



THE **STANDARD BEARER**

*A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine*

Upholder of the truth is what the church *is*. This belongs to her essence as she has been created by the Spirit of Christ. It is not merely a matter of a task that has been assigned her, so that she is still the church even though she fails to uphold the truth. Whatever religious organization fails to uphold the truth is not the church.

See: Editorial — page 173

*Vol. 70, No. 8
January 15, 1994*

Meditation — <i>Rev. Wilbur G. Bruinsma</i>	
Our Savior Who Makes Blind	171
Editorial — <i>Prof. David J. Engelsma</i>	
To be Church: Upholder of the Truth	173
Day of Shadows — <i>Homer C. Hoeksema</i>	
God Is the Creator (2)	175
Church and State — <i>Mr. James Lanting</i>	
Recent Developments in Church-State Law	178
GoYe Into All the World — <i>Rev. Ronald J. VanOverloop</i>	
Calvinism and Missions	
V. Perseverance of the Saints	180
Contribution — <i>Mrs. Jan Westra</i>	
A Faithful Shepherd	182
In His Fear — <i>Rev. Arie denHartog</i>	
Counseling Those with Marital Problems	183
Bring the Books — <i>Prof. David J. Engelsma</i>	
The Remarriage of the "Innocent Party"	186
Book Reviews	189
News From Our Churches — <i>Mr. Benjamin Wigger</i>	190

In This Issue ...

A theme running through this issue is that of the godly life, or Reformed ethics. Homer Hoeksema declares that the biblical doctrine of creation is "the basis of all morality" (see "God is the Creator"). In the last installment of his series on "Calvinism and Missions," Ronald VanOverloop distinguishes the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of saints from an antinomian teaching of "eternal security." The difference is that the Reformed truth of perseverance maintains God's preservation of His people in holiness of life. The editorial sees the privilege and duty of the church as "pillar and ground of the truth" to include her upholding "all the doctrines concerning the Christian life."

In his vitally important article, "Counseling Those with Marital Problems," Arie denHartog reminds every Reformed pastor of his urgent duty both to teach the full truth about marriage publicly and to give private counseling to the distressed couples in his congregation. Consistories might well discuss this article in their meeting.

James Lanting calls our attention to the kind of (nominally Christian!) world in which the Reformed church and Christian are called to godliness of life. See his piece, "Dutch Parliament Adopts Permissive Euthanasia Law," in "Church and State."

From time to time, we plan to reprint sections from published books, new and old. We take the name of this rubric from Paul's request in II Timothy 4:13, "Bring the Books." If we reprint a paper, or article, we may change the rubric to "Bring the Parchments." The subject of the work reprinted in this issue, an aspect of the Christian life, is the remarriage of the "innocent party."

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Our Savior Who Makes Blind

And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.

John 9:39

"I am come ... that they which see might be made blind." A striking statement it is that Jesus makes. We preach a Savior who is the light of the world. He makes the blind to see and the lame to walk. He heals the sick and visits the prisoner. He seeks and finds those that are lost and gives to them light where there is only darkness. Christ is the Savior, after all! He gives to guilty, undeserving wretches eternal life through the blood He shed on Calvary's tree.

"I come to make those who see blind." How is it possible to hear such horrible words proceed from the very mouth of our Savior Himself?

To understand these words of judgment we must consider the events that provided the occasion for them. Jesus had just escaped the Pharisees who had picked up stones to cast upon Him, when outside the courts of the temple He and His disciples passed by a blind man sitting along the way. This man had been blind from his birth, never having seen the light of day. After Jesus approached the blind man, he stooped to the ground and spit into the dirt. Mixing the dirt with His spittle He made a clay-like mixture and anointed the blind man's eyes with it. He then

instructed the blind man to go wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam.

In faith the blind man heeded Jesus' instruction, and returned to the courts of the temple, having received his sight. His friends and neighbors, in their excitement, brought him before the Pharisees. The reaction of the Pharisees, one would suppose, would be the same as that of the blind man. But the opposite was true. They said, "This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath day." They could not, however, escape the wonder of the miracle Jesus had performed. After the blind man's parents confirmed that he had indeed been born blind, the Pharisees still refused to believe. "Give God the praise," they say, "we know that this man is a sinner."

In unbelief the Pharisees again asked the man how it was that he had come to see. By now he had grown weary of them, and he replied, "I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? Will ye also be his disciple?" This angered the Pharisees, and they reviled the man, "Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is." When the blind man once more rebuked these self-righteous leaders, he was cast out of the synagogue.

Jesus, after He heard what had happened, went out and found the man. Leading this blind child of God who could now see to a beautiful confession of faith, Jesus then spoke the words of this passage. Everyone knew, including the Pharisees who stood by listening, what Jesus meant

when He spoke of making the blind see and the seeing blind. Jesus was obviously using the occasion of this miracle and the reaction of the Pharisees to teach a great spiritual truth: Christ has come in judgment!

That work of Jesus in judgment, today as well as then, is two-sided. On the one hand, Jesus has indeed come to make those who are blind to see. This is a beautiful truth of Scripture for which every child of God ought to be thankful — not because this makes of Jesus a wonderful humanitarian who made the physically handicapped whole again, but because it expresses a spiritual reality that has to do with our salvation.

In Scripture physical blindness is a picture of spiritual blindness. When one is physically blind he is unable to see. Everything is dark to him. He cannot find the right way. He gropes about in the darkness of his blindness. The same is true spiritually. When one is spiritually blind he is totally incapable of seeing and understanding in a correct way the things of the kingdom of heaven. Because of sin, his heart and mind are totally darkened to those things which are of God. He may hear the things of the kingdom; he may have those things laid out for him in the clearest of terms; and he may even learn them. But if he is blind spiritually, he cannot believe them. He refuses to believe these things. Spiritual blindness is, therefore, in essence unbelief.

This terrible spiritual condition of the human race befell man in the fall of our first parents. In Adam we all became blind in sin and unbelief. The Canons of Dordrecht, Article 1 of the 3rd and 4th Heads of Doctrine,

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describe man's blindness in graphic language: "entailed upon himself blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity and perverseness of judgment, became wicked, rebellious, obdurate in heart and will, and impure in his affection." That is spiritual blindness! So blind are we that it is impossible to see (to understand and believe in) salvation in Christ and the heavenly kingdom that awaits God's people! How horrible and frightening!

And except a man be born again, except Christ Himself comes and anoints the heart of a man with the clay of His Spirit and Word, that man will never be able to see the things of the kingdom of heaven. Unless Christ Himself, by an act of salvation, works in the heart of a fallen sinner he will never believe. But in this is the beauty of salvation. Christ has come into this world to give sight to the blind. He says as much in the words He spoke to the blind man: "I came into this world that they which see not might see." Through His death and resurrection Christ has removed the darkness and given us light to see. Our eyes are opened from their unbelief and we begin to understand and desire the riches of the kingdom of heaven. We are made to know and love the God of heaven and earth and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. We realize that if it were not for the powerful work of Christ in our hearts we would still be in darkness and not even know it!

Perhaps the real beauty of our salvation is this: we understand that it is entirely an act of the sovereign grace of God. The sinner whose eyes are made to see realizes that he was powerless to open his own eyes. He could not make himself see the kingdom of God and its righteousness. He could not make himself believe in God. Christ had to work faith in him. Faith then is not an innate power which we, blind sinners, have in ourselves, and which

enables us to accept Christ. We are blind; we cannot see Him! On the contrary, faith is a gift of God in Christ. It becomes ours only with salvation. And that is true whether we are born in the church or outside the church.

In the second place, the blind who are given to see realize that not everyone is given spiritual sight. There are still many who yet walk in darkness. There are, in fact, only a few whom God through His atoning work on the cross makes to see and understand the kingdom of heaven. These are those whom God has elected as His own from eternity. Those who are ordained to eternal life believe. Why me, O God, why me? Why hast Thou opened my eyes to behold the mysteries of Thy kingdom and not the eyes of others? Certainly, I did not deserve it! I was blind, lost in my sin and depravity! Why me? And the answer we receive of God is: "For so it seemed good in my sight!" Amazing grace! How sweet the sound!

And it is made the sweeter when Jesus speaks of the other side of His work of judgment. "I am come into this world that they which see might be made blind." To put it simply, Jesus Himself destroys the idol-Christ of Arminianism. The Arminian Christ does not come in judgment, but dies in order to offer sight to everyone. Yet that Christ does not actually make one to see. He leaves it up to the blind man to make himself see. The true Christ of the Scriptures comes to make some see and to make others blind.

No, Christ does not come to make true believers into unbelievers. He does not come to extinguish the light which He has worked in the hearts of His people. But Christ comes to make blind those who *think they of them-*

selves already see — those who think that they have already earned their salvation themselves and do not need a Savior. The Pharisees knew Christ was speaking of them. For that reason they asked Jesus, "Are we blind also?" In response Jesus explains Himself, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin? but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." And how true that was! The Pharisees refused to admit that Jesus could perform this miracle. As plain as it was to everyone who saw the miracle, they refused to believe that here

before them was the Messiah, the Son of God. They had Moses. They had the law. This man was a sinner. They thought they had cornered the market on salvation. They thought they could see the proper way into heaven. All one need to do is keep the law of Moses as perfectly as they did. If one could do this, he earned the favor and love of God.

These are those who claimed they could see. And we find many of the same spiritual caliber today too. These follow a Jesus who is the greatest of all humanitarians. He has come to cure the world of its ills, of its hatred and strife — a Jesus who will make this present world a better place in which to live. But these will not confess a Jesus who has come to deliver His people from the depravity and guilt of their sin. If they did, they would not deny the incarnation, the atonement, and the resurrection of Christ while still claiming to believe in Him. These, like the Pharisees, claim to see, when in fact they are blind.

Do not deceive yourself! We need Jesus. We are blind, lost in the darkness of sin. And we will go on stumbling about in our sin, unless Jesus Himself, by the power of His cross and resurrection, delivers us. If we view ourselves as having any ability or power in ourselves, we too are those who claim to see when, in fact, we are blind! And these Christ actu-

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ally hardens in their sin. *He makes them blind.* So says Jesus Himself. I have come to save sinners. I make sinners to see and know their sin, and as a result in true sorrow confess that sin. But I have come to judge those who in the hardness of their hearts think they have no sin and need no Savior. And that too, remember, is rooted in the sovereign decree of God: the decree of reprobation. Those whom God has appointed unto destruction Christ makes blind.

It was for this purpose, after all, that Christ was sent. Everything we have explained is the judgment of Christ for which He came into the world. The term "judgment" here means that Christ has come into the world to *reveal the justice* of our God in saving some and rejecting others. Christ came to make manifest that God in His judgment of men is just and righteous. We must remember that God judges every man according

to his works. If one's works proceed out of a heart in which Christ has worked by His Spirit and grace, then God's judgment is just in declaring that man righteous in Christ's blood and giving him a place in His kingdom. But if those works proceed out of a heart which is hardened in its unbelief, then God is also just in casting such a one into utter desolation.

Christ was sent into this world to reveal the very thoughts and intents of the heart. He was sent *then* for that reason; and He is preached *now* for the same reason. When men are called to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, then there will always be one of two reactions: either by God's grace they will be made to see their sin and in sorrow bow before the cross of Christ and confess their need for Him, or they will in unbelief refuse to bow before that Savior because they see no need for Him. They believe themselves to be inherently good. The

first, God saves in Christ; the latter, He punishes on account of their sin. Then God's judgment upon all men is made plain. Christ came into this world, and is still preached today, in order to make manifest the justice of God in saving His elect and condemning the reprobate.

What about you? Look into your heart. Do you see, because of Christ; or do you see, without Christ? Sure, you go to church. Sure, you follow the doctrines and teachings of that church. Does that make you worthy of heaven ... or does Christ make you worthy?

If we believe that we are sinners saved by grace, then we have much to be thankful for. Christ has revealed that to us. We were blind, but now we see. Now we follow the example of the blind man in this account. We confess, "Lord, I believe." Then we fall on our knees and worship our Savior. □

Editorial

To be Church: Upholder of the Truth

It is the honor and privilege of the church to be the upholder of the truth in the world. The church preserves and promotes the truth. The truth depends upon the church as a great building rests upon its supporting pillars and stands solidly on its foundation. Take away the church, and the truth disappears from the world.

Upholder of the truth is what the church *is*. This belongs to her essence as she has been created by the Spirit of Christ. It is not merely a matter of a task that has been assigned her, so that she is still the church even though

she fails to uphold the truth. Whatever religious organization fails to uphold the truth is not the church, regardless of its claim and regardless of its impressive appearance.

The apostle of Christ gives pointed expression to what is said about the church throughout the New Testament in I Timothy 3:15: "... the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

In view of the worth of the truth as the revelation of God in His glory and as the power of the salvation of the people of God, to be upholder of

the truth is surpassing honor for the church. Calvin remarks on this in his commentary on I Timothy 3:15:

No ordinary enhancement is derived from this appellation. Could it have been described in loftier language? Is anything more venerable, or more holy, than that everlasting *truth* which embraces both the glory of God and the salvation of men? Were all the praises of heathen philosophy, with which it has been adorned by its followers, collected into one heap, what is this in comparison of the dignity of this wisdom, which alone

deserves to be called light and truth, and the instruction of life, and the way, and the kingdom of God? Now it is preserved on earth by the ministry of the Church alone.

Only the church has this honor and privilege. Para-ecclesiastical organizations are not upholders of the truth. It was to no purpose that in the late 1970s and the 1980s evangelicals in the United States attempted to preserve the doctrine of the infallible inspiration of Holy Scripture by means of a "council," apart from the church. Man-made, quasi-ecclesiastical movements are not upholders of the truth. The efforts on behalf of the truth in the Netherlands by federations within apostate Reformed churches are vain. Individual, sound preachers and theologians remaining within departing churches can never be pillars of the truth.

The evidence is plain. The doctrine of Scripture is in shambles in evangelicalism in North America today. Witness the open denial of the historicity of Genesis 1-11. Some of the worst offenders are the very men who were quite in prominence at the "International Council on Biblical Inerrancy." The "bonders" in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands get absolutely nowhere in checking the headlong falling away of their churches, much less in reforming the churches. If their magazines are any indication, their witness to the truth is hardly more than a feeble, pathetic bleating. Individual theologians are silenced. Over the years their own weakening is noticeable. They become tolerant of certain aspects of the lie, and even defend them. They are able to do much for themselves personally. They do little or nothing for the truth.

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth.

The reference is to the instituted church. The church that God has made upholder of His truth is the local congregation of believers and their children, organized in the offices of bishop (teaching and ruling elders) and of deacon. I Timothy 3

leaves no doubt about this whatever. The church of the living God is the local congregation, and she is the pillar and ground of the truth. She is the upholder of the truth, however, not in the splendid isolation and self-sufficiency of congregationalism but in the bond of church-unity with other faithful congregations. Thus, indirectly but importantly, the denomination of such churches is upholder of the truth.

That the church upholds the truth has nothing to do with Rome's proud claim that Scripture, gospel, and doctrine depend upon the (Roman Catholic) Church in an ultimate and absolute sense. According to Rome, the church does not depend upon the truth, but the truth depends upon the (Roman Catholic) Church. Even if it were the case that the truth of the Word of God depends absolutely upon the church in the sense that the church originates, determines, and is sovereign over the truth, this would do nothing for the honor of Rome. For Rome does not uphold the truth. It is exactly the fundamental description of the church as the upholder of the truth that clearly unmasks Rome as a false church. Rome has always been, and is today, an enemy of the truth and of the Reformed church that upholds the truth.

But the church is not the upholder of the truth in the sense that the truth is subject to the sovereign church. The church does not produce the truth, but the truth produces the church. The church does not determine the truth, but the truth determines the church. The church does not have the last word about the truth, but the truth has the last word about the church. We Reformed must be clear about this. It is by no means only Rome that likes to exalt the church over the truth, that is, over the Word of God. A Reformed synod, or a Reformed consistory, does the same thing when it decides contrary to or

apart from Holy Scripture and then demands compliance from the congregations, or from the congregation, simply because the assembly has so decided.

Ultimately, the church is founded upon the truth. Christ taught this in Matthew 16:18: "Upon this rock I will build my church." The apostle taught this in Ephesians 2:20: "...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." The truth precedes the church. The truth forms the church. The truth is the foundation upon which the church stands. Again and again in history, the truth reforms the church despite the opposition of an institute that has hardened itself in apostasy.

But the truth is the foundation of the church in such a way that the truth uses the church to preserve and promote itself in the world. As a standard bearer serves his kingdom by holding aloft the banner of the kingdom, so does the church hold up the truth. It pleases Christ to maintain His truth in the world by means of the church, not otherwise. Therefore, to destroy the church (which the father of the lie has worked at for some 6,000 years — unsuccessfully) would be to abolish the truth.

The church upholds the truth by her confession. This explains how upholding the truth belongs to the very being of the church. The church is a confessing church. She confesses in her official creeds. The Protestant Reformed congregations confess by means of the "Three Forms of Unity." Basic to this confession is the binding of all officebearers to these creeds through the "Formula of Subscription" and the firm enforcement of this sacred vow.

The churches confess in the preaching and teaching of their pastors, particularly in the worship services, the catechism classes, and the seminary. Through the faithful teaching of Holy Scripture as interpreted in

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the Reformed confessions by their ministers, the Protestant Reformed congregations are pillar and ground of the truth.

The church confesses in her singing at public worship. The songbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches, basically the Psalms with their magnifying of the covenant God, their message of gracious salvation from sin, and their call to a thankful life of obedience to the law, is an important aspect of the support of the truth by these Churches.

The church also confesses by the official decisions of her consistory, as well as by the official decisions of the classis and synod, for which each church is responsible.

Being upholder of the truth involves definite, sharp condemnation of the lie. A church that cannot say "no" to the lie is a crumbling pillar of the truth. The creeds condemn error. The preaching necessarily does this. Consistorial and synodical decisions must do this.

This involves the church's judging on confessional issues that be-

come controversial because of the teaching of error. The church does not forever allow debate over the historical reality of Genesis 1-11, over the origin of the universe by creation in six days, or over the eternal, unconditional predestination of all humans to everlasting bliss or to everlasting woe. But she preserves and promotes the truth by condemning the view of Genesis 1-11 as unhistorical, the theory of theistic evolution, and the teaching of

a universal, conditional love of God.

The condemnation of the lie that is part of the church's upholding of the truth includes also that the church disciplines the impenitent heretic and transgressor. Their mouths must be shut. They must go out. Otherwise, as far as that institute is concerned, they pull down the whole structure of the truth. That institute is responsible.

A calling is implied by the honorable designation of the church as the upholder of the truth. The calling is, "Be what you are!" "Uphold the truth!"

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The truth is not only all the doctrines concerning Christian belief as made known in Scripture, centrally the doctrine of Jesus Christ as God in the flesh. It is also all the doctrines concerning the Christian life. For example, the church is called to uphold the truth of marriage. The world certainly will not. It cannot even defend the truth that marriage is exclusively for a man and a woman. The church must be pillar and ground of marriage and, thus, of the family.

The individual member of the church is not excluded from this calling. As member of the church he or she is included in this calling. Let him or her know the Reformed confessions; see to it that the truth is soundly preached and taught; receive the preaching with a believing heart; do his or her part in discipline; speak out in defense of the truth personally; practice the truth; and support in every way the church that shows herself the upholder of the truth.

To be upholder of the truth is, as Calvin put it, "so magnificent a title."

It is also awesome responsibility.

It is to be the church of the living God. □

— DJE

Day of Shadows

Homer Hoeksema

Chapter 1 (cont.) God Is the Creator

Scripture begins the narrative of the coming into existence of our universe with the statement of Genesis 1:1, 2: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void;

and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

The question as to how this narrative of creation came into being can have but one answer. That answer is: by revelation. God Himself revealed that He created the world, and how He created the world.

It is a question of minor importance how God revealed this. Scrip-

ture does not tell us the details concerning the mode of this revelation. It is not impossible, but in fact very likely, that the origin of the universe was first revealed to Adam. It may be regarded as a matter of course that God would reveal to the first man, who stood as friend of God in Paradise, not only the manner of his own creation but also the way in which the entire universe came into existence.

The late Homer Hoeksema was professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

For it is especially in the mighty act of creation, first of all, that God revealed Himself as God. Nor is it at all impossible, but again very likely, that this revelation of the creation-narrative was preserved in the line of the generations of God's covenant in the old dispensation even before the Flood, and that after the Flood it was transmitted in the line of those same covenant generations to the time of Moses. Then Moses, under the influence of infallible inspiration, put the narrative into writing. All this, however, is of relatively minor importance in this connection.

What is of importance to remember is, first of all, that creation can only be an act of God. God only is able to create. And therefore the act of creation is a deep mystery — something that can be known only by revelation. Only God Himself can shed any light on the matter of creation and can reveal to us how He made the world. Secondly, this account or revelation Moses, under the influence of infallible inspiration, put into writing. God knew and spoke with His friend Moses face to face (Deut. 34:10). That is sufficient for faith. Thus, we are assured that what we have in the account of Genesis 1 is not one of the many cosmogonies and mythological accounts that were in existence at the time when Moses wrote, and which, according to higher criticism, Moses must have known and used. Nor is Genesis 1 the product of human imagination. But it is the account of what actually took place in the creation of the universe.

Thus, in connection with this account, the Spirit witnesses in our hearts: "In the beginning God...." Whatever trouble the fool unbeliever may have with the problem of origins, and whatever difficulty he may have in hunting for "missing links," the people of God have no trouble. God reveals to us how He made the world. Apart from that revelation and apart from faith, the problem of origins is indeed a problem — an insoluble problem. Science can investigate the created world, the things that are made; it cannot inves-

tigate the creation of that world. The origin and formation of the world are strictly a matter of revelation.

It follows, therefore, that we take, and must take, the narrative of creation in the book of Genesis in the literal sense of the word. When we read of the beginning, we understand it to mean the very commencement of time and the beginning of all things. When we read of days, it can only refer to days as we know them. And when we read that God created, we understand that all things came into existence by His almighty Word. This does not mean that we can fathom the divine mystery of creation. It always remains a unique work of God who is really God. But it does mean that God makes known to us this mystery on our level, so that we can understand a little of the marvelous work of God. And unless the creation-narrative is understood literally, we can only come to the conclusion that we have no account of creation whatsoever in any real sense.

To create is a unique work of God.

The root meaning of the term used in Genesis 1:1 for "create" seems to be "to cut, to divide, to separate."

We must remember that we shall never be able to fathom this work of God. Our work and our manner of working are but a faint reflection of God's work. Nevertheless, we may form some conception of this unique work of God. Frequently the work of creation has been described as "creation *ex nihilo*." And a rather popular definition of creation has been: "to make something out of nothing." Also our Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day IX, speaks of the fact that the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ "of nothing made heaven and earth with all that is in them." And while this definition, as a definition, is defective

and does not properly give expression to the rich idea of God's creative work, nevertheless it expresses something of the unique nature of creation. God is the God who calls the things which be not as though they were. And through faith we understand

that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. The idea of creation, in distinction from all work of man, therefore, is that man needs something in order to make something. Man cannot simply bring something forth. But God brings forth; and in that sense He simply calls things, as it were, out of nothing. This is a work that can be predicated only of God. It is only through the Word of God that anything is and can be created. He is the God who is powerful to call

the world into existence of Himself. Of nothing, that is, purely of and through and by Himself, God made the heavens and the earth. Creation is purely and absolutely an act of God. Nothing determined Him. Nothing limited Him. No one counseled or aided Him. He used no means, for there were none. There was no material from which the world might be formed. There was no space in which the world might be fixed. There was no time in which the world might develop. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, calling them into existence by His Word.

As we remarked, the root meaning of the term "create" appears to be "to divide, to cut, to give separate being and existence to something." And in this sense the term is plainly applicable to all the various creative acts of God. God divides the light from the darkness, the waters from the waters, the sun and the moon and the stars. Calling grass and herbs and trees out of the earth, He gives them separate existence, distinct from one another and distinct from the earth

... unless the creation-narrative is understood literally, we can only come to the conclusion that we have no account of creation whatsoever in any real sense.

which brings them forth. And thus God gives to all creatures an existence separate from the chaos, or the unformed world material, which He first created, as well as separate and distinct from one another.

In this connection, we may take note of the other terms which are used in the creation-narrative for this same idea of creation, but with a different connotation. Repeatedly we find in the Genesis-narrative the term "to make" and also the term "to form." The term "make" simply denotes the general idea of giving existence or being to anything. And the term "to form" conveys the notion of giving distinct form to any being outside of God and in distinction from the form of other creatures. Moreover, while the term "to create" is used here to denote the act of God whereby He calls the world and its creatures into existence of Himself alone and brings into existence the as yet unformed mass of the universe, the other terms point to a creative act of God out of material already existing. Nevertheless, also when Scripture speaks of God making things and forming things, we must remember that this is the work of God, and particularly the work of God whereby He simply calls things which be not as though they were.

We are certainly not to conceive of the creative work as though God labored and toiled, as a man labors and toils, and in the physical and human sense of the word made things and formed things out of other things. It is wicked blasphemy, for example, to make a caricature of the work of creation and to mock the truth of creation when it speaks of God forming man out of the dust of the ground by picturing it as though God was playing with mud-pies. God is the Creator, not a creature. And when He makes and forms the works of His hands, He does so as the Creator, not as the creature. He creates, He calls. He speaks, and it is done; He commands, and it stands fast.

In the deepest sense of the word, therefore, this same idea of dividing, cutting, separating, as it is conveyed

in the term "create," is applicable to the original act and idea of creation as it is set forth in the opening words of Genesis. God is alone, in eternity. He is the eternal and infinite God. There is nothing outside of Him. There was no counselor or instructor with him. There were no means for Him to use. There was no material; there was no space; there was no time. There was God! That is all! God is, in and of Himself, as the Triune God, from eternity. From eternity He has His eternal conception of all things, His thoughts of all creation, His divine counsel. And in the beginning God separated all things and the whole creation by an act of His almighty will out of that eternal counsel and gave to them, not, indeed, independent existence, but existence, separate being, outside of His own Being. Creation, therefore, may be defined as that mysterious act of the almighty will of God whereby He gave to the things that were eternally in His counsel existence in distinction from Himself.

In this connection, we must remember, in the first place, that creation is an act of God's sovereign and omnipotent will. It is not an act of necessity, but of perfect freedom. Fire emanates heat. A stream runs down its bed to the sea. A tree grows. Thus some have conceived of the relation between God and the world. The world simply emanated from God, and God evolves in the world. God is the source of all things, and creation emanates from Him, even as the light issues forth from the sun. But following up the line of this proud philosophy, we lose our God and our Christ. For a source does not create; and if creation emanates from God, then God is not distinct from the world, not transcendent above it. Then man also is but an emanation of God, part of the divine Spirit; and His redemption really consists in this, that He attains to a clear consciousness of His own divinity. And the great significance of Christ is that in Him this God-consciousness broke through in

all its fullness and clarity. Christ is the Son of God indeed; but so are we Sons of God, and that in the same sense as He; and the supreme significance of Christ is then that He taught us the worth and importance of man, that He teaches the true dignity of man, and that through His teachings all men may come to the realization of the great truth that they are the Sons of God and may learn to practice the brotherhood of man under the universal Fatherhood of God.

The testimony of Scripture, however, is that this is not so. Between the world and God's Being stands God's sovereign will and His sovereign Word of calling. All things were called into existence by God's omnipotent will. He is the Creator!

Nor was creation an act of compulsion on the part of God. If a man eats, he certainly wills to eat. But he must eat, or die. God's act of creation is not to be understood thus. There was no necessity from within Him. God is the perfect and infinitely blessed God in Himself. He needs no men's hands in order to be glorified. He is Triune, and all-sufficient. He created: and that is an act of His sovereign will. Neither was there any constraint or limitation from without. There was nothing outside of God. No material could constrain Him to create, or limit Him, or determine Him in creating. Between the world and God is His will, and nothing else.

In the second place, creation is an act of divine wisdom. God created. And God is no blind force. Nor is He a mere first, or ultimate cause, operating of necessity through second causes and ordinances and law as of nature so-called — as theistic evolution would have it. A cause is not sovereign. It is subject to law. It must of necessity produce its effect. It is not free. It does not counsel. It does not intelligently determine. But our God is a personal Being, of infinite wisdom and goodness and perfection. And His creative work is an act of that infinite wisdom. By His om-

*If God is not
in the beginning,
He is not at all.*

nipotent and intelligent will alone were all things — in the beginning and throughout creation-week — called into existence. For that reason there is plan and purpose and design in creation. That purpose could not be outside of God. The reason and purpose of all things must be in the Most High. And so Scripture teaches us that God created all things for His revelation and His glory.

Such is the language of revelation! God is the Creator! Never must the church exchange this testimony for the language of man's wisdom. By faith the church looks up from the beginning directly and immediately to the eternal God alone. Of Him, therefore, and to Him are all things.

This is not true of any form of Pantheism, which has found its place in modern philosophy and theology. Then the world is its own god. Then there is no God outside of the world. Then there is no God. Nor is it true of evolution. If the world somehow evolved of itself, that world owes its

existence to no one outside of itself. If God is not in the beginning, He is not at all. Nor must the church deny her faith and her character as witness of the living God by assuming an apologetic attitude to the theory of evolution. She has been often tempted to do so when unduly impressed by the pretended results of science falsely so-called, and to compromise with and apologize to the philosophy of evolution. It must be well understood that we have no quarrel with true science. But the proper domain of science is limited to the things that can be weighed and measured, analyzed and demonstrated; and when science reaches beyond this limit and pretends to explain the origin of things, it steps over into the domain of mere philosophy and becomes scientism. No theory of evolution can reach beyond the things that do appear.

But again, according to revelation, God is the Creator. And if He is Creator, He is Possessor, in the abso-

lute sense of the word, of all that is. And then He is also Lawgiver in all the universe. That universe is absolutely His own house; and He ordains all the ordinances for all His creatures. Herein lies the basis of all morality. For this truth of creation means with respect to His moral creatures that to Him all their life — their thinking and willing and loving and desiring and acting — must be. His will must be theirs; His purpose theirs; His work theirs. Their whole life must point in this direction. They shall love the Lord their God with all their heart and mind and soul and strength. That is responsibility. That is morality. That is religion. That is the highest good. The theory of evolution destroys all this. But God the Lord maintains Himself, and He maintains His truth. He is the almighty Creator of heaven and earth. Of Him, and through Him, and therefore to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever! □

Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

Recent Developments in Church-State Law

■ Congress Passes Significant Religious Freedom Law

On November 16, 1993, at a White House ceremony largely ignored by the secular press, President Clinton signed into law the new Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). Although the bill was supported by a smorgasbord of religious organizations of every stripe, it took almost

two years of political maneuvering and debate before both houses of Congress agreed upon the final language of the federal statute.

Church/state scholars and religious leaders have hailed the new law as a significant measure insuring religious freedom in this country.

The official title for the law includes the word "Restoration" because its sponsors sought to restore religious freedoms "lost" in the 1990 Supreme Court case of *Employment Division v. Smith*. It was the consensus among court watchers that the

narrow (5-4) *Smith* decision effectively stripped the First Amendment's "free exercise" clause of any meaningful protection for religiously motivated activity.

In the somewhat unusual *Smith* case, two members of the so-called Native American Church were fired from their jobs and later denied unemployment benefits because they admittedly used 'sacramental' peyote (an illegal drug derived from cactus plants) during a sanctioned religious ceremony. The Court majority held that since the state law against drug

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Religious Freedom Restoration Act

On November 16, 1993, the *Religious Freedom Restoration Act* (RFRA) became law. This federal statute restores certain religious freedoms arguably lost in a recent Supreme Court decision (see text). The core language of the Act reads as follows:

Sec. 3. FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION PROTECTED.

(a) IN GENERAL. — Government shall not substantially burden a person's exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability, except as provided in subsection (b).

(b) EXCEPTION. — Government may substantially burden a person's exercise of religion only if it demonstrates that application of the burden to the person —

(1) is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest; and

(2) is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.

(c) JUDICIAL RELIEF. — A person whose religious exercise has been burdened in violation of this section may assert that violation as a claim or defense in a judicial proceeding and obtain appropriate relief against a government. Standing to assert a claim or defense under this section shall be governed by the general rules of standing under article III of the Constitution.

use was "facially neutral," the Native Americans were not exempt from the law even though it allegedly interfered with their religious ceremony that traditionally incorporated the use of peyote.

Although the sponsors of RFRA have little interest in the religious use of illegal drugs, the *Smith* decision was nevertheless of dire concern because the Court majority arguably abandoned the traditional "compelling interest" test for the governmental interference in religious activity when the challenged law is viewed as "facially neutral" toward religion.

Within months of the notorious *Smith* decision, religious leaders began sponsoring bills in the House and Senate to overrule legislatively the despised *Smith* ruling. RFRA does essentially that and arguably restores the freedom traditionally associated with the free exercise clause of the First Amendment.

RFRA essentially states that the state or federal government may not "substantially burden" a citizen's free exercise of his religion, even if the burden results from an allegedly "neutral" law (one of "general applicability"), with one exception. This exception exists only when the government

can demonstrate that the challenged law is both (a) "in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest," and (b) the "least restrictive means" of accomplishing its alleged compelling interest. (See box above.)

The sponsors of RFRA contend that this new federal law will restore religious freedom because before the government can now "substantially burden" a person's religiously motivated conduct, it must satisfy this two-pronged test.

In conclusion, under RFRA the government cannot interfere with a person's religious beliefs or practice unless it has a "compelling" reason for doing so. In addition, the government must also prove that its goals under the challenged law cannot be achieved by some other means which would avoid such interference with a citizen's religious conduct.

■ Dutch Parliament Adopts Permissive Euthanasia Law

After lengthy debate, the Dutch parliament recently passed what has been described by the secular press as "the world's most liberal euthanasia policy." Although the legislation does not legalize indiscriminate mercy killing, the loose reporting requirements

and vague guidelines, if followed, make it virtually impossible to prosecute doctors who engage in such activity.

The new guidelines provide that no legal action may be taken against a physician who assists a patient in dying who repeatedly and lucidly requests death when suffering from "unbearable pain." The only exceptions are comatose patients and deformed newborns, where the physician presumably cannot obtain "repeated and lucid" requests for death. The maximum penalty for violating the law is a sentence of only 12 years.

Although this new law gives the Netherlands the world's most permissive mercy killing law, in reality euthanasia has been widely practiced by the Dutch for the last decade, even without government imprimatur. A recent report indicated that approximately 3,000 cases of euthanasia occurred annually in the Netherlands in recent years, representing 2.1 percent of all deaths there. The report also disclosed that "accelerated clinical measures," with or without request, resulted in an additional 8,800 deaths.

The Hemlock Society, Kevorkian supporters, and other "right-to-die" advocates in this country will undoubtedly be exploiting the Dutch legislation in their crusade to legalize mercy killings and assisted suicide in the U.S. and Canada.

■ School Voucher Initiative Fails

The widely publicized California school-voucher initiative was soundly defeated by California voters last November. Initiative 174 — a proposal to give a \$2,600 tax-paid voucher to every parent who enrolled a child in a non-public or private school — was vigorously opposed by teachers' unions and their allies who spent in excess of \$10 million in a TV campaign against the proposal.

Former Secretaries of Education William Bennett and Lamar Alexander strongly supported the measure, and the voucher concept was again widely debated in the secular press and education journals. Although the voucher proponents con-

ceded defeat in California, they vowed that vouchers are the wave of the future for American education. Many other state legislatures, including Michigan and Illinois, are quietly assessing the merits of school

"choice" and education vouchers.

School vouchers, once an ignored and despised alternative to tax-supported public schools, have recently gained surprising political viability

because the concept has lately been endorsed by black educators and parents who argue minority children are locked into the notoriously deficient inter-city public schools □

Go Ye Into all the World

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

Calvinism and Missions

V. Perseverance of the Saints

We have tackled the "toughies." Those who have difficulties with the doctrines of "Calvinism" ordinarily have their problems with the doctrines of total depravity, unconditional election, irresistible grace, and especially the doctrine of limited atonement. With those we have dealt in previous issues. Some, but fewer, have a problem with the fifth and last of the doctrines of "Calvinism," namely, the perseverance of the saints. Many who deny the previous four points of Calvinism profess to maintain the fifth. They say that they hold to the preservation of the saints, but they often speak of it as "eternal security."

It should be noted that these Arminians of today are inconsistent when they do not have a problem with the preservation of the saints. They ought to. Their spiritual fathers did, and they let it be known that they did. The Remonstrants or Arminians in the Netherlands stated their doubts in the fifth of the five articles they presented to the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618. The old Arminians said there could be no certainty as to a believer's continuance in salvation and in the

state of grace. It is obvious that if grace can be resisted, then there always remains the possibility that one who accepts grace today might resist it or not cooperate with it tomorrow. So the Remonstrants, or Arminians, concluded that it is not biblical to teach that true believers will persevere in salvation.

Just as the five points of Calvinism stand or fall together, so also do the five Arminian positions stand or fall together.

* * * * *

Consider with me the great and wonderful comfort which can be derived from being able to preach the perseverance of the saints, especially on the mission field and in the work of local evangelism.

Every convert to the faith soon finds that he begins to doubt his salvation. He joins every other believer in needing a reassuring and biblical answer to the doubts and fears he has about the reality of his salvation and about the possibility of his remaining saved. Sometimes he may even wonder whether he ever was saved. These doubts and fears arise because he finds sin remaining in himself.

It is the universal experience of the child of God that, though he is saved and forgiven, he still battles sin. He believes that Christ gave His life a ransom for him, but he is not

entirely free of the ruts of sin. He knows that he is freed from the dominion of sin, but sin is still very much present in him. He knows that sinfulness clings even to his best works. Daily he must fight against sin. He recognizes in himself the capability and possibility of falling into grievous sin, as did David and Peter.

The presence of sin and of this sinfulness can make the believer wonder whether he is really saved, and whether he might not be destined for eternal damnation. The devil delights in nothing more than in giving the adopted children of God doubts about the reality or the continuance of their adoption.

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It is to this present reality of sin within every convert that the Calvinistic or Reformed missionary pastor has an answer. His answer will not leave the convert in a worse state than when he began with his doubts. He will not tell these converts that there is the very real possibility that some day in the future they might choose not to cooperate with God's grace, and that they might fall from grace. Nor will he tell the believer who is frightened by his sin that he is not really as bad as he thinks, or that his sins are not to be considered serious. Such a response belittles the horrible

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nature of all sin. It also errs by focusing attention on the sinning believer rather than turning and keeping one's attention fixed upon God. With respect to the question of giving or maintaining salvation, the Calvinist and Reformed pastor has been taught by the Scriptures to focus on the unchangeable and most merciful God.

The Reformed missionary will teach that every believer, *left to himself*, will easily stumble into specific sins and will certainly fall away from grace. This is as certain as the rising of the sun every day.

Also the Reformed missionary will be teaching, with an abundance of scriptural proof, that there are many reasons why the believer is never left to himself and will never fall out of favor with God. Briefly, those reasons are: God's eternal plan cannot change; God's promises cannot fail; God's calling cannot be revoked; the merit of Christ's life and death cannot be destroyed; and the sealing of the Holy Spirit cannot be withdrawn. Simply put, the Calvinist who is active in the work of missions can and will proclaim the biblical and Reformed truth that God is the Almighty and ever faithful God.

God is Almighty. His power is the greatest. Therefore, those whom He is pleased to regenerate are regenerated unto "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (I Pet. 1:4, 5). All who are born into the family of God shall gain their inheritance because not only is it reserved for them, but also they are kept for it by the omnipotent power of the Almighty. God is the One who "is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless" (Jude 24). This is His power. Also, to Christ was given "all power" in heaven and on earth to save. As the Captain of our salvation He has never suffered defeat. This is an integral part of the message of the Reformed missionary pastor.

The Reformed missionary will also be teaching to fearful Christians the biblical truth of God's faithfulness. He who began a good work in

them will not leave them until that work is fully done in the day of Christ's return (Phil. 1:6). "God is faithful" (I Cor. 1:9) to His own eternal decree of election. The eternally determined decree of election cannot be frustrated by any weak creature. God is faithful to those whom He has spiritually adopted to be His own children, though they may fall into sin, even deeply and bitterly. Also, God is faithful to His just determination of righteousness when He declared them justified. So nothing will alter His judicial decree. God is faithful!

The Reformed preacher proclaims the good news of the Gospel that He who gave the Holy Spirit will never take Him away, even though the Spirit may be grieved by the sins of those in whom He dwells. The Spirit's presence in a believer is the "earnest," or guarantee, that full redemption shall be given (II Cor. 5:5). Believers are "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:13, 14). After all, the work of the Spirit is sovereign, irresistible, and efficacious; so He and His work cannot be stymied or frustrated by any believer's fall into sin.

In addition, the Reformed missionary pastor will preach and teach that God and Christ would never leave those for whom Christ died. If Jesus gave Himself unto death for those who were ungodly and sinners, how much more will He not, by His life at God's right hand, ever work to save them to the uttermost (Rom. 5:10). He tells us that He gives "unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28, 29). What a comfort this knowledge is to the believer. This knowledge calms his fears and assures him of the certainty of his salvation.

The security of the saint does not depend on the state of his feelings, but on the great love of God.

The Reformed missionary pastor also can comfort those who are converted, because he can proclaim the God who is "rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4). There are no limits to God's riches. His riches are infinite. And so is His mercy. This mercy He extends to His people. And His mercy endures forever (Ps. 136).

God's mercy is accompanied by God's "great love" (Eph. 2:4), which never slackens, and is unchangeable, though the manifestations of this love may vary. The security of the saint does not depend

on the state of his feelings, but on the great love of God. The Holy Spirit, through Paul in Romans 8, defies anything in heaven or on the earth to separate a single object from this love of God in Christ. Is there any passage of Scripture which states our assurance of salvation more powerfully?

And the Reformed missionary tells those converted to God that when they begin to wonder whether they might fall away from salvation, they need not fear, for the honor of Christ's name (Matt. 1:21) is at stake. His name declares that He saved from all their sins every one of those the Father gave to Him. The Savior will certainly preserve those for whom He came to earth in order to save from their sins!

This is the comfort the Reformed under-shepherd proclaims to the sheep of the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.

* * * * *

It has been said that the Calvinistic doctrine is a dangerous doctrine. Some have made a caricature of this doctrine by re-defining it as "once saved, always saved." Then the beautiful doctrine of the preservation of the saints is presented as meaning that once someone makes a profession of faith, they can be assured of going to heaven regardless of how they live the rest of their life. It has been said that the preservation of the saints means that things are so settled

that we can enjoy the pleasures of sin.

It is good to remember that this caricature is not new, but was exactly the opposition the Arminians put up against the Reformed position at the Synod of Dordt. Note well that those who wrote the Canons of Dordt deliberately identify the Fifth Head of Doctrine, not as the *preserving*, but as the *perseverance* of the saints. The selection of this word was deliberate. And notice that this is called the perseverance of the *saints*, i.e., the holy ones. Not everyone who professes to believe is a saint, for some deny their profession with a life and life-style which are contrary to it.

Those who are preserved by God in the faith do persevere in it. The true believer shows God's preservation by persevering. Those who sincerely profess a true faith, howbeit with

weakness, will accept the responsibility of living a life of gratitude, a life worthy of his profession and of the God he professes to have saved him.

God preserves through the use of means. These means are the hearing and reading of God's Word, and meditation on the exhortations, threatenings, and promises of God's Word. Believers persevere by using these means. Saints are responsible to use the means that God has given to produce and to preserve faith. The saint will desire to use and will be diligent in using the means God has ordained for strengthening his faith and his walk of obedience.

The Reformed missionary will proclaim from the pulpit and in private conversation that anyone who would sincerely call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Rom. 10:13),

and all who come unto Him shall in no wise be cast out (John 6:37). The Reformed missionary declares that anyone who says it does not make any difference how a believer lives is either not regenerated or does not know God's Word. Those who have faith live for Him who saved them. They will not say that it does not make any difference how they live.

The Reformed missionary is quick to point out that this, in turn, does not mean that the believer does not sin. We sin, even terribly! But while a Christian may be overtaken in sin, yet he mourns over it. He repeatedly repents and earnestly desires to flee from his sin. And he persists in using the means God is pleased to use for his perseverance.

Those chosen in Christ shall by grace certainly persevere. □

Contribution

A Faithful Shepherd

Mrs. Jan Westra

Pastor — that faithful shepherd of God's chosen flock.
The flock which, by the shed blood of His own Son,
He has purchased for His very own.
That shepherd called by God according to His heart.
Mere man, in flesh weak, but through the Holy Spirit
To him much knowledge has been shown.

A faithful shepherd called to lead in pastures green,
God's sheep. Feeding the flock with nothing else but
The preaching of God's Holy Word.
Guiding with the staff of righteousness given from above.
Protecting from heresy by sound doctrine firm,
So nothing but the truth is heard.

A faithful shepherd administers the sacraments
Which the Lord our God Himself has instituted
As a seal of His grace to them.
Baptizing in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost;
Seeing that they receive the holy bread and wine
In sure remembrance of Him.

He keeps his flock in good discipline before God,
As a faithful watchman guarding through the night;
Praying for God-given wisdom,
That he may faithfully lead his flock in pastures green;
Wisdom and grace that he may always use aright
The keys of the heavenly kingdom.

Preaching repentance and salvation through faith in
Christ alone, a faithful shepherd always near,
His flock down life's pathway doth lead.
By God's grace he's given strength to uphold the Word,
Instructing, admonishing, comforting, reproving,
According to everyone's need.

He joys with us as we give birth to God's cov'nant seed,
A heritage of the Lord, a gift from God,
Indeed, a very great reward.
He comforts us when God sees fit to take our little ones
home,
Bringing the covenant promise; we trust those
Little lambs are safely with our Lord.

Little lambs also, a faithful shepherd must guide.
He does this in the Catechism classes
He teaches from week to week.
And in his preaching also, he leads them in their
Childlike faith; instructing and admonishing
That they the ways of the Lord must seek.

As our children grow, a faithful shepherd doesn't leave
These young sheep to question the truth and wonder
In what they must put their trust;
But leads them down life's pathway, instructing as they
go,
Teaching sound doctrine, that through the Holy Spirit
They too God's truth will confess.

In marriage also a faithful shepherd must guide.
His life he lives as an example to us.
A faithful husband of one wife.
Teaching his sheep that marriage must be in the Lord
As a picture of Christ and His bride the church;
For God will surely bless this life.

As some of God's flock, God's aged saints, the end of life's
Pathway see; still some are called through pain and suffering
On this earth yet to remain.
By their side, with those they love, a faithful shepherd
stands,
Bringing to them all, God's most precious Word:
"To live is Christ, to die is gain."

And so, our heavenly Father, it is our earnest prayer
That by Thy Holy Spirit Thou wilt give us humble hearts
Thy true and Holy Word to hear.
For Thou dost give us pastors according to Thy heart.
We know that weakest means fulfill Thy will and
Lead us in Thy name to fear.

Be with the faithful shepherd that Thou hast given us.
Lord, give to him new strength from day to day;
Be Thou always at his side.
He knows the weakness of his flesh; he needs Thee every
hour.
As Thy chosen flock, we lift our hearts in prayer:
Bless our pastor, Lord, with him abide.

Mrs. Westra, a member of Hull PRC, prepared this reading for a program marking Rev. Moore's 25th year in the ministry of the Word.

In His Fear

Rev. Arie denHartog

Counseling Those with Marital Problems

The article which follows is the first part of a paper presented by Rev. denHartog at the Classis West Officebearers' Conference held last March in South Holland, IL.

The Lord has greatly blessed our churches with many strong Christian marriages and homes. This is a wonder of His grace, especially in the age we live in. We see in the world around us more and more the destruction of marriage and the home. And in much of the modern-day church we find the same miserable and wretched situation as in the world at large. There are

almost as many divorces and remarriages in the church today as there are in the world. This is an alarming thing. Immorality and unfaithfulness are in many churches accepted as the inevitable product of our contemporary society. All the marriage counseling in the modern-day church has done little to stem the tide of trouble in marriages.

In the midst of this world one of the greatest blessings that the Lord has given to our churches, second only to the blessed truth of His Word, is the blessing of many strong Christian marriages. I have heard visitors to our churches express amazement at the strong Christian marriages and families that our churches in general have. I believe that the truth that is preached and maintained in our churches is, by the grace of God,

largely responsible for the many solid Christian marriages which we see in our churches. Definitely apostasy in many churches, even in Reformed churches, has resulted in the disregard for the sanctity of marriage and the breakup of many marriages.

The best marital counseling is good solid preaching. Even the preaching of the great truths of God such as His absolute sovereignty and holiness serve for the good of marriages in the church. Such preaching instills the fear of God in the members of the church. The fear of God is the main principle for all Christian living and also for Christian marriage. Preaching the truth of the absolute infallibility and authority of the Word of God for all of life is necessary for maintaining marriages in the church. Sharply antithetical preaching that

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reveals the absolute difference between the philosophy of the world and the truth of God is necessary for maintaining good Christian marriages in the church. In particular, preaching that emphasizes the great truth that marriage is an ordinance of God and that it is an unbreakable, lifelong bond is the preaching that will foster strong marriages in the church. In short, faithful preaching of the whole counsel of God is the greatest power to maintain Christian marriage in the church. I believe that the Lord has greatly blessed in our churches the strong position that we have by His grace maintained regarding marriage and the home.

At the same time, our churches and her members are threatened by the increasingly ungodly world that we live in. There is hardly an area that more reveals the ungodliness of this world than the evil philosophy it propagates regarding marriage. Worldly philosophy regarding marriage is also making inroads into our churches. Even philosophies as evil as those of the feminist movement are having subtle influences on the thinking of our church members. There is evidence of a relaxing attitude towards the seriousness of the sins of immorality. Though we strongly condemn worldly amusement in our pulpits there is evidence that movies and videos, even with grossly immoral themes, are being watched for entertainment in some of our homes. Some of our members are adopting worldly life-styles that in a large measure contribute to the breakdown of marriages and homes. The devil is working hard in our churches. He well knows that one of the best ways to destroy the church is by destroying her marriages.

There is a great need in our churches for specific preaching about all the various aspects of marriage. The Bible enables us to do that because it is full of specific instruction on marriage. God gave us all of this

because He knew how much His people needed constant instruction on marriage. This need is greater than ever because of the ungodliness of our age. There is need in our churches

for pre-marriage counseling for couples intending to get married. It is good for us as pastors to deal directly with marriage questions in young people's society and couples' groups in our churches. In Redlands we recently spent a whole season studying marriage and the family in our Young Adults Fellowship.

But in addition to public teaching and preaching there is a great need for pastoral work to help members of the church with serious marital problems. We are, sad to say, seeing more and more marriages in deep trouble also in our churches. These troubles are bringing great grief and anguish to the people involved. Marital problems among the members of the church are some of the most difficult problems we face in the pastorate. Often such marital problems are so extremely difficult that God's people cannot solve them without outside help. That help must be given by the pastors of the church, including ministers of the Word and elders. We as churches take a strong and uncompromising stand on marriage on the basis of God's Word. This stand however is not one without compassion. In fact, the strong stand of Scripture is also at the same time the most truly compassionate stand. Pastors must have deep sympathy for those who are struggling with marriage problems. They must reach out to help them by the grace of God.

Pastors are called to be involved in counseling couples with marital problems. Such counseling is part of the spiritual labors we must perform

for the welfare of the sheep of our Lord Jesus Christ. As pastors we may not ignore this part of our calling or give it to someone else. There is prevalent in the church-world the notion that most marital problems are of such a nature that they need to be dealt with by a professional counselor, they are too difficult for the ordinary pastor to handle. Many pastors therefore quickly send their parishioners to such professional counselors if they imagine that they cannot handle the problems themselves. We believe this is wrong and also very dangerous. Among the so-called professional marriage counselors in the world there are very few that hold to truly biblical principles of marriage. Many in fact promote some of the most ungodly principles of marriage imaginable. I recently heard, for example, even of a so-called Christian counselor giving advice to an unmarried man struggling with sexual temptations to go out and find himself a woman with whom he could obtain relief from his sexual tensions by satisfying his desires. As pastors we had better realize the tremendous amount of ungodly advice that is being given to couples with marital problems.

We are responsible before God for this when we send the sheep of Jesus' flock to such evil counselors!

The faithful pastor who is thoroughly equipped with the Word of God is the best marriage counselor. He is qualified to do marriage counseling even where there are difficult marital problems. He is equipped for two reasons especially: because he stands in the office of

Christ and has the authority of that office, and because he has the Word of God which reveals the perfect wisdom of God concerning marriage. This Word is all-sufficient, powerful, authoritative, compassionate, effective, and saving. God's people with marital problems need to hear the

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Word of God. They need that more than they need anything else, certainly more than they need the humanistic advice of ungodly men. Pastors need to have a thorough knowledge of the biblical principles of marriage. We need to be thoroughly convinced of the power of the Word of God. We need to rely entirely on the wisdom and power of God's Word.

We need to show ourselves to be pastors indeed to members of the church of Jesus Christ, men who are carefully studied and have the wisdom of the Word of God, and men who are full of the compassion and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must have a reputation in the church of Jesus Christ that we are warm, personal, and deeply concerned, and easily approachable by God's people. Our demeanor must be such that the first person that God's people will seek out when they face marital problems is not some worldly professional counselor but the pastor of the church of Jesus Christ.

Because of the deeply sensitive nature of marriage problems most who are experiencing these are very hesitant to go for any outside help. We therefore need to live among the people of God so that we can spot marital problems as early as possible. One of the great tragedies of marital problems is that it is often the case that those with such problems do not seek help until their marriages are totally on the rocks. They are then at a stage in which helping them is extremely difficult. Often deep-seated bitterness and despair have set in, the feeling of love has been destroyed, and there is a tangled web of sinful words and deeds that couples have done to each other, and after a long period of time this has resulted in the absolute breakdown of their marriage. Sometimes decisions for separation and divorce have already been firmly made.

Marital counseling takes a lot of pastoral work. It takes a lot of compassion and willingness on the part of the pastor to deal personally and extensively with the members of his

flock. It takes skillful handling of the Word of God with patience and perseverance. There must be a real willingness to listen to the deep hurt which marital problems cause. Needless to say, all of this takes much prayerful preparation and wisdom on the part of the pastor.

Books on this subject list various causes of marital problems. Some of the chief ones are 1) disagreement over financial matters in a marriage; 2) sexual problems between couples; 3) a lack of communion and communications between husband and wife; 4) difficulties of life that drive couples apart rather than together because such problems are not being dealt with together as husband and wife, are not dealt with in a biblical manner, and are not borne by the grace of God; 5) the burdens of raising children not shared by husband and wife together; 6) constant cruel and harsh criticism of one partner for the other; 7) many ways in which husbands or wives do not fulfill their responsibility and duty in the marriage; 8) physical abuse of wives by their husbands.

I am sure there are many more. Life in the world today certainly puts great pressure on marriages that greatly contributes to the breakdown of many marriages. There are many ungodly philosophies that militate against God's Word on marriage. We are living in a sex-crazed society that instills in people the expectation that sex between husband and wife must always be passionate and extremely exciting. There is propagated by the mass media an inordinate emphasis on outward bodily appearance, which leaves the idea in people's mind that the worth of a marriage partner is dependent entirely on sexual attractiveness. There is a commonly accepted notion that if you no longer find your partner sexually attractive, there may be someone else available who is more attractive, and you have every right to forsake your spouse to find someone more exciting.

The world we live in is extremely materialistic. Everyone imagines that he has a right to be wealthy and to have all the luxuries of a beautiful,

elaborately furnished home; several automobiles; frequent, expensive, exciting vacations; and more. To keep up the great expense of such a lifestyle, both husband and wife have to work. Not only this, they have to work so many hours that they hardly have any time for their marriages and families. The women of the world imagine that they have the right to forsake entirely their calling in the home to seek a glamorous career in the world. Men in turn often make their careers the absolute number one priority of their life, and they devote to it all their time and energy. At the same time they grievously neglect their responsibility and calling in marriage and the home. The world is caught up in a rat race to succeed and get ahead and to be prosperous.

Many Christians have made themselves part of this rat race. This is a great evil. This is not justified by convincing oneself that all this is necessary to support a wife and family. This kind of life-style is destroying many marriages. There is the common philosophy among many that, as soon as problems arise, either of the partners has the right to forsake the marriage. Every man has the right of happiness in this life and he need not put up with trouble for any length of time. Many have forgotten the traditional vow "for better or for worse."

... to be continued

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The Remarriage of the "Innocent Party"

And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

— Matthew 19:9

Scandal

It is painfully evident to everyone that the dishonoring of marriage in evangelical Protestant churches today is scandalous. Divorces for every reason and remarriages abound. It is now lawful for a man to put away his wife for any cause and to marry another, often someone else's wife, and to be a member in good standing in an evangelical church.

The causes of this scandal are many. For one thing, the churches are conformed to this world. In North America we live in a society in which one of every two marriages breaks up in divorce and in which it is acceptable to remarry. Like Israel under the Old Covenant, the churches have learned well the ways of the heathen among whom they live.

Another cause is the silence of the pulpit and the neglect of the key-power of Christian discipline. Due partly to their sympathy for the hard lot of some members and due partly to their fear lest they cause trouble in their congregations, ministers refuse to preach the truth about marriage, divorce, and remarriage, and elders refuse to exercise censure upon mem-

bers who sin in the matter of marriage.

Not long ago, a deeply disturbed church member related to me that he had gone to his minister pleading that he teach the congregation the will of God concerning marriage. He had made this plea because of the abominable events that were occurring in the congregation. Members were divorcing their own wives and husbands and remarrying each other's wives and husbands. The minister's response was, "I would not touch that subject with a ten-foot pole."

At the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy held in Chicago, Illinois, in 1986, where inerrancy was to be applied to the Christian life, some proposed a strong statement on the lifelong nature of marriage, condemning divorce except in the case of fornication and forbidding remarriage. Pastors of the large evangelical churches opposed the proposal vehemently since it would have created trouble in their churches, filled as they are with divorced and remarried members. Needless to say, the proposal got nowhere.

Fundamentally, the cause of the scandal is that the churches refuse to bow, unconditionally, to the sovereign authority of the Holy Scriptures. When the Pharisees asked Jesus about the lawfulness of divorce, He replied, "Have ye not read?" that is, "What does the Bible say?" "What does God say in His inspired Word?" (Matt. 19:4). What God said "at the beginning" in Genesis 2:24 was decisive for Jesus as regards marriage and divorce. Not so for the evangelical churches. Neither what God said about marriage at the beginning nor

what God said about marriage in Matthew 19 is the rule for marriage, divorce, and remarriage in evangelical churches today.

The consequences are dreadful.

Divorce and remarriage are destroying Christian families by the thousands. Countless wives and husbands, wickedly divorced by their mates, and multitudes of children, abandoned by one of their parents, are ruined. They are ruined psychologically, spiritually, and eternally.

Worse still, divorce and remarriage disgrace God's Name. People called by the name of the God who is faithful in His covenant are unfaithful in the most basic of all the relationships of life. Their claim is that the God of Christianity justifies and approves this gross unfaithfulness. They ransack His Word to discover warrant for their violation of their sacred vow of marriage. When they remarry, often another man's wife or another woman's husband, they do so in a Christian ceremony, using an obliging minister of the gospel, and with yet another pledge of godly fidelity. It is common in evangelical churches that this is repeated three and four times. This is a profaning of the name of God.

It is urgent that the true church of Christ and her faithful ministers bear witness to God's truth concerning the unbreakable bond of marriage.

The "Innocent Party"

A serious challenge to this testimony about marriage is the claim that the "innocent party" in a divorce has the right to remarry. The "innocent party" is the faithful husband whose wife commits adultery against him or

Excerpted from the new book on single life, marriage, divorce, and remarriage by David J. Engelsma, Better to Marry. Copyright by the Reformed Free Publishing Association. Reprinted with permission.

the faithful wife whose husband wickedly divorces her for another woman. Some who oppose other remarriages as unlawful have great difficulty with the prohibition of the remarriage of the innocent party.

People are naturally sympathetic to the innocent party and suppose that the Scriptures would make allowances for them and their need.

But there is also biblical argument for the position that the innocent party may remarry. Appeal is made to Jesus' words in Matthew 19:9. Although Jesus forbids divorce and remarriage, there is an exception: "except it be for fornication." Surely, say the advocates of the remarriage of the innocent party, this establishes the right of the innocent party to divorce his or her unfaithful mate and to marry another.

Marriage, then, is not a lifelong, unbreakable bond. Men and women can break it. They can break it by fornication.

This popular understanding of the text, however, is mistaken. The text itself makes plain that the remarriage of the innocent party is forbidden by the Lord....

...Our question concerning Matthew 19:9, remember, is whether the exception clause is intended to qualify only the prohibition against divorcing or also the prohibition against remarriage. Nowhere else do the Scriptures teach that fornication is a ground for remarriage. Rather, the Scriptures elsewhere teach that all remarriage after divorce is adultery. But Matthew 5:31,32 does teach that fornication is a ground for divorce. This would lead us to suppose that in Matthew 19:9 the exception clause must be taken to qualify only the prohibition against divorce.

No Remarriage

A careful examination of the Lord's words in Matthew 19:9 reveals that this is exactly His teaching. This is evident from the placement of the exception clause in the text. The words "except it be for fornication" immediately follow the words "whoever shall put away his wife" and

precede the words "and shall marry another." The exception applies to the prohibition against divorce. Had Jesus meant to give an exception to His prohibition against remarriage, He would have placed the exception clause after the words, "and shall marry another." The text would then have read, "Whoever shall put away his wife and shall marry another, except it be for fornication," etc.

The deliberate placement of the exception clause following the mention of divorce but preceding the mention of remarriage indicates that Jesus is giving an exception only regarding the prohibition against divorce.

That Jesus is not teaching that the innocent party may remarry is proved conclusively by the second part of the text: "and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." It is a serious violation of a basic law governing the interpretation of the Scriptures that men ignore the other, clearer passages on remarriage in their explanation of Matthew 19:9. It is an even worse error that they commonly ignore the second part of the text itself.

The second part of the text refers back to the wife of the first part. Her husband has divorced her even though she was not guilty of fornication. He has since married another and, according to the judgment of Christ, is living in adultery. The woman referred to in the second part of Matthew 19:9, therefore, is the innocent party. According to those who find in the first part of the text the right of the innocent party to remarry, she should be free to marry another man. But Christ denies this: "Whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." Even though she is the innocent party, she may not remarry. If she does, her marriage is an adulterous marriage.

The doctrine of the Lord in Matthew 19:9 then is this: Husbands may not divorce their wives. If they do, they sin. The rule in the kingdom of Christ is that expressed in verse 6: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

There is one exception to this forbidding of divorce: the fornication of one's mate. Fornication in the text is sexual unfaithfulness to one's husband or wife in that one has sexual relations with another. Usually, it is adultery, but it refers as well to homosexual sin.

Fornication is the one biblical ground for divorce. This brings home to Christians the importance of sexual faithfulness in marriage and the gravity of the wickedness of adultery. It also brings out that the wisdom of the Lord is practical. No one is required to live with a fornicating mate with all the dangers to soul and body that this involves.

There is an exception to the prohibition against divorce. There is no exception to the prohibition against remarriage. All who remarry after divorce, regardless of the fact that they are the innocent party, commit adultery. The guilty husband who has divorced his faithful wife and married another commits adultery. But also the man who marries the innocent divorcee commits adultery.

Interpreted in this way, Matthew 19:9 harmonizes with the teaching of Christ and His apostles elsewhere in the New Testament, that marriage is for life and that all remarriage after divorce is adultery. It also accords with the fundamental Word of Jehovah God about marriage in Genesis 2:24 to which Jesus has referred in verses 4 and 5 of Matthew 19: "... For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh."

This explanation fits the context, for the question of the Pharisees concerned divorce, not remarriage: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (v. 4). Jesus is answering the question "Are there grounds for divorce?" He is not answering a question about grounds for remarriage. Jesus mentions remarriage because remarriage is invariably in view when a man divorces his wife.

It may be noted that this interpretation of the text, with its prohibition against the remarriage of the inno-

cent party, was the virtually unanimous position of the church for about a thousand years after the apostles.

The Ground of the Prohibition

The ground of the prohibition against the remarriage of the innocent party is simply what marriage is by the sovereign act of God the Creator. Marriage is a lifelong, unbreakable bond between one man and one woman. Jesus had taught this basic truth about marriage in verses 4-6 of Matthew 19:

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

In teaching this, Jesus points out that He was only repeating what God Himself had revealed about marriage on the occasion of His institution of marriage in Paradise. In Genesis 2:24 God Himself had revealed that His institution of marriage is an indissoluble bond for life.

At issue in the controversy over the remarriage of the innocent party is the very nature of marriage itself. Is marriage merely a conditional contract hammered out between a man and a woman—a contract hammered out in the presence of God but still only a contract between the two? If this is what marriage is, it can indeed be broken by the failure of one or the other to fulfill the basic condition of the contract, namely, sexual faithfulness.

Or is marriage not a contract at all but a relationship, a union, made by God? And is it such a union, such a divine joining, of the two that they become one flesh? If this is what marriage is, it cannot be dissolved by man. The state cannot dissolve it; churches cannot dissolve it; society cannot dissolve it; the married persons themselves cannot dissolve it.

Only God *may* dissolve it. Only God *can* dissolve it. God dissolves it by death. Christ's forbidding of the remarriage of the innocent party rests on the conception of marriage as an indissoluble bond formed by God. Verse 9 of Matthew 19 is grounded in verses 4-6.

Even though her husband has unjustly put her away and entered into an adulterous marriage with another woman, the innocent woman may not remarry. Whoever marries her commits adultery. For she has a husband. He is a wicked husband. He is living in adultery with another woman. But he is her husband. She is bound to him. God binds her to him. God binds her to him until death as they no doubt acknowledged when they married, vowing "until death us do part."

If, on the contrary, the innocent party is free to remarry, the guilty party is likewise free to remarry. Some like to restrict the right of remarriage to the innocent party. But this is impossible. If the innocent party in a divorce may remarry, the reason must be that the marriage has been dissolved. No one, except perhaps an unreconstructed Mormon, would allow a person who is presently married to marry another. The guilty party has dissolved the marriage by his fornication. But if the marriage is dissolved for the innocent party, it has been dissolved also for the guilty party. In the nature of the case, a marriage cannot be dissolved for only one of the married persons any more than a marriage can be an adulterous marriage for only one of the persons. This means that the guilty person is no longer married. In this case he is free to marry, for God gives every unmarried person the right to marry if he wills (cf. I Cor. 7:27, 28).

Permitting the innocent party to remarry necessarily opens the church up to the acceptance also of the remarriage of the guilty party. Two examples reflecting that which is actually happening in evangelical churches will make this clear.

A man's wife leaves him to whore around with other men. He divorces

her on the biblical ground given in Matthew 19:9. According to the stand of his church, the man—the innocent party—then remarries. Later, the unfaithful wife repents and returns to the church. When she desires to remarry, the church must approve. For her original marriage was dissolved by her fornication. As an unmarried woman, she has every right to marry. In addition, her original husband has been allowed to remarry so that reconciliation with him is impossible.

Or a man divorces his wife unbiblically in order to marry another woman. The innocent woman remarries with the blessing of the church. Later, the original husband professes repentance and seeks admission into the church with his second wife. The church must approve his present marriage and receive the couple since his original marriage was dissolved by his adultery.

Christ approves none of this. The remarriage of the guilty party is continuous adultery: "(He) committeth adultery." Also the remarriage of the innocent party is adulterous: "Whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." For Christ honors His own institution of marriage as an unbreakable bond. God ordained marriage in the beginning to be the earthly symbol of His own relationship of love with His people in Christ. The reality of marriage is the covenant of grace that God has established with Israel/church. God married Jerusalem according to Ezekiel 16. The fulfillment of this marriage according to Ephesians 5:22ff. is the New Testament covenant between Christ and the church. Marriage is the "great mystery... (of) Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32).

God is faithful in the covenant. He never divorces and remarries. God is faithful at awful cost. He gave up His only begotten Son to the death of the cross. By the atoning death of the Son of God, faithless Israel/church obtained the right to be God's bride. On the basis of the cross, the Spirit of Christ cleanses Israel/church so that she becomes faithful to God in thankful love.

Jesus Christ taught a doctrine of faithfulness in an indissoluble marriage bond because He practices this Himself in the real marriage.

Some Practical Implications

This must be the stand of the

church that is determined to teach the nations "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Her stand on remarriage is determined by the doctrine of her Lord as revealed in the Scriptures. This must be her stand regardless of

the culture in which she lives; regardless of the teaching and practice of other churches; and regardless of the opposition within her own membership of fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and friends of those who desire to remarry. □

Book Reviews

Better to Marry, by David J. Engelsma. Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1993. 105 pp., \$9.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Rev. Audred Spriensma.]

Prof. David Engelsma has written another small book (105 pages) on the subject of marriage. His first book, *Marriage: the Mystery of Christ and the Church*, was first published in 1975 and has been reprinted several times. It is a fine book on the nature and demands of marriage based upon the teaching of God's Word from Ephesians 5. The Christian couple in their marriage relationship are to be a picture of the glorious relationship between Christ and His church. As a pastor I was happy to give that book to all the young couples I married in my previous churches.

Now we have another book from the able hand of this writer and pastor. This book is not to replace the first book but to supplement that teaching. Now Prof. Engelsma draws from the teaching of God's Word as it is found in that classic passage of marriage, I Corinthians 7. Here God's Word gives us the very practical and earthly basis for marriage and the answers to problems in marriage.

We need this. Too often God's people listen to the wisdom and advice of the world concerning sex and marriage, advice not based upon God's Word and therefore advice that leads the saints astray. Prof. Engelsma writes, "It becomes increasingly rare that the churches and their teachers base their instruction and guidance squarely on the Word of God ... the churches are ready to give counsel that deviates from, and even plainly contradicts Holy Scripture. In the end, there is no difference between

the advice of the unbelieving counselor and the advice of the supposedly Christian counselor." Or again he writes, "Either the churches officially adopt reports that sanction the sexual activity of the unmarried, the unbiblical divorcing and the remarriage of the married, and the homosexual lust and conduct of married and unmarried; or the churches preach a grace of God in Christ that approves all this wickedness by tolerating it in the lives of professing Christians and in the fellowship of the congregation." Prof. Engelsma, correctly I believe, lays the blame of much of the sin where it belongs, i.e., on the church. Office-bearers will have to give an account to the Head of the church in the Judgment Day for having caused these little ones to stumble.

The theme of the book is that it is better to marry in order to flee fornication. Fornication was common in the pagan world of the apostle Paul's day, as it is also in our day. We live in a sex-saturated society. As Prof. Engelsma points out in regard to fornication: "It is no different from eating, except that more effort is put forth to stir up the appetite for fornicating than for eating." In this age the church must speak plainly and unashamedly about sex in the single life and in marriage.

The author can be thanked for his careful exegetical treatment of I Corinthians 7, pointing out how modern translations have corrupted the teaching of God's Word. At the end of each chapter Prof. Engelsma sums up the teaching of God's Word and lists implications of this teaching for the conduct and attitudes of believers and the church. And coming through loud and clear, as must be the case, is the gospel to those who have sinned,

or are struggling with homosexual feelings: "It (the Gospel) forgives all past sins of fornication, including homosexual sins ... and it breaks the ruling power of the sin of fornication. Whether the gospel has the power to deliver those who have the perverse desire for people of their own sex, so that they crucify this desire and resolutely refuse to practice it, is not even a question in the church where the gospel is known" (p. 10). Again, "... for those who have already broken God's law concerning marriage, whether by fornication, by an unbiblical divorce, or by remarriage, there is a way of escape from condemnation. This way is by repentance. Repentance finds forgiveness in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. There is abundant mercy in the Savior to blot out the guilt of fornication, desertion, divorce, and remarriage. But repentance breaks with the sin and walks henceforth in obedience to the ordinances of God, regardless of the cost" (p. 87).

The book contains a nice section on the single person. Single life is often neglected or looked down upon. But God's Word shows that the single life is honorable and even beneficial for the Kingdom of God. Personally I would like to see the author write a separate book on this important topic. Or perhaps we would be better served with a different title to this present book, such as "Serving the Lord in Single or Married Life." Singleness as a lifelong state is honorable.

Christians who desire to live for God's glory and in obedience to God's Word whether single or married would do well to read and apply the down-to-earth practical instruction that one finds in this book.

Prof. Engelsma concludes the

book with a sermon in an appendix regarding the sin of remarriage. It is well that the book ends with a sermon. It shows that not only is it possible for the church to preach these practical truths but also necessary, for preaching is the means of grace that God uses and blesses to lead His church in the truth. ■

Institutie 1536, Johannes Calvijn. Vertaling Dr. W. van't Spijker. 1992 Uitgeverij De Groot Goudriaan - Kampen. 320 bladzijden. £62,50. [Reviewed by the Editor.]

Some of the readers of this magazine read the Dutch language. Others may want to add a Dutch edition of Calvin's *Institutes* to their library. Especially for them, I call attention to Dr. van't Spijker's translation of Calvin's 1536 edition of the *Institutes* from the Latin into the Dutch. Evidently, this is the first time that the 1536 *Institutes* has been translated into Dutch.

The 1536 edition of Calvin's great work was the original form of the *Institutes*. It was much briefer than the final form of 1559. The importance of the original edition, as van't Spijker observes in his "*Verantwoording*," is that it was "the first public testimony of (Calvin's) choice on behalf of the Reformation." As to its nature, "as catechism, a theological handbook in process, an apology in the sphere of church and state, thus Calvin intended his first edition of the *Institutes*."

The translator is a capable, reli-

able Reformed scholar. He has compared his own translation with the German translation of B. Spiess; the South African translation of H. W. Simpson; and the English translation of F. L. Battles. The purpose that guided van't Spijker in the decisions that translators must make was to "offer a good readable Dutch text, by which Calvin's intention was rendered as purely as possible."

A comparison with the English translation of F. L. Battles indicates that this Dutch translation is faithful. This may be illustrated from VI.B.20, Calvin's powerful treatment of the mark of the true church against the "more than dangerous and deadly enemies of the church" who pride themselves on a "false pretext of the church."

First, the translation of Battles:

So in place of the church now are displayed to us certain outward appearances which are often far removed from the church and without which the church can stand at her best. Accordingly, we are to refute them by the very argument with which Jeremiah contended against the stupid confidence of the Jews. That is, "Let them not boast in lying words, saying 'This is the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord'" (Jer. 7:4) For the Lord recognizes nothing anywhere as his save where his Word is heard and scrupulously observed. For this is the abiding mark with which our Lord has sealed his own people: "Everyone who is of the

truth," he says, "hears my voice" (John 18:37). . . . Why do we willfully act like madmen in searching out the church when Christ has marked it with an unmistakable token, which, wherever it is seen, cannot fail to show the church there; while where it is absent, nothing remains that can give the true meaning of the church?

Then, the translation of van't Spijker:

Op die manier worden ons nu sommige uitwendige verschijnselen van de kerk voorgehouden. Maar die zijn van het wezen van de kerk ver verwijderd, en de kerk kan het op een uitnemende manier zonder stellen. Daarom hebben ook wij geen andere bewijsgrond om hen te weerleggen dan die, waarmee Jeremia het overmoedige vertrouwen van de Joden bestreed, en wel dat zij zich niet moesten beroemen op leugenachtige woorden door te zeggen: 'Des HEREN tempel, des HEREN tempel, des HEREN tempel is dit' (Jer. 7:4). Want de Here erkent nergens anders iets als zijn eigendom, dan waar men zijn Woord hoort en godvruchtig in acht neemt. Want dit is immers een altijd geldend kenteken, waarmee onze Here de zijnen heeft gekenmerkt: 'Wie uit de waarheid is,' zegt Hij, 'hoort mijn stem' (Joh. 18:37). . . . Hoe zullen wij dan uit onszelf bij het beoordelen van de kerk ons als dwazen aanstellen? Christus heeft haar immers met een teken aangeduid dat allerminst dubieus is. Overal waar men dit ziet, kan het niet anders, of daar vertoont zich zeker de kerk. Waar het echter ontbreekt, blijft er in het geheel niets over, wat een echte betekenis aan de kerk zou kunnen verlenen (pp. 268, 269). □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Young People's Activities

Let's begin this issue of the "News" by coming up to date on some of the activities and fund-raisers which the young people of our various congregations are engaged in.

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

In keeping with the holiday season just past, the Young People's Society of the Byron Center, MI PRC sponsored a combination poinsettia and fruit basket sale toward the end of November. Members of Byron Center were encouraged to purchase these items from the young people, with the money raised going towards this summer's young people's convention in Lynden, WA.

The Young People's Society of the Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB, Canada recently sponsored an evening of volleyball and other activities for their congregation at the Lacombe Christian School. Refreshments were also provided by the young people, with proceeds from the evening going towards this summer's convention.

Following that same theme, the

young people of the Loveland, CO PRC also recently sponsored a night of volleyball for their congregation. Refreshments were provided, with donations taken for the up-coming convention.

All adults of the First PRC in Holland, MI were invited to a Christmas dinner in early December, sponsored by their young people's society, proceeds going once again to this year's convention.

Lest you get the impression that all young people's activities involve raising money for yearly conventions, let me include here that on Sunday afternoon, December 19, the young people's societies of the Hudsonville, MI PRC spent a couple of hours going about in small groups to church members who are confined to rest homes, or their own homes, who may be widows or widowers, or for some other reason may need a visit. At each of their 45 scheduled stops they sang Christmas carols, and distributed some 300 greeting cards collected from the congregation during the previous three weeks.

Congregational Activities

The Mid-week Bible Study of the Trinity PRC in Houston, TX met in early December not only to study a passage of Scripture, but also to work on mailing Christmas worship invitations to their community.

If there is any advantage of being without a pastor, it is that the building committee of the vacant church gets to do some repair work on the parsonage while it is empty. Such was the case recently at the Loveland, CO PRC, where their building committee asked for volunteers to help paint the parsonage basement as needed.

The Bible societies of our Hudsonville, MI PRC met in mid-December for their annual combined Christmas meeting. Besides spending an hour in the study of the birth of our Lord and Savior, as found in Luke 2, they were also treated to a short program by the two elders from Hudsonville's Consistory who had just recently returned from the mis-

sion field in Northern Ireland, where they were able to visit with their missionary, Rev. R. Hanko and his family, and the Covenant Reformed Fellowship.

Once again this year the congregation of our Hudsonville, MI PRC were encouraged by their deacons to participate in a food-drive for the benefit of those in need in their own congregation. The day before distribution by Hudsonville's deacons, they had managed to collect some 45 bags of groceries, and \$800.00 worth of gift certificates from area stores.

The recently completed holiday season saw many of our congregations able to enjoy good, spiritually-uplifting Christmas programs provided by individual church choirs. Such was the case when the choirs from our Hudsonville, Faith, and Hope PRC's were able to present excellent programs not only for their own congregations but also for visitors from other of our churches as well.

If you enjoy good choir music, you may also be interested to know that these choirs, along with several others in the West Michigan area, are making plans for a combined choir program sometime this spring.

As a footnote to the above, the "Voices of Victory," a quartet made up of Rick Noorman, Jim Daling, Dan VanDyke, and Jerry Kuiper, provided special music at both Faith's and Hope's choir programs. I believe I speak for many when I say that they should consider giving a concert by themselves. These four men are good.

Food for Thought

"No sin can be little, because it is committed against the great God of heaven and earth. To commit little sins the sinner must find out a little God."

Bunyan □

BRITISH REFORMED FELLOWSHIP FAMILY HOLIDAY CONFERENCE

Dates: 30 July — 6 August 1994.

Place: Scottish College of Textiles,
Galashiels, Scotland,
(34 miles south of Edinburgh;
72 miles from Glasgow).

Speakers: Professors H. Hanko
and D. Engelsma, PRC.

Rev. Sinclair Horne,
Scottish Reformation Society.

Theme: The Doctrine of
Sovereign Grace.

Accommodations: Information
about different options available (all of
them delightful and affordable) can be
obtained from either of the two con-
tact persons listed below.

Program: The conference will be
of a relaxed nature, and adequate
time will be available for recreation
with family and friends.

At the conference the glorious
doctrine of sovereign grace will be
expounded in its relation to Predesti-
nation, the Cross of Christ, the Preach-
ing of the Gospel, the Development of
Sin, the Application of Salvation, and
the Circumstances of Life.

Also included will be an address
on the Covenanters, entitled "The
Relevance of the Covenanting Wit-
ness for Today." The years 1660-
1688, particularly, are known as the
Covenanting Period in Scottish eccle-
siastical history. Some 18,000 people
suffered during those years for their
allegiance to "Christ's Crown and
Covenant." Optional (and inexpen-
sive) tours are planned to sites asso-
ciated with their memory.

Contact persons (for informa-
tion or reservations):

Mr. Tony Horne
9 Church Road
Thornbury, Bristol BS12 1EJ
England
(Tel. 0454-41517)

Mr. Bill Oomkes
6299 Wing Ave. S.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49512
USA
(Tel. 616-698-6697)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SALE

Better to Marry by David J. Engelsma, 105 pages, paper, \$9.95.

Better to Marry is available at an introductory price of 25% off through January. Book club members will receive a 40% discount through January.

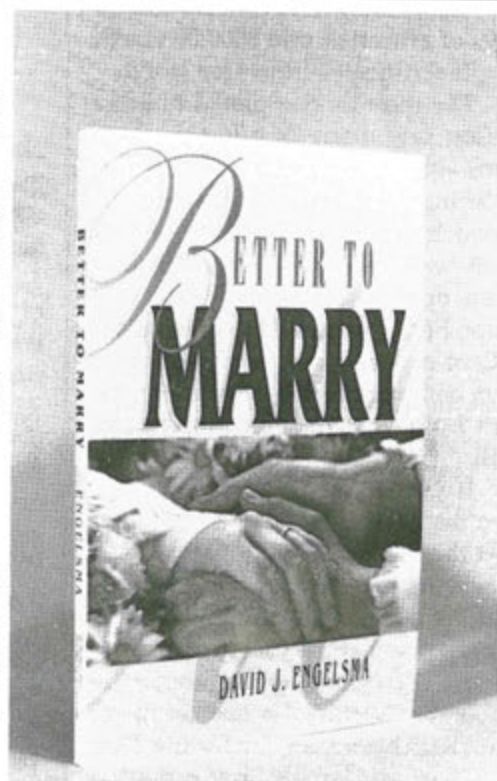
To order, send \$7.50 plus \$1.50 postage (foreign, \$2.50) to

RFPA

P.O. Box 2006

Grand Rapids, MI 49501

Book club members will receive their copies automatically and may order additional copies at \$6.00 each plus \$1.50 postage (foreign, \$2.50).



RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church extend our Christian sympathy to Genevieve Alphenaar and family in the death of her husband, and to Mr. Adrian Alphenaar and Mr. Fred Alphenaar and families in the death of their brother,

MR. JACOB ALPHENAAR

on October 26, 1993.

"Thou shalt guide me by thy council and afterwards receive me to glory" (Psalm 73:24).

Jeffrey Steenholdt, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church extend our Christian sympathy to Pat and Elaine Triezenberg and family in the death of their mother, and to Mrs. Joahanna Alphenaar and family in the death of her sister,

MRS. HATTIE TRIEZENBERG,

on November 3, 1993.

"... all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:23).

Jeffrey Steenholdt, Clerk

TEACHERS NEEDED

Covenant Christian High School of Grand Rapids, Michigan is accepting applications for teaching positions for the 1994-1995 school year. Those interested in the position of choir or band director are also invited to apply. Call Miss Agatha Lubbers at school (616) 453-5048 or home (616) 458-2057, or Mr. Rick Noorman (616) 457-6087. Applicants may also write the school at 1401 Ferndale S.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49504.

TEACHER NEEDED

The Protestant Reformed Christian School in South Holland will have an opening for a third/fourth grade teacher for the coming year. Applications and resumes should be sent to the school at 16511 South Park Avenue, South Holland, IL 60473, Attention: Lamm Lubbers, Administrator.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

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

MRS. HATTIE TRIEZENBERG.

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

Rev. Meindert Joostens, President
Theodore Looyenga, Clerk

Request

The seminary library could put to very good use some more copies of the printed Acts of Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches. We are most interested in the 1940s and 1950s, but our supply of some of the Acts in the 60s and 70s is also very low. Whatever you have, and are willing to give, will be much appreciated. The address of the seminary is:

4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418