodied in the historic Reformed confessions," eighty church leaders from ten nations, fifteen denominations, and eighteen seminaries met in Pasadena in late February to organize an alternative body. By unanimous resolution on February 20, those present at the Pasadena meeting voted to organize a new group and named it the "International Reformed Fellowship" (IRF). Co-presidents of the new body will be the Rev. Sam Sung Lee, moderator of the General Assembly of the Hapdong Presbyterian Church in Korea, Dr. John E. Kim, senior pastor of Los Angeles Korean Christian Reformed Church and president of International Theological Seminary, and Dr. Luder Whitlock Jr., president of Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. The IRF General Secretary will be Dr. Ananda Perera, professor at International Theological Seminary. Dr. Perera will be assisted by Recording Secretary Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, president elect of Westminster Theological Seminary in California. Much of the groundwork for the new orga-

nization was laid by Dr. Kim, an elder statesman among Koreans in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). Kim has been a pastor in the CRC since 1976. His congregation numbers 14,409 members, making it the second largest congregation in the CRC. The formation of the IRF could mean serious consequences for the CRC. The debates in the CRC over ordaining women ministers and el-

ders have infuriated many in the Korean minority and produced open calls for secession if the CRC allows women to serve in all offices of the church. A major Korean secession could triple the number of churches pulling out of the CRC. According to an IRF press release, the new fellowship "seeks to bring together churches, seminaries, and mission organizations

committed to the inerrancy of Scripture and the sovereignty of God as taught by the Reformed confessions." Will the Protestant Reformed Churches be invited to participate in the International Reformed Fellowship?

Christianity Today
Reformed Believers Press Service

□

The Strength of Youth

Rev. Barrett Gritters

Renewing the Battle

Drama, Television, and Movies

(5)

In our renewed campaign against drama, television, and movies, we began by sharpening the battle lines, showing precisely what the issues are. We pointed out that the battle is not against the television as an instrument, for it can be put to good use if extreme care is exercised. The battle is against the *content* of most television and movies, as hostile towards the Christian faith and life. The attack was leveled against television, movies, and drama from the viewpoint of the ruinous *effects* they have on the Christian life — marriages, family life, personal holiness, and more. And, last time, we argued that *drama itself* is not a behavior that Christians ought to engage in or be entertained by.

We have not yet asked the question of history.

WHY HISTORY?

By "the question of history" I mean this: what has the church in the past said about drama, television, and movies? We have analyzed drama and movies in the light of the Bible. Has the church in the past come to the same conclusion as we have? Obviously, there were no television and movies before about 75 years ago, but there certainly were drama and stage

plays for entertainment and education. Has the church made any judgment on the matter? Have God's people in the past judged favorably or unfavorably? That's the question.

The question of history is an important one.

We make a serious mistake if we neglect to ask (at the very least only for information) what the fathers have said about a particular matter. Pride at its height ignores the question of history. Wisdom will not die with us. We have learned to sing from Psalm 78, "Let children thus learn from history's light...." The apostle Paul

impressed us with the need to "hold fast to the traditions which ye have been taught...." Even worldly wisdom calls us to learn from history.

History is not the *rule*. It's not the *final word*. The rule and final word is the Bible. But that Word of God has been read, studied, and applied for thousands of years. We do well to hear how God's people have been led by the Spirit of truth who promised to guide the church "into all truth" (John 16:13).

As for progress, history implies progress, development. But before we change direction, we ought to

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study carefully where the church is coming from, and listen to what they have learned.

We will honor Jesus' Spirit by examining the history of His Church.

THE ANCIENT CHURCH

From the beginning, the church frowned on plays as entertainment for Christians.

The generality of good Men, both in former and in latter Ages, have looked upon Stage-Plays as abominable Vanities. The Fathers (as they are called) do with one Voice vehemently Condemn them.... In those days (of Tertullian, AD ca.160-210, BLG) they would not Baptize any Person, that should be so much as a Beholder, much less one that should be an Actor in a Stage-Play. Yes, if Christians did afford their presence at such Stage-Plays, they were by the Ecclesiastical Constitution judged as guilty of a Crime deserving no less than Excommunication.¹

If you wish, you may read the church father Tertullian, and hear his sound condemnation of the plays. For he "led the way for a 'theatre-criticism' during the time of the Church Fathers as well as for the critics of the theatre of centuries to follow...."²

Looking back on this history, Thomas Brainerd, Presbyterian minister in Philadelphia, lectured in 1840 on "Influence of Theatres: A Lecture on the Nature and Tendency of the Stage." After denouncing the evil content of plays, he pointed out that "An English writer (William Prynne, BLG) in the time of Charles I. 'made a catalogue of authorities against the stage, which contains every name of eminence in the heathen and Christian world — it comprehends the united testimony of the Jewish and Christian churches — the deliberate acts of fifty-four ancient and modern, general, national, and provincial councils and synods, both of the western and eastern churches; the condemnatory sentence of seventy-one ancient fathers, and one hundred and fifty modern Catholic and Protestant authors.'"³

REFORMATION HISTORY

As often happens, what was once condemned soon gained favor in the churches. By the time of the Reformation, plays were common. Luther was using drama to instruct the schoolboys, and Calvin's Geneva permitted acting troops to enter the city. But "some early Reformers expressed ambivalence and even hostility towards scenic spectacle...."⁴ William Farel, who brought Calvin to Geneva, wrote to Calvin on June 16, 1546, that "actors who delight in assumed characters when they should conform their own to Christ in every kind of duty, do grave spiritual harm to themselves by representing the sins of others."⁵ This criticism was not unique to William Farel.

Certainly, some Reformers did not condemn drama. But this was not the only remnant of corruption that remained to be rooted out until other men of God were raised up to call the church to holiness.

After the Reformation gained momentum, the "one Voice" sounded again against drama and the theater. "By 1580 or so, the old consensus of opinion among Protestant leaders and writers in supporting or tolerating the theatre was over. There was now a pronounced division of attitudes, apparently with most siding with the opposition...."⁶ In Shakespeare's England, "there does appear to have been a decline in number as the (16th) century came to a close... at least to the extent that they were a distant memory for Samuel Harsnet in 1601 who recalled fondly the 'old church plays, when the nimble Vice would skip up nimbly like a Jack an Apes into the devil's neck, and ride the devil a course.'"⁷ Another reason given for the "decline of Protestant drama during the early sixties (1560s, BLG) is a changed attitude towards drama per se by returning Marian exiles of a Calvinist persuasion."⁸

A NEW LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY?

I am aware that two recent works make the claim that drama was allowed in the early church and during

Reformation time.⁹ The authors call the church to witness for the defense of the theater. But by their own admission, they "benefit from revisionist historians."¹⁰ One of the two authors gives aid to our cause by admitting that her research of church decrees up till A.D. 750 "confirmed the existence of the official negation of the Roman theatre by the Church...." And the publisher of one boasts that the author argues "contrary to received wisdom."

All this "new research" should carry no more weight with us than would a man's argument 100 years from now (if the Lord tarries) that "Somesynods and Reformed churches of the last century denied the infallibility of the Bible." We will hold to the "received wisdom."

POST-REFORMATION HISTORY

The national Synod of Holland at Dort, 1587 (and several provincial councils in the Netherlands) outlawed plays. Voetius, one of the delegates to the 1618/1619 Synod of Dort, "Declares that Stage-Plays had been quite banished out of the City of Utrecht, and other places, and not practiced for many years...."¹¹

In 1687, Increase Mather, regarded by many as the greatest native-born American Puritan, wrote a "Testimony" against "several Prophane and Superstitious Customs, Now Practiced by some in New-England," in which he includes stage plays. Mather agrees with Dr. John Rainolds "who said that it is not only Unlawful to be an Actor, but a Beholder of those Vanities." Mather believed, as we have earlier argued, "that to set forth Sin Dramatically or Sportfully, is inconsistent with that Sorrow for Sin, as Sin, which is every man's Duty."¹²

On the day after Christmas, 1811, a crowded theater burned in Richmond, Virginia killing 75 persons, including the governor of the state. At the request of some young men, the Rev. Samuel Miller, of the First Presbyterian Church in New York City, preached a sermon against the-

ater attendance. He said, "You ought to know, that even pagans, and Christians of all denominations and in every period of the Church, have united in denouncing this class of amusements, as essentially corrupt and demoralizing in their nature." He quotes from ancient authorities. He continues: "All the *Fathers*, who speak on the subject, with one voice attest that this was the case. A number of early *Synods* or *Councils*, passed formal canons, condemning the theatre, and excluding actors, and those who intermarried with them, or openly encouraged them, from the privileges of the church." Again, he provides proof. In addition, "The churches of *France*, *Holland*, and *Scotland*, have declared it to be 'unlawful to go to comedies, tragedies, interludes, farces, or other stage plays, acted in public or private; because in all ages, these have been forbidden among Christians, as bringing in a corruption of good manners.'" ¹³

It should not be left out that the American Congress, following the famous Declaration of Independence, passed a resolution that declared, "Whereas true religion and good morals are the only solid foundation of public liberty and happiness, Resolved, that it be and hereby is earnestly recommended to the several states to take the more effectual measures ... for the suppression of theatrical entertainments ... and such other diversions as are productive of idleness, dissipation, and a general depravity of principles and manners."¹⁴

C.H. Spurgeon (of late last century) has already been called to witness against drama. If theatre-going becomes general among professing Christians, he said, it "will soon prove the death of piety." In reaction to church members who wanted to introduce plays in Sunday School and church, Spurgeon pleaded to keep it out, maintaining that it only "whets the appetite for the real thing, breaks down the barriers, and swells the throng of saints and sinners at the opera and the theatre. The church-theatre trains for the world-theatre."¹⁵

AND THE DUTCH REFORMED...

Abraham Kuyper, spokesman for the Reformed cause in the Netherlands last century, once said to an American audience, "Calvinism ... placed a barrier against the too unhallowed influence of this world by putting a distinct 'veto' upon three things, *card playing*, *theatres*, and *dancing*...." He pointed out what was offensive to Calvinists: "the moral sacrifice which as a rule was demanded of actors and actresses for the amusement of the public." A "low moral standard resulted partly from the fact that the constant and everchanging presentation of the character of another person finally hampers the moulding of your personal character...."¹⁶ This is precisely the argument that we have used against *drama itself*.

Early Christian Reformed history harmonizes well with this united testimony. Although their Synod of 1928 condemned only the evil content of the movie and theater, thus showing itself poised to recommend drama to her children, some leading spokesmen for the church felt differently. Respected CRC pastor Leonard Greenway said, "Some of us, however, are inclined to believe that dramatic and theatrical filming is *basically* wrong. We believe that God has given every individual his own unique creatural distinctions in life, and that it is sinful for anyone habitually to reshape his individuality and to twist his personality for dramatic purposes. To 'make love' or to display anger, sorrow, fear or elation under *artificial stimulation* is a profanation of gifts and powers which God intends shall be used only in sincerity and truth."¹⁷

The testimony of the church, with few exceptions, is not only that the content of the theater is evil, but the theater itself is to be avoided by Christians.

CONCLUSION

This testimony of the church is important.

Church history should always be important for us.

There are some today who want to change worship practices, modify a position on divorce and remarriage, allow membership in unions, and more. Their reasoning is that "Other Churches and Other Denominations" allow these things. It should be important for them to know that most "other churches and denominations" did not, before, hold that position which they now preach as gospel truth. Formerly they forbade remarriage; formerly they disallowed membership in unions; formerly they disciplined those who danced; formerly their worship was not like today.

Formerly, these churches forbade also attendance at theaters and movies.

Why, now, the change?

Why do the churches today run madly after drama? Why the strong attraction to theater and movies? Why do they not only promote ungodly movies in the church magazines and school papers, but include drama in their worship services and schools? Why are they so strongly attracted to it?

Is it because they have learned more than our fathers? Is it because they have studied the Scriptures more carefully, that some new light has been shed from the Bible, and they have found that our fathers were badly mistaken on these important matters of the Christian walk and life?

Or is it not rather that the days are evil, and that the temptations that our fathers resisted are not resisted anymore? Has not the history of the church always gone that way? The day of Christ is at hand. The mystery of iniquity is working powerfully.

If we are not careful, watching and praying, will that not happen to us?

Resist.

You will be in good company.

(Concluding next time, God helping, we will stand back and point out the basic issue in our attitude toward Drama, Television, and Movies.) □

Endnotes:

1. Increase Mather, *A Testimony Against Several Prophanes and Super-*

stitious Customs ... London, 1687, from the "Preface," pp. 16,17.

2. Christine Schnusenberg, *The Relationship Between the Church and the Theatre*, University Press of America, 1988, p. 40.

3. Pamphlet printed in Philadelphia, 1840, no publisher given.

4. Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 163.

5. White, p. 170.

6. White, pp. 163, 164.

7. White, p. 139.

8. White, p. 60.

9. Paul White, *Theatre and Reformation* and Christine Schnusenberg's *Relationship Between The Church And The Theatre*.

10. White, p. xiii.

11. Increase Mather, *A Testimony....* Preface, p. 17.

12. *A Testimony...* Preface, p. 15.

13. Samuel Miller, "A Sermon Delivered January 19, 1812, at the Request of A Number of Young Gentlemen of

the City of New York...." Printed in New York, 1812.

14. Quoted from S.M. Houghton, "The Christian and Theatrical Entertainment," *The Banner of Truth*, December, 1971, p. 29, although many other sources provide the same quotation.

15. S.M. Houghton, in *The Banner of Truth*, p. 32.

16. *Lectures on Calvinism*, pp. 73-75.

17. *Basic Questions about Christian Behavior*, Zondervan, 1949, p. 86.

Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

Michigan Home Schoolers Lose Teacher Certification Battle

"...we have not found and defendants have not presented any case that finds the existence of a Fourteenth Amendment fundamental right of parents to direct their children's secular education free of reasonable regulation. We conclude that parents do not have such a constitutional right requiring a strict scrutiny standard. On the contrary, the state may reasonably regulate education, including the imposition of teacher certification and curricula requirements on home-school programs, in order to advance the legitimate interest of compulsory education."

People v. Bennett, Michigan Supreme Court (May 25, 1993)

"We hold that the teacher certification requirement is an unconstitutional violation of the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment as applied to families whose religious convictions prohibit the use of certified instructors. Such families, therefore, are exempt from the dictates of the teacher certification requirement."

People v. DeJonge, Michigan Supreme Court (May 25, 1993)

State Regulation of Home Schools

Michigan home schoolers have long chafed under an onerous state education law that requires parents who home school their children to provide instructors who are state certified. Curiously enough, only two

other states in the U.S. (Alabama and California) continue to insist on teacher certification for home schools. In contrast, by far the majority of states that regulate home schools now require only that the parent-instructors have a high school education and that the home school students submit to periodic academic achievement tests.

During the last decade Michigan home school advocates have chal-

lenged not only the despised certification requirement, but also other regulations imposed on non-public schools (e.g., curricula requirements, 180 school day minimum, and record keeping). In May of this year, the Michigan supreme court finally addressed all of these issues in lengthy opinions in three unrelated home school cases that were consolidated for purposes of hearing. In the *Bennett* and *Clonlara* companion cases, al-

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though the truancy convictions were overturned because of procedural irregularities, the court essentially upheld Michigan's regulatory scheme over home schools, holding that the regulations reasonably advance the state's legitimate interest in compulsory education. In the *DeJonge* case, the court carved out a limited exception where family religious convictions forbid use of certified teachers.

The Bennett Case

Dissatisfied with the public school system in the Detroit area, John and Sandra Bennett withdrew their children and began teaching them at home. The Bennetts enrolled their children in a home-based education program (HBEP) sponsored by Clonlara, Inc. of Ann Arbor, Michigan. The Bennetts occasionally traveled to Ann Arbor where their children were instructed by certified teachers about four to six hours per month on Clonlara's campus. The Bennetts held classes five hours per day, made monthly attendance reports, prepared individualized curricula for each child, and administered standardized achievement tests for each of their four children.

Despite these activities, the Bennetts were tried and convicted of failing to send their children to school in violation of Michigan's compulsory education laws. The trial court held that the Bennetts failed to utilize the services of a certified teacher for at least a substantial portion of the school day, and also failed to maintain certain attendance and curriculum records. The Bennetts appealed their convictions to the appellate court and then to the state supreme court.

No Fundamental Right

Although the Bennetts did not contend they had withdrawn their children from the public school system for religious reasons, they nonetheless argued to the supreme court that parents' right to direct the education of their children should be classified as a "fundamental" right. Such a favored classification would then subject any attempted state regulation of

such a fundamental right to a "strict scrutiny" test. This test would shift the burden to the state to prove that teacher certification, for example, is the "least intrusive means" of attaining the state's compulsory education goals.

Regrettably, the court disagreed. Although the majority grudgingly recognized the parental right to direct the education of one's children, the court stopped short of calling it a "fundamental" constitutional right.

Accordingly, having found the absence of a fundamental right, the court held that the state's teacher certification requirement need only satisfy the "minimal scrutiny" test — whether the regulation is "reasonably related" to a legitimate state interest. The court held:

...it was incumbent upon the Bennetts to show the unreasonableness of the certification requirement, and they have been unable to do so. We are simply unconvinced that there is any reason to find that the teacher certification requirement is anything but at least reasonably related to the state's legitimate interest [in compulsory education]."

Finally, the court determined the Bennetts' convictions should be overturned and vacated because they were not afforded a proper hearing prior to their prosecutions. The court then ordered the state superintendent of education to conduct a new hearing to determine whether the Bennetts' home school met state education laws.

In conclusion, the court obstinately refused to jettison the teacher certification requirement for home schools, even though this questionable regulation is used in only two other states in the U.S. Even more regrettably, the court refused to recognize the parental right to educate children as a protected fundamental constitutional right.

DeJonge Case — Religious Exemption

In the companion case of *People v. DeJonge*, however, which was decided the same day, the court did

carve out a special exemption to teacher certification for "families whose religious convictions prohibit the use of certified instructors."

Mark and Chris DeJonge of Allendale, Michigan taught their children at home since 1984 because of their desire to provide them with a "Christ-centered education." They likewise enrolled their children in a HBEP administered by the Christian Liberties Academy in Illinois.

Nevertheless, because neither of them were certified teachers, the DeJonges were convicted, fined \$200, and sentenced to two years probation. On appeal to the Michigan Supreme Court the DeJonges contended that the certification requirement violated their First Amendment right of free exercise of their religion.

A split court (4-3) ruled in the DeJonges' favor, creating an exception to teacher certification where certification would violate a parent's religious beliefs. Mark DeJonge had apparently testified at trial that it was his sincerely held religious belief that it is sinful for anyone other than parents to teach their children.

Strict Scrutiny Test

Writing for the majority, Justice Dorothy Riley held that, because (unlike the *Bennett* case) the DeJonge's religious beliefs were being burdened, the First Amendment requires the "strict scrutiny" test to be applied. Accordingly, the application of this test shifted the burden to the state to prove that teacher certification is the "least restrictive means of achieving the state's interest" in education.

Applying the strict scrutiny test, Justice Riley opined that teacher certification is an "archaic notion," noted that the "nearly universal consensus of [other] states is to permit home schooling without demanding teacher certified instruction," and further noted that over twenty states have already repealed teacher certification requirements for home schools.

Accordingly, the DeJonge's conviction was vacated and the court held that, although *Bennett* stands for the general principle that home

schools are subject to teacher certification requirements, *DeJonge* carves out a specific exemption or exception for families whose religious convictions forbid the use of certified teachers.

Shallow Victories

Although the Home School Legal Defense Association, the secular press, and Michigan home schoolers quickly declared a victory in the *Bennett* and *DeJonge* cases, a close reading of the court opinions demonstrates otherwise. Even though the *Bennetts'* and *DeJonges'* convictions were overturned, these cases accomplished little if anything for the home school movement, and may have signaled a setback for parental rights in Michigan. There are several reasons for this.

First, the central important issue in the *Bennett* case was whether the parents' right to direct the education of their children is a "fundamental" constitutional right enjoying favored status over state regulatory schemes. The court unequivocally ruled to the contrary, declaring that such state regulations over parental education

need only pass a minimal "reasonableness" test. This ruling is clearly a loss for all non-public school parents sensitive to control over their children's education.

Secondly, in the *Bennett* case the Supreme court stubbornly retained the teacher certification requirements for both home schools and all non-public schools. Teacher certification, then, is regrettably still alive and well in Michigan. This adverse ruling, too, is a major defeat for all parental schools burdened with ongoing state bureaucratic rules and regulations, particularly the archaic teacher certification scheme.

Thirdly, although the *DeJonge* truancy convictions were overturned, only three of the four majority justices ruled that the teacher certification law was an unconstitutional violation of *DeJonges'* religious freedom. Accordingly, the religious freedom aspect of the *DeJonge* case has dubious precedential value.

The Sin of Delegation

Finally, the religious exemption to teacher certification created by the

DeJonge case is arguably very narrow and thus will be of limited use to Michigan home schoolers. This is because Justice Riley's majority opinion restricts the exemption of "families whose religious convictions prohibit the use of certified teachers." Mark *DeJonge* apparently believed it to be a sin to send his children to a day school (even a Reformed Christian day school with certified teachers) because, he insisted, the Bible teaches that only parents may teach their children. Consequently, it would be a sin to delegate teaching to a certified tutor or Christian school teacher. *DeJonge* also maintained it was a sin for him or his wife to submit to state authority and become certified.

But since Mark *DeJonge's* unusual if not bizarre notions are shared by few if any home schoolers (indeed, the appellate court noted that *DeJonge's* own wife and pastor did not share these beliefs), it appears that the *DeJonge* religious exemption can be claimed by few parents. Accordingly, as a parental religious freedom decision, the *DeJonge* case may be of limited significance. □

Guest Articles

Counseling Hopelessness, the Heart Sin of Spiritual Suicide

Mr. Joel Sugg

Whenever the word "suicide" in its literal sense appears, it causes disquieting dread, a dread of death, of death deliberate and appalling. Suicide is always a human tragedy. It is often the cause of yet other human

sufferings. It is sometimes simply unexplainable. It is occasionally seen as sin. But it is only rarely seen as a sin that can be wholly contained within the heart of a believer. This is an important focus of this paper.

Thus a basic premise of these remarks is that sin is always committed in the heart, but does not necessarily show itself outwardly. Therefore, the

sin of suicide can be committed without a person physically taking his own life, just as the sin of adultery in the heart of a man can be committed in the sight of God without that man ever touching a woman.

Another premise is that many believers may be guilty of this sin unknowingly, that even among the most spiritual there is but a beginning

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realization of living a truly sanctified life, a life of seeking to obey God out of loving thankfulness for God's great goodness to him. Consider the personal disgrace in public exposure of our disobedience compared to the shame felt when that same sin is known only to the believer and God. Not often does the child of God feel the same degree of baseness in these two cases, and yet both are equally heinous and deserving of condemnation. It is true that the present human consequences of outward sin are ordinarily much greater than those present human consequences of sin in the heart alone. But this fact itself shows that too often we are more concerned with human consequences than with Divine judgment. Too often we fear men and not God. And as we repent of spiritual frailty, we are graciously brought to our knees and are shown more sharply our total dependence upon God. How could we not know that God, always and everywhere, sees the full depth and the darkest corners of our sinful hearts, even things beyond our own consciousness?

If then this offense is so great, what exactly is it, how may its many aspects be described, who is called to confront, or counsel, or comfort the sinner, and when and how? We can only suggest some responses to some of these questions. Our main purpose here is not to learn so much from these few words as it is to be encouraged to examine further these matters in our own experience and in that of those near us.

Our subject addresses this heart sin of suicide as "hopelessness," a hopelessness which arises from the paradox of a believer's unbelief, the child of God being drawn into the black hole of self-pity by the twisting, goading thought that any new life from above is now dead, if in fact it had ever lived. Closing his ears because of searing pain from the sharp blade of the Word of God, he sees himself as the hated Pharisee, dead within despite his outward form. Or, even worse, he sees his own life reflected among those so-called follow-

ers of Christ with their great deeds and profession of Jesus' name, upon whose ears fell those terrible words of our Lord Himself, "I never knew you."

He willfully closes his mind to the psalmist's admonition, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God...."

Instead, he listens woefully to that wicked self of the old man within him, flooding the eargate of his mind with endless recriminations from that great Deceiver, accusing him night and day. Being overcome, he listens, and that real life within dies to his consciousness, or is seen as having never really been alive. In emotional turmoil, he becomes a walking dead man, and Satan growls as a hungry lion at the prospect of his helpless, hopeless prey. And are there not more than a few battle-scarred people of God who have heard the stricken words of our Lord Himself, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" resonant upon their own lips as they hung comfortless in the grasp of hopelessness?

At the center of this hopelessness lies the sleeping dragon of unbelief, and what readily stirs this monster within is severe trial. The testing ultimately comes from the Sovereign hand of God, but He often brings it to us through the means of the physical pain, injury, disease, or even traumatic cure. It can come from loss of loved ones, of material possessions, of useful independent life. It can come from shame, the public exposure of weakness, failure, or wicked deeds. It can even come from various manifestations of melancholy arising from physical dysfunctions. One who is hopeless finds nothing with which to support his life, and thus death appears as welcome release from present suffering.

In all this, Satan's purpose is to convince the believer that there is no one who understands, that there is no help, that God has rejected him, that he is utterly abandoned, that all is lost.

Yet within this excruciating plight the foundational lesson of God for

His people is most powerfully manifest. The dejected believer is effectively stripped of every earthly support. The loss of all help from this world is undeniable.

But then Satan's lie of God's rejection is mercifully unmasked. And the revived believer begins to be restored with comfort, his *only* comfort, that he is not his own but belongs to his faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He begins to learn that no matter what the circumstances, whether in direst need to the point of death or in the fullness of earthly riches beyond any want, he knows (but to forget and learn again) that it is God's sovereign hand alone, and no earthly means however cherished, which holds him from destruction and the pangs of hell. For some this is a lesson taught in a grievously severe school, but for all of God's people, however learned, it is the most precious Truth of their lives.

Satan's lie that the believer has been rejected by his Lord is unmasked only by the hand of God Himself, working out of a reservoir of many means. But all these varied means, including the counsel of fellow-believers, must have but a single purpose — to leave the beset one finally standing emptied and alone in the world, yet bathed in the love and mercy of his heavenly Father. What a paradox! One who has lost everything but possesses all! How striking that the great truths are great paradoxes! The untouchable and perfect God bending down to embrace the base and cursed man! Resurrection rising out of crucifixion, glory coming forth from shame, life bursting out from death, one's belief made strong despite one's unbelief!

However stark is our naked dependence on God alone, our heavenly Father is utterly gracious in His mercy to His children. He leads us to this point with much human support, even as a father holds his toddler's hand in his first efforts to walk. And He continues to provide such blessings so long as we remember our ultimate dependence upon Him alone.

Good counsel is such a support. In counseling the hopeless we must

first ask for the gift of wisdom, especially the wisdom of sensing what he will listen to, if he will listen at all. Of course it is our prayer that we may be wise to choose the proper words of Scripture; but emotional stress can, for a time, close the ears of the believer even to God's Word. Then, perhaps, the counselor has experience like that of the troubled one. Wisely stated, this could serve as a means of his seeing he is not alone, a key element in counseling the desolate. And if his ears are opened even for a moment by the compassion of some mutual experience, Scripture must then be brought to him, particularly the many trials there are of God's people, once again helping him to see he is not alone in his loneliness and defeat. Elijah flees what he thinks is the desolation of his life, and, coming to the cave, he groans "... I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." David abjectly confesses his sin in despondence, "For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness.... For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me." The despairing one must hear first the depths to which the godly often sink, before being shown through the mercy of God the visit of the Day-spring from on high who brings light where there was before only darkness.

We must show him that the trials of the helpless faithful were fully encompassed in the hateful thorny crown of Jesus Christ, who drank to the very last drop the punishment due His people, suffering the anguish, shame, sorrow, pain, and loneliness of the desolate in the black night of His own soul. All this infinitely surpassed any human trauma and accomplished all our salvation out of His loving obedience to the Father and in loving concern for His people.

Now we see another purpose of God in the suffering of Jesus Christ, to show us the way as He draws us along that narrow, flinty path which leads to His presence, beginning now and leading into eternity. Again the paradox — eternal hope out of hopelessness! Seeking release from suffering, we find that everything we vainly grasp is taken away — except one thing: God alone, our heavenly Father, manifest in Jesus Christ, and engraved upon our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This must be the heart lesson in consoling the disconsolate.

There are times when wisdom in counseling should be judged by the skill in asking good questions, more than in giving correct answers. Yet often the suffering ones are left deaf and dumb by their conviction that nobody understands, and that there is no solution in this life to their problem. So attempting to give answers, however true and valuable, or asking questions, however incisive or pro-

vocative, are both futile, for the effort falls upon an emotionally deadened spirit. There are the times when God closes both the ears of the counseled and the lips of the counselor. But when this happens, He does not leave us disarmed in the midst of battle. It is here that He teaches both counselor and counseled a very great lesson.

We might call it the lesson of God's faithful dog. Indulge the writer for a moment and picture a dumb creature, one without human voice or reason—a dog, a four-legged, maybe a flop-eared, long-tailed, panting critter, whose eyes are filled with faithful love as he rests at his discouraged master's feet. Just the presence of the dog's unvoiced, unconditional concern can be used to bring the one who thought himself alone and abandoned out of his desolation.

When the forlorn, forsaken, deserted, forgotten, cast down, dejected can give neither lips nor ear, let us pray that we may be able to counsel that hopelessness, the heart sin of spiritual suicide, by our simple, unvoiced presence. And in that presence may there be found the Holy Spirit showing forth the abiding love of the Living Word for His people, until hope is revived, and we are able to feed the spoken word of Scripture, even the word, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee...." □

Counseling Those Who Lack the Assurance of Salvation

Prof. Robert Decker

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At the outset we wish to assert as strongly as possible that lack of assurance in the experience of the believer is abnormal. Doubt concerning one's salvation is not the norm of the believer's life. And certainly the lack

of assurance of salvation is not a sign of a deep spirituality. There are those in the Reformed tradition who teach that doubt or the lack of the assurance of salvation is an indication of spirituality, so that the more one doubts, the

more deeply spiritual that person is. This notion must be rejected.

What is normal in the life of the Christian is that he not only knows and assents to the truth of Scripture, but also is assured in his heart that Jesus died on account of his sins and was raised on account of his justification. The child of God is assured of his salvation.

That the assurance of salvation is the norm for the life of the child of God ought to be evident from the fact that both Holy Scripture and our Reformed Confessions teach that assurance belongs to the *essence* of faith. Assurance is not merely one of the fruits of faith which may or may not accompany believing in Christ and appropriating the benefits of salvation. Assurance is essential to faith.

John Calvin defines faith as "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence towards us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."¹ Note the "both ... and" of Calvin's definition. Faith is knowledge of God's benevolence towards us, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit. By the sealing of the Holy Spirit Calvin means assurance. In his discussion of this concept, Calvin even goes so far as to say that "the knowledge of faith consists in assurance rather than in comprehension."² In sections 15 and 16 of the same chapter of the *Institutes*, Calvin argues at length, and with many references to Scripture, that belonging to faith is the assurance of salvation.³

The *Heidelberg Catechism* too makes assurance part of the essence of faith, when in answer to the question, "What is true faith?" it says, "True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel, in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of

grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits."⁴

That faith includes assurance is also the clear teaching of Holy Scripture. The Christian confesses with the apostle Paul, "for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."⁵ And, with the same apostle, the Christian is persuaded that nothing is able to separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus his Lord.⁶

The fact that assurance belongs to the essence of faith does not mean that Christians never doubt their salvation. Indeed most, if not all, Christians struggle at one point or another and to one degree or another with a lack of assurance. We pastors and elders in God's church know this. Scripture and our Confessions recognize this as well.⁷

What may be some of the causes of lack of assurance in the lives of God's people? Sin is of course the cause of all of the problems of the people of God, including the lack of assurance. When we say sin is the cause we mean specific sins, besetting sins, against which Christians have to fight. The *Canons* speak of the fact that sometimes Christians "sinfully deviate from the guidance of divine grace, so as to be seduced by, and comply with the lusts of the flesh.... This, the lamentable fall of David, Peter, and other saints described in Holy Scripture, demonstrates." "By such enormous sins," the *Canons* go on to say, these Christians "sometimes lose the sense of God's favor, for a time...."⁸

Depressed Christians often lack assurance, even to the point of believing they have committed the unpardonable sin. These Christians are often plagued by severe inferior feelings. They believe they are bad, unlovable people. They are convinced others do not like them. Then they often transfer these feelings to God. I'm so bad, God must not love me either.

Unhealthy teaching and preaching in the church, laying too much

emphasis on sin and misery and too little on the wonder of grace in Christ Jesus can produce in some believers a lack of assurance or, at best, a misunderstanding of the truth.

In close connection with this last mentioned cause, a lack of the knowledge of faith may very well produce a lack of assurance. If it is true, and it is, that the confidence of faith is rooted and grounded in the knowledge of faith, one will lack the assurance of salvation in the measure that he lacks the knowledge of faith.

*... counseling those
who lack assurance
begins in the pulpit.*

From a negative point of view, this last observation provides the key to proper, effective counseling of those Christians who lack the assurance of salvation. Effective counseling of those who doubt their salvation can take place only in an environment of good, balanced preaching, i.e., preaching which proclaims the whole counsel of God. To put it another way, counseling those who lack assurance begins in the pulpit. Preaching, after all, is the chief means of grace. By means of preaching, God's people hear the voice of their Savior, believe on His Name, call upon Him, and are saved.⁹ Such preaching will never minimize sin. Such preaching will emphasize that sin is an enormous offense to the thrice holy God. Such preaching will be constantly calling God's people to faith in the Lord Jesus and repentance toward the living God. But, balanced preaching will never sell short the almighty power of God's sovereign grace in Christ Jesus. Such preaching will be constantly directing God's people to the cross of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead. It will stress the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit who can and does break the hardest of hearts.

But even in those congregations blessed with faithful, balanced preaching the pastors and elders will en-

counter those who lack the assurance of faith. How must these be counseled?

The answer to this question is perhaps best summed by Article 10 of the *Canons*, "This assurance, however, is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to, or independent of the Word of God; but springs from faith in God's promises, which he has most abundantly revealed in his Word for our comfort; from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit, that we are children and heirs of God, Rom. 8:16; and lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience, and to perform good works. And if the elect of God were deprived of this solid comfort, that they shall finally obtain the victory, and of this infallible pledge or earnest of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable."

Note well that the assurance of salvation is not produced by any peculiar revelation contrary to or independent of the Word of God! Assurance does not come from some mystical experience. God, the Holy Spirit, grants assurance by means of the Word. Therefore, we must bring the Word of God to those who lack assurance. They must be taught and even admonished (with patience and kindness) to rely on the promises of God which are most abundantly revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Assurance springs from faith in the promises of God. We must direct God's people to God's promises. We must exhort them to believe those promises of God. And again the element of knowledge, the knowledge of faith, is crucial. God's people must grow in their knowledge of the truth of Holy Scripture. The *Heidelberg Catechism* emphasizes this in Lord's Day I, Q. 2. In order to live and die happily (live and die with the assurance of salvation) we need to know how great are our sins and misery, how we may be delivered from our misery, and how to live in thankfulness for that deliverance. We must know this. This is Scripture as well. If we are to avoid falling from our own steadfastness (and that includes the assurance of

salvation), we must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (II Pet. 3:17, 18). Assurance springs from the knowledge of faith.

But, faith is the gift of God. If God's people are to possess what the *Canons* call "solid comfort," the Holy Spirit must witness with their spirits that they are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). The Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirits that we are God's children *by means of the Word!* Hence, those who lack assurance must be exhorted to use faithfully the means of grace. Privately we must bring them the Word as well, in the confidence that the Holy Spirit will use that means to comfort God's children. Still more, they must be urged to pray. Scripture exhorts us to rejoice in the Lord always, something we can do only when we are assured of our salvation, and something we cannot do if we are anxious. Hence Scripture tells us to pray. By this means God blesses us with His peace (Phil. 4:4-7). If God's people cannot pray, they must call for the elders of the church and let them pray over them, and the prayer of faith will save the sick (James 5:13-15). Those who lack assurance must also be reminded that Jesus, their sympathetic and merciful High Priest, prays for them (cf. Heb. 4:14-16; 2:18; 9:24).

Assurance springs from faith in the promises of God.

Still more, these troubled souls must be exhorted to strive to preserve a good conscience by performing good works, i.e., by living a life of sanctification. The *Catechism* teaches that one of the reasons we must do good works is "that every one may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof..."¹⁰

The assurance of salvation flows out of reliance on God's promises, the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirits, and a life of sanctification.

Finally, let us who are called to

shepherd the flock of God be much in prayer for those of our congregations who struggle with doubt. Let us strive to be sympathetic, patient, and kind, as faithful servants of the Chief Shepherd of the sheep. Let us above all, bring these troubled souls the Word of God. □

Endnotes:

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), I:551. (Book III, chap. II, 7).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 560.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 561-562. In these sections Calvin makes very strong statements concerning faith as assurance. "By these words (a reference to Ephesians 3:12, RDD) he obviously shows that there is no right faith except when we dare with tranquil hearts to stand in God's sight. This boldness arises only out of a sure confidence in divine benevolence and salvation. This is so true that the word 'faith' is very often used for confidence.... Here, indeed, is the chief hinge on which faith turns: that we do not regard the promises of mercy that God offers as true only outside of ourselves, but not at all in us; rather that we make them ours by inwardly embracing them. Hence, at last is born that confidence which Paul elsewhere calls 'peace'.... Without it the conscience must be harried by disturbed alarm, and almost torn to pieces.... No man is a believer, I say, except him who, leaning upon the assurance of his salvation, confidently triumphs over the devil and death.... And elsewhere he (Paul) so teaches as to intimate that we cannot otherwise well comprehend the goodness of God unless we gather from it the fruit of great assurance."
4. Question 21. Cf. also Question 1 and 2. Zacharias Ursinus was obviously influenced by Calvin.
5. I Timothy 1:12.
6. Romans 8:38-39.
7. Many of the psalmists struggled

with this problem. Cf. for example, Psalms 42, 73, and 77. Cf. also *The Canons of Dordrecht*, V/5.

8. *Canons of Dordrecht*, V/4, 5.
9. Cf. Romans 10:13-17.

10. *The Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 86.

A Cloud of Witnesses

Prof. Herman Hanko

Theodore Beza: Reformed Theologian

Introduction

Few Reformers have been as much maligned as Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva. The slanders against him came in his own lifetime from his Roman Catholic opponents who evidently feared the power of his pen. But, though of a different kind, these slanders have been found in the writings of modern-day "Calvinists" who charge Beza with corrupting Calvin's pure doctrine and giving Calvin's teachings new twists which Calvin would have repudiated. Specifically, Beza is charged with altering in significant ways Calvin's teachings on predestination and the atonement of Christ. While we may dismiss with scorn the Romish charges which were leveled against him in his lifetime, the accusations that Beza altered Calvin's doctrines of predestination and the atonement are more serious. It is maintained, e.g., that pure Calvinism has been lost since Calvin's time because the Reformed fathers in Germany, the Netherlands, and America have followed Beza in teaching a view of predestination and the atonement which Calvin never taught. Gomarus, the Synod of Dort,

the Westminster divines, Perkins and Owen in England, Turretin, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Hoeksema have followed Beza and not Calvin. It is time, so these critics opine, that today's Calvinistic churches return to pure Calvinism and repudiate Beza's corruptions of what Calvin taught.¹

Beza's Early Life

Who is this Beza who is so widely criticized?

Theodore Beza was born in Vézeley in Burgundy of France on June 24, 1519. He was born of Pierre de Besze and Marie Burderot, from the lesser nobility. His mother, an intelligent and charitable woman, bore seven children, of whom Theodore was the last. She died when Beza was only three years old.

Beza never knew his family home. At a very young age his uncle Nicholas, a member of Parliament in Paris and one who was impressed with Theodore's intelligence, took him into his own home in Paris to supervise his education. Perhaps part of the reason why Theodore's father consented to this was the death of his beloved wife.

Protestantism had come into France with the first writings of Luther which were widely circulated and read. As early as 1520 many Protestants could be found in the land, although they were isolated from each other and unorganized. It was to be the lot of Calvin and Beza to provide

leadership in France and a haven for the refugees who fled the fierce persecutions of Protestants in that Roman Catholic land.

Beza's formal education began in 1528, when Beza, scarcely nine years old, was sent to Orléans to study under Melchior Wolmar. Wolmar will be remembered in history as a man of Protestant convictions who had the privilege of teaching both Beza and Calvin. In fact, it is quite possible that the two knew each other already then, for they were together students of Wolmar. Wolmar took Beza into his own family and Beza stayed with Wolmar for seven years.

Although Wolmar made every effort to convert Beza to Protestantism, the young boy resisted strenuously and refused to forsake the Roman Catholicism of his family. As Beza himself later wrote, it was not until much later that God caused the seeds of Wolmar's teaching to grow and mature in his life.

Nevertheless, the affection between Wolmar and Beza never diminished, and Beza followed Wolmar to Bourges.

In 1534 Wolmar fled to his native Germany during the incident of the placards. Some Protestants had distributed widely in Paris condemnations of the mass, and this brought upon them the fierce persecutions which were to be so much a part of the life of the faithful in France.

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Following the wishes of his father, Beza (much like Calvin) turned to the study of law in Orléans. His heart was not in it, though; he far preferred the study of ancient Greek and Roman literature, especially old Latin poets. He was a literary man above all, and he reveled in the writings of these Roman pagans.

Although he did set up a law practice with his uncle in Paris after he completed his studies, Beza spent more time in reading literature and writing Latin poetry than he did in practicing law. He even had many of his poems published in a book entitled *Juvenalia*, which made a huge sensation in the literary world in Paris. His mastery of the Latin and his elegant style in Latin were so impressive that all his contemporaries agreed that his Latin writings were stylistically more beautiful than his later writings in his native French. The poems, however, were indecent and were to be a source of many regrets in his later life.

Beza was able to enjoy a life of comparative leisure because two benefices were arranged for him which provided him with a steady income of 700 golden crowns a year. Such a handsome income enabled him to live luxuriously in the highest circles of Parisian society, where he wine and dined with the famous literary people of his day. While Beza, in reflecting on this period of his life, admitted sadly to many indiscretions and sins, he steadfastly maintained that he had never fallen into immorality or the more cardinal sins which were so openly practiced in the higher circles of society.

In 1544 Beza was secretly engaged to Claudine Denosse, a girl of the lower class. He insisted on keeping the engagement secret, for to make his engagement public would not only be an embarrassment to his literary friends, but it would also rob him of the income from his benefices. Yet his moral principles left him uneasy even then, and he promised his fiancée that at a proper time he would marry her publicly.

Beza's Conversion and Early Work

God prepared Beza during these years for greater work in His kingdom. Much like Moses, who was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and much like Calvin, who was educated as a humanist scholar, Beza too, though he did not know it, was being fashioned and formed by his God for crucial labors in the Reformation.

Like Zwingli, Beza was brought to conversion by a serious illness during which he had much time to ponder the inscrutable ways of providence and to remember the faithful instruction of his old tutor, Melchior Wolmar. Humbled and chastised, he recovered from his illness a sound Protestant who now committed his life to the propagation of the gospel.

Because persecution continued in France, he took his fiancée and fled to Calvin in Geneva. Here he was warmly welcomed by his old fellow student and kept his promise to Claudine by marrying her publicly in the church of Geneva.

By means of the influence of Peter Viret, Beza was appointed professor of Greek at the University of Lausanne. Calvin already then showed his high esteem for Beza when he wrote to Farel during a time when Beza was ill with the plague:

I would not be a man if I did not return his love who loves me more than a brother and reveres me as a father: but I am still more concerned at the loss the church would suffer if in the midst of his career he should be suddenly removed by death, for I saw in him a man whose lovely spirit, noble, pure manners, and open-mindedness endeared him to all the righteous. I hope, however, that he will be given back to us in answer to our prayers.

Beza's work in Geneva and France

But Geneva needed Beza, and so in 1549 he was called to become professor of theology in the Academy of Calvin. Lausanne was reluctant to see him leave, but Beza felt the urge to work with his beloved Calvin. Beza served as professor in the Academy

from 1559-1599 and as rector from 1559-1563, when Calvin refused the position. He was pastor of the church in Geneva from 1559-1605 when old age forced him to retire. And he served as moderator of the company of pastors when Calvin died (1564-1580).

The Academy in Geneva became the one most important school in all Calvinistic Europe. Students from every part of Europe came there to study, and went forth from the Academy to spread the truths of Calvinism into every part of the continent. Among those who studied there was John Knox, who returned to his native Scotland to fight for the Reformation in that land; and Jacobus Arminius, who, although he studied under Beza, never imbibed Beza's teachings on the truths of Scripture and returned to the Netherlands to spread his poison in the land of our fathers.

Beza will be loved especially by those whose ancestry dates back to the Huguenots (as Calvinists in France were called). It is impossible to relate here how many trips he took to France, how many years he spent among the Huguenots, and what services he rendered for them. When not receiving warmly their refugees in Geneva, he endangered his life by preaching for them, marching with their armies, writing on their behalf and in their defense, and attending their Synods. He presided over the last French Reformed Synod in La Rochelle, before the horrible massacre of Protestants by the Roman Catholics on St. Bartholomew's eve made further Synods impossible. While engaged in peaceful worship in a barn at Vassy, these hapless Protestants were set upon by the Duke of Guise who butchered hundreds of them.

His greatest service to French Protestants was his attendance at the Colloquy of Poissy on July 31, 1561. This colloquy was called in an effort to bring peace between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Attending this notable conference were 11 Reformed pastors from France, delegates from Switzerland, French Roman Catholic

bishops, the king of France (though he was a child), and the queen mother, Catherine de Medici. It was a notable assembly. The discussions, however, went nowhere. As Beza was speaking in defense of the Protestant cause, he was rudely interrupted by the bishops of Rome who were determined not to allow the Protestants to propagate their views. After fruitless efforts to continue the discussion, the assembly was adjourned. Yet the result was that the king and queen mother were exposed to Protestant teaching, Catherine de Medici was impressed with the clarity and boldness of Beza's presentation, and Protestantism was given some recognition and a measure of freedom. This however lasted but a short time. Cardinal Lorraine, the chief opponent of Protestantism, said of Beza: "I could well have wished either that this man had been dumb or that we had been deaf."

In a confrontation with the cruel and bloodthirsty Duke of Guise, Beza made his memorable statement: "Sire, it belongs, in truth, to the church of God, in the name of which I address you, to *suffer* blows, not to *strike* them. But at the same time let it be your pleasure to remember that the Church is an anvil which has worn out many a hammer."

Beza's Last Days

The last days of Beza were spent continuing Calvin's doctrines, quietly teaching, attending meetings, writing and corresponding with Reformers and saints throughout Europe. His wife, Claudine, died in 1588 and Beza married again: a refugee from Genoa, Geneviève del Piano. When Calvin died in 1564, Beza preached his funeral sermon, and shortly after wrote a biography of his mentor and dear friend.²

Weary of his many labors on behalf of the cause of Christ, he died peacefully on Sunday, October 23, 1605 at the age of 86. At his request, written in his will, he was buried in the common cemetery where Calvin was buried and near the grave of his wife. He had fought the good fight

and had kept the faith, and he then received the reward of the crown of life.

Concluding Thoughts

Though not the original thinker that Calvin was, Beza was nevertheless a man of great learning, vast intellect, and deep devotion. His labors and writings are staggeringly great. He wrote dramas, satires, polemical treatises, Greek and French grammars, biographies, political treatises, and theological works. He edited an annotated text of the Greek New Testament which he bequeathed to Cambridge University in England, which text received his name: Codex Bezae. He edited the publication of Calvin's letters and wrote a defense of the killing of Servetus, the heretic who denied the Trinity and was burned at the stake in Geneva by the order of the Council. He defended Presbyterian church polity against the Anglicanism of the church in England. He refuted the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper, defended predestination against the heretic Castellio, and defended the doctrine of the Trinity against the Italian heretic Ochino. His pen was sharp and often filled with the ink of satire; his enemies feared him.

He attended countless meetings, not the least of which was a meeting with German, French, and Swiss Protestants in an effort to bridge the chasm between Lutherans and Calvinists, in the hopes that German Protestants would aid in helping the beleaguered French Huguenots.

He made explicit some of the key doctrines of Calvinism which were more or less implied in Calvin's writings: the truths of the particular atonement of Christ, the federal imputation of Adam's guilt, and supralapsarianism. It is for this that he is charged with altering Calvin's theology.

His enemies, showing their fear of him, did everything to discredit him. He was charged with immorality and with the gravest of moral faults. Repeatedly the rumors of his return to the bosom of Rome were

spread far and wide. In fact, specific efforts were made to persuade him to return to the Romish Church. On one occasion, when Beza was an old man (1597), a certain Francois came to Geneva to do this. He was only thirty, young, zealous, skilful in debate, and the winner of countless encounters with adversaries. But all his skill failed to move Beza. When argumentation failed, he tried bribery and offered Beza in the name of the pope a yearly pension of 4000 gold crowns and a sum equal to twice as much as the value of his personal effects. This Beza could not tolerate. Politely but emphatically Beza told him: "Go, sir; I am too old and too deaf to be able to hear such words!"

That Beza significantly altered Calvin's teachings is nonsense. They worked together in peace and harmony for many years in Geneva and the Academy. Beza read what Calvin wrote and Calvin read what Beza wrote. Who can know the many discussions they had between them on all matters of the truth? Not one word can be found in all the records that Calvin disagreed with Beza on any one point.

Yet the slander goes on. Even Steinmetz calls Beza the father of Hyper-Calvinism.³ But then, we too are called Hyper-Calvinists. And, if Beza was a Hyper-Calvinist, then so was Calvin himself. It is a slander which is easily refuted. And in any case, sovereign, unconditional, and particular grace, which Beza so ardently taught, is the truth of Scripture. □

Endnotes:

1. For an example of this thinking, one can consult R. T. Kendall's monograph, "Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649." For a detailed discussion of these charges see my articles in *The Journal*, beginning with the April, 1988 issue.
2. The biography is still available.
3. David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings* (Baker Book House, 1971) p. 170.

Come Over and Help Us

The sabbath evening of July 18, 1993 marked a historic occasion for Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Houston. It was such an occasion for the whole confederation of our churches as well, and at least a rare event in the church world at large. Pastor Jaikishin Mahtani, a minister of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, was formally installed as minister of our Houston congregation, virtually an unparalleled action, but one made possible in the grace of God through the sister-church relationship which our denominations share.

The Singapore church began in the 1970s as a group of largely Chinese, unmarried young people living in the midst of a dominantly heathen land. They formed a Christian organization originally called the Gospel Letters and Tracts Department. Essentially, all of them came from families that were non-Christian, and many strongly anti-Christian.

In the providence of God, they were put in touch with our Protestant Reformed Churches, the year 1978 marking the beginning of our mission work with them. At that time, Pastor Mahtani was a teenage Indian youth from a Hindu family, who had to participate with this Christian group while under parental persecution. In the ensuing years, we sent tapes, literature, and emissaries of pastors, elders, and professors, often accompanied by their wives, to whom the girls and young women were especially drawn in their questions.

Perhaps of the greatest significance were the sending of one of our ministers and his family to serve as missionary with them for over eight years and the training of two of their men in our Grand Rapids Seminary. These men, one of whom was Pastor

Mahtani, were to be the first two ministers of the new Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, formally organized with the approbation of our own denomination. A sister-church relationship was formed, as we have continued to support Singapore by the presence of one of our most experienced and valued pastors and his wife as minister on extended loan to them today and the soon-coming of a third young student at our seminary.

In these and many other ways, the Lord has been pleased to use the Protestant Reformed Churches to respond to the Singapore group's hunger for the truth and high spiritual energies, all arising and being fed by God's grace alone. We are brought low in humility before the wonder of His work, and yet lifted up in thankfulness for the fruit of His hand.

Now He has been pleased to show in yet another way the mystery of His power. The pulpit of our tiny Texas congregation had become vacant earlier this year. Our pastor, who had faithfully served us for seven years, answered God's call to become missionary to a Reformed and Presbyte-

rian group of believers in Northern Ireland, whom our churches have been assisting for a number of years.

In our need and our struggling in prayer that God would give us growth in numbers while we faithfully witnessed to the Truth of His Word, our tiny country church on the western perimeter of Houston, Texas was led to ask for help from Singapore. We called one of their ministers to become our under-shepherd. When we called Pastor Mahtani to come over and help us, we were greatly influenced by his reputation of commitment to God's Truth and his evangelical fervor to present that Truth to all men. Not knowing God's purpose beforehand, it came to us, at least as a possibility, that his own Indian ancestry and the Chinese origins of Esther, his wife, might be used of God in bringing the Gospel to the extensive Indian and Chinese enclaves in our large metropolitan, as well as to the population at large.

Our hopes for the future are in faith and not seen, but we have been blessed far beyond our expectation with the presence of the Mahtani family and the preaching of our new pas-



Pastor Mahtani with Esther holding Peter; Jonathan, Benjamin, Samuel, and David ready to cut the cake in Trinity's Fellowship Hall.

tor for the few weeks since their arrival. Great has been the reward after months of human concern and activity during the immigration process and major renovation of the parsonage, all carried out by numerous dedicated hands. Time would fail me to enumerate all that has been done and by whom, but one acknowledgment must be made. We are thankful to

God beyond our ability to express in words, not simply for bringing this great work to pass, but for His gift of faithfulness to every member of our Protestant Reformed Churches, each of whom has contributed to our being sustained for over 20 years now through the generous subsidies derived from synodical assessments from all our congregations. May He

give us strength to show truly our thankfulness in our loving obedience to His Word, especially in the way of preaching the Gospel to all the world, and may He send some of you who read this to visit us in Texas so that we may personally show our gratitude to God for His work in you. □

Joel Sugg,

Elder, Trinity PRC of Houston

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Society of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored a conference on Eschatology on August 4, 11, 18, and 25. Each one of these sessions was led by a different minister, starting with Prof. H. Hanko, and followed by Prof. D. Engelsma, Rev. D. Kuiper, and Rev. W. Bruinsma.

The Evangelism Committee of the Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, Alberta, Canada sponsored a lecture given by Prof. R. Decker on the topic, "The Foolishness of Preaching." This lecture was held in mid June in the Lacombe Christian School gym. The audience for the night numbered about 100, with one-third of them being from outside Lacombe's congregation. While Prof. Decker and his wife were in Lacombe, he preached for the congregation of Immanuel for two Sundays while Rev. Dick was on vacation. He also led a two-day seminar on the subject, "The Office of Elder in God's Church." This seminar consisted of four lectures followed by discussion.

We also want to update our readers concerning the ongoing work in the Alamosa/Monte Vista, CO area as reported in our August issue of the "news." With the Lord's blessing, the first Sunday services were held there on June 20, with Rev. R. Cammenga (Loveland, CO PRC's pastor) preaching on the subject, "Our Comfort in Christ," based on Lord's Day 1 of the

Heidelberg Catechism. Present at that morning service were two families with children, two couples, and three individuals. Present at the afternoon service were four families with children, one couple, and three individuals.

Sunday services continue in Alamosa, with pulpit supply coming from Loveland's pastor, or another minister from Classis West, Rev. W. Bekkering being there July 18 and 25. The services in Alamosa are attended also by members of the Loveland, CO congregation on a regular basis. And we have learned that two families from Michigan also attended recently.

Ministerial Calls

The evening of July 18, 1993 was an exciting one for Trinity PRC of Houston, TX. The installation of a new pastor is always cause for excitement, but it was especially so in this instance because their new pastor came to them from faraway Singapore, having before been an ordained minister in the Evangelical Reformed Church of that country. We are thankful to God for bringing this event to pass. May God's blessing rest on Pastor Mahtani and his family as he begins his labors in the Houston area.

Rev. J. Slopesma declined the call he had been considering to become pastor of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI. And, subsequent to that decline, the Council of Southwest formed a new trio from which to call a minister. This trio consisted of the Revs. R. Cammenga (Loveland, CO), T. Miersma (Edmonton, AB), and C. Terpstra (South Holland, IL).

The congregation met on July 29 and called Rev. Cammenga.

Congregational Activities

The Consistory of the Bethel PRC of Elk Grove Village, IL has appointed two committees to work on the matter of their future church location. One committee is to investigate alternative locations for their present worship services, and the other was given a mandate to determine the approximate cost of a structure on their Pratt Blvd. property.

The month of September marks the 50th anniversary of the Randolph, WI PRC. The congregation plans to mark the event with an evening program on Friday, September 10, a picnic on September 11, and special worship services on Sunday, the 12th. We mention this here in the September 1 issue so that possibly you might be able to attend one of these events instead of reading about it in News From Our Churches after it has happened.

Mr. David Higgs, who is presently attending our seminary, and who is a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, was in our Loveland, CO PRC this summer with his wife and family. While there he gave a presentation concerning the EPC of Australia and answered questions about that church.

And one last item concerning our Christian schools. In mid-July, Rev. C. Haak gave a special lecture held at the Lynden, WA PRC on the promotion of Covenant education, sponsored by the Society for PR Secondary Education. □

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On July 28, 1993,

HERM and DEANE SCHIPPER

celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them and thank God for the many years they have shared. It is our prayer that He will continue to keep and bless them in the years ahead. "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

The Schipper Family
Jenison, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's and Ladies' Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland expresses its Christian sympathy to fellow members Mr. and Mrs. Edward Cammenga and their family in the loss of Mrs. Cammenga's mother,

CORA BYLSMA.

Our prayer is that you may find comfort in the knowledge that "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Gordon Wassink, President
Marilyn Wassink, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's and Ladies' Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland expresses their sincere sympathy to their fellow members, Mr. and Mrs. Brent Overway, and their family in the death of Brent Overway's father,

EDMUND OVERWAY.

May they be comforted by the words of Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Gordon Wassink, President
Marilyn Wassink, Secretary

Please remember that announcements for this page should be sent to the Business Office, not to the News Editor (see information on the inside of the front cover).
Thank you

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 25, 1993, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. TIM R. KOOIMA, celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to our God for the love, guidance, and instruction which they have given us. It is our prayer that God will continue to bless them and keep them in His loving care.

"Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations" (Psalm 90:1).

- * Marv and Melinda VanMaanen
Jill, Brian, Lisa, Beth, Nathan
- * John and Sharon Keizer
Kimberly, Kerri, Michelle
- * Steve and Rachel Kooima
Travis
- * Glenn and Krista Kooima
Justin
- * Kevin and Joan Kooima
- * Mark Kooima

Hull, Iowa

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's and Ladies' Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan expresses its heartfelt sympathy to fellow member Larry Dykema in the death of his father,

PETER DYKEMA.

May he be comforted in the words from Psalm 48:14, "For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death."

Gordon Wassink, President
Marilyn Wassink, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of the First Protestant Reformed Church expresses its heartfelt sympathy to its fellow officebearer, Elder William Booth, in the passing of his mother,

MRS. CATHERINE BOOTH.

May the comfort of the family be in this, that the death of His saints is, in the sight of the Lord, precious. (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. Meindert Joostens, President
Theodore Looyenga, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

The Lord willing, on August 17, 1993, our parents,

MR. and MRS. CORNELIUS KAMPS, celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to our covenant God for giving us parents who have taught us and have instructed us in His ways. May the Lord continue to bless them and keep them in His care in the years ahead. "For the Lord is good: his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- * Carey and Lois Kamps
Matthew, Timothy, Kyle, Anna, Nathaniel
- * David and Karla Kamps
Laura, Sara, Betsy, Kara
- * Terry and Lavonne Kooienga
Jarad, Tara, Ryan, Todd, Denise, Vonda
- * Jim and Sandra Westing
Kimberly, Pamela, Amy, Jimmy, Nicole
- * Dave and Ruth Gunnink
Heather, Jordan
- * Larry and Lynn VanOverloop
Joshua, Lynndle, Cory, Cameron
- * Jonathan

Grand Rapids, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 4, 1993, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. JACK VAN DYKE, will celebrate, the Lord willing, their 35th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to our covenant God for the love and Christian instruction we have received from them all these years. May the Lord continue to bless and keep them in the coming years.

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

- * Ken and Sheri Pastoor
Erinn
- * Dave and Nancy VanBaren
Melissa, Brenda, Chad, Michelle, Jessica
- * Dave and Julie VanOverloop
Nicole, Jeffrey, Andrew
- * Jim and Kim VanDyke

Jenison, Michigan