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**Newly organized Georgetown PRC —
Bauer, MI**

See "News From Our Churches — p. 310

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In This Issue ...

In our circles, the birth of a baby is cause for celebration. The reason is indicated by the Rev. Richard Moore's meditation, "Wonder Work: Our Children": the covenant of grace with believers and their children. The pastor of the Hull, Iowa Protestant Reformed Church grounds this truth in a passage of Scripture that the Reformed have always viewed as especially compelling: Luke 1:39-44. Unborn John leaped for joy at the presence of Jesus Christ — Himself yet in the womb.

Pastor Moore writes:

In our churches our children are counted most precious, a rich heritage given us of God. They are a wondrous part of the work of our God, a part of that work that is so great as to fill the parents of the newborn infant with exceeding joy.

If there is joy within the fellowship of a congregation at the birth of a child, there is certainly joy throughout the denomination at the birth of a congregation.

The Protestant Reformed congregations have a new sister. Church news editor Benjamin Wigger informs us that she was born on March 2, 1994 at an organizational meeting held in the auditorium of the Hudsonville, Michigan Protestant Reformed Church. Her size at birth was 34 families. Her name is Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church.

At present, the newly formed congregation is holding worship services each Lord's day in the rented facilities of the Bauer Elementary School in Bauer, Michigan. She extends a hearty welcome to visitors.

The *Standard Bearer* extends congratulations.

— DJE

Wonder Work: Our Children

He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD is gracious and full of compassion.

Psalm 111:4

The works of the Lord are great, the psalmist exclaims in the one hundred eleventh Psalm; and this sets the theme of comfort and strength for God's church. As a pastor I sometimes use this passage on visits that I make to parents of newborns and apply its instruction to this blessing that God gives to His church as she brings forth the covenant seed. In like manner I consider some of the instruction of this Psalm for this month's meditation.

In our congregation we have been blessed with many children, like the true church throughout the ages. In our churches our children are counted most precious, a rich heritage given us of God. They are a wondrous part of the work of our God, a part of that work that is so great as to fill the parents of the newborn infant with exceeding joy. And as a pastor I find that this is true of the covenant parents whether it is their first child or their eighth.

This is as it should be, for our children are the heritage of Jehovah, His gift to His people. O, how different this attitude toward children is from the thinking of the world of unbelief. Children, for this world, are a burden. In fact, for the most part, children are unwanted; for they constitute, in the minds of the world, the

reason why their parents cannot obtain the things they want. Children, so it is thought, curtail the independence of a man and woman. Children are therefore looked upon as something to be avoided, or at the least very carefully planned, so that they will not interfere with the fulfillment of one's desires.

In fact, so great is this attitude of unbelief that many kill their own children while those children are still in the womb, so that they do not have to care for them. And as the people of this world live to the glory of man, selfishly they claim that abortion is not murder, for life begins not until the actual time of birth. How foolish this is, and how very contrary to the Word of God. Do they who consider themselves Christian and yet abort life really think that they stand in harmony with the Word? Then they have not considered what the Scriptures declare about life in the womb. The psalmist teaches that God has made him hope upon God from the womb. And again we read in Psalm 139:13, "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee: for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." At the least, both references speak of a regeneration that took place already at the time of birth, and the unborn child is already a spiritual being.

But even more clearly is this truth emphasized in the history of the birth of Christ. We read that, soon after the conception of Christ, Mary went to her cousin Elisabeth's home. We read in Luke 1:39-44 this: "And Mary arose in those days, and went into the

hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy." Now, the testimony of the Spirit of Christ is that, when John was yet in his mother's womb, he was already regenerated, not only alive physically, but alive spiritually. He was a spiritually regenerated child of God, for only then could the Spirit say through Elisabeth that the child leapt for joy. And we take note that the infant who was in the womb of his mother was a little over six months. Even more conclusive is the fact that Jesus, in the womb of Mary only about a month, is considered the *Lord* by Elisabeth, as she is led so to confess by the Holy Ghost. The life and spiritual being begins at conception, as the wonder work of God. How foolish and how sinful is the world that denies this truth.

The child of God, when he is given children, sees this as a wonderful work of God, and knows that God is gracious and full of compassion in all of his work (v. 4). This is important for us to remember as we bring forth our children in this day and age. It is not easy for the people of God to bring forth children today. This is true because of the many temptations that

Rev. Moore is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa.

are set before the church. It is true because godly parents realize the many trials and sufferings that their children must pass through as the day of Antichrist comes ever closer. Further, God-fearing parents realize that, as time goes on, the church of Christ becomes an ever smaller remnant. This means that it will be still harder for their children to have the covenant fellowship and the strength of that fellowship for the battle of faith.

Even more, in the light of our calling to instruct our children in the ways of God and in His fear, the parents know their own weaknesses, their own sinfulness, and this leads them to ask, How shall we rightly bring up the children that we bring forth in those ways that are well pleasing to God, and that shall serve their eternal welfare? But, beloved reader, our children and our family are a part of the wonderful work of God that He shall make to be remembered (v. 4).

Psalm 111 answers the above question, and all questions that godly parents have as they bring forth and raise the children that God has given them. For God is ever mindful of His covenant (v. 5). This is a most blessed word for us to hear. God will prosper His work. He will provide for our children. He will give us the grace to raise them in the fear of His name. He will provide them strength in the days of temptation. He will deliver us from the enemy that would destroy the cause of God. And He will do all this because He is mindful of His covenant.

That covenant is rooted already in eternity, as God chose His people to be the body of His dear Son, to be living stones in the temple in which He dwells. He chose us in covenant love to be sons of God. And He realizes that covenant with His elect by sending His only Begotten to come as our Head, and to impute our guilt to Him in order that we might be deliv-

ered from the terrible sin that we have committed in father Adam, and from all the transgressions in which we have walked. As God has chosen His church, He has determined to gather that church in the line of continuing generations. As He has redeemed her, so surely does He send forth the Spirit of His Son to quicken her. And powerfully, by the Word that He sends through the ministry, He calls His children out of darkness and into the light of His fellowship. Indeed *He sent redemption unto His people, and He hath commanded His covenant for ever* (v. 9).

This affords covenant parents much comfort and strength as they are called to raise up their covenant children in the fear of the Lord. For then the child of God realizes that God does not give to us children without also giving to us the grace to care for them. God does not give to our care the children of His cov-

enant, and then forsake those children that He has given. But our God will provide His covenant people with all things necessary for their salvation.

According to this Psalm God will sustain us even in earthly things, as He is mindful of His covenant (v. 5). As the child of God brings forth many children, and wonders how he will provide even for the earthly needs of such a family in the day in which we live, he has the confidence that all he needs for each day God will graciously provide. Thus the godly father goes about his daily labors faithfully in the confidence that God will through those labors provide those things necessary for the family. O, it may be that we will have to forego earthly pleasures which have become so much a part of the world in which we live; but we shall not lack that which is needed for this life, for God is ever mindful of His covenant.

Even more importantly, as our children will face a world ever increasing in ungodliness, and as they

shall face temptations that are greater than those which the church has ever before faced — for Antichrist is coming “after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” (II Thess. 2:9) — yet they shall stand. As parents we will be sustained in our calling to provide for our children the instruction that shall give them the strength for the battle. Again, this is not because of any natural understanding that we have as parents, but is due to the fact that God quickens His children, as He has redeemed them, and applies His Word to our hearts under the preaching, thus giving us the understanding to lead our children in the fear of His precious Name.

The work of the Lord is great. And the Word that He gives to us to increase our understanding, thus enabling us in faith to lead our children into the paths that shall serve their salvation and the coming of the Lord, is a Word that is sure. His commandments are sure, for they are infallibly given to His people in the Scriptures, and they stand forever. Armed with His Word, led by His Spirit in perfect confidence, we may then bring forth our children and instruct them in the walk of faith and in the fear of Jehovah.

As God gathers His church from our seed, with each child who is brought forth, Christ comes ever nearer. Trusting therefore in the faithfulness of our God, the child of God in faith brings forth the covenant seed. And also in this prays, yea, Lord, even so, *Come quickly.* □

*God does not
give to us
children without
also giving to us
the grace to care
for them.*



The Nose of the Camel (2)

Last year, the synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("Liberated" — hereafter GKN-Lib) decided that women may participate in the congregational meeting as voting members. Virtually ignored by the conservative press, this was a significant decision by a denomination of churches that has been sharply critical of other Reformed churches in the Netherlands for caving in to the pressures of worldliness and that has influence with conservative churches in North America.

The decision authorized the nose of the camel of feminism within the church-tent of the GKN-Lib and, by example, within the church-tents of all those in fellowship with the GKN-Lib.

The editorial in the preceding issue of the *Standard Bearer* (March 15, 1994) summarized the grounds of the decision.

The grounds are ominous. They threaten the camel of women officebearers and the inseparably related rejection of the headship of the husband in the home. The first ground, concerning the biblical basis for the decision, appeals to Acts 2:17, 18; Acts 21:9; I Corinthians 11:5; Acts 18:26; Romans 16:1ff.; and Philippians 4:3, 4. These passages teach that women have the gift of prophecy; that Phoebe was a "servant of the church"; and that women labored with Paul in the gospel. The synod of the GKN-Lib explained the passages as portraying "an active involvement and participation of women in the service of the gospel."

What is foreboding is that these

are the very passages that are always appealed to in support of women preachers, elders, and deacons in the church. By appealing to these passages in support of the participation of women at the congregational meeting, the GKN-Lib gave credence to the appeal to these passages on behalf of women officebearers.

In fact, these passages say nothing about voting at congregational meetings. But they do speak of women laboring in the gospel and helping as a servant (Greek: *diakonos*) in the church. Therefore, if the passages prove anything at all along the lines intended by the GKN-Lib, they prove that women may be preachers and deacons in the church.

What the GKN-Lib ought to have said about these passages is that they do not at all refer to women holding office in the church and that they do not conflict with the clear passages in the New Testament that forbid women to teach and to rule in the church. In view of the powerful threat of feminism today, and the fierce struggle of faithful Reformed churches to withstand this threat, the GKN-Lib ought to have said this sharply and emphatically.

The second ominous and objectionable aspect of the first ground is its ambiguous declaration, "the Scriptures do not give a general order for the women to be silent in the congregation." The ambiguous word is the word "general." By this word, the GKN-Lib made the opponents of women voting at the congregational meeting look ridiculous. Opponents of women voting at the congrega-

tional meeting are either so foolish or so chauvinistic that they think that the Scriptures give a general order for the women to be silent in the congregation. Women may not even open their mouths to join in singing at public worship. Women may not speak in the organic life of the church: the Bible study meetings; the gatherings for fellowship; the Sunday School classes; the evangelism societies; and the like.

But elide the word "general," and the decision of the GKN-Lib flatly contradicts the express statements of the apostle of Christ in I Corinthians 14:34 and in I Timothy 2:11, 12: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak"; "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

The Scriptures do give an order for the women to be silent at church. It is a specific order prohibiting all female speaking that exercises authority and that teaches. And this is precisely the issue in the question whether women may vote at the congregational meeting.

The most objectionable and threatening element in the first ground is its interpretation of I Corinthians 14:34-36 and I Timothy 2:11-15. These are the two crucially important, indeed decisive, passages on the issue of women ruling and teaching in the church. There are two ways in which the advocates of women officebearers set aside the plain, powerful force of these passages. One is the blunt rejection

tion of their teaching as limited to that day and those local circumstances. The other is an interpretation of the passages that empties them of their real, full meaning.

In defense of its declaration that "the Scriptures do not give a general order for the women to be silent in the congregation" and in the interests of women voting in the congregational meeting, the first ground of the decision of the GKN-Lib explained I Corinthians 14:34-36 thus: "I Cor. 14:34-36 denies women the judging of prophets during worship, because that would give those women authority over them." This is all that is taught by the passage: Women must not speak out in worship to judge the prophets. Presumably, the application to the present is that women must not criticize the minister during the public worship service.

This interpretation empties the passage of its full force. For in I Corinthians 14:34-36 the Holy Spirit forbids all teaching by women in the gatherings of the church for worship. Women may not speak at church in any capacity of teaching. This is grounded in their being "under obedience" (v. 34) and directly related to their submission to their husbands (v. 35: "And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home").

Although the reference is to the gatherings for public worship, there is implication for the issue of women voting at the congregational meeting. The implication is found in the statement that the woman is under obedience and in the exhortation that she ask her husband at home. The apostle rules out the possibility that a woman get into a rip-roaring debate with a man, perhaps her own husband, at the congregational meeting and that she nullify her husband's vote for some officebearer by her own, contrary vote.

The interpretation of I Timothy 2:11-15 by the synod of the GKN-Lib was even more woefully inadequate. Again in defense of the odd, ambiguous declaration in its first ground for having women at the congregational meeting, "the Scriptures do not give a

general order for the women to be silent in the congregation," the GKN-Lib explained I Timothy 2:11-15 thus:

I Tim. 2:11-15 forbids women to speak in a position of leadership and authority during worship, since that causes her to abandon her own position and to usurp the place of the man.

Clearly, the GKN-Lib intended to limit the apostle's restriction upon women to the services of public worship: "during worship." One asks, "May women speak in a position of leadership and authority in the church before, after, and apart from worship? at the congregational meeting? in the consistory room? at synod?" Also, the sole activity of women that is forbidden, according to the decision of the Dutch Reformed churches, is that of speaking: "...forbids women to speak in a position of leadership and authority." One asks, "May women exercise leadership and authority in the church, if this does not involve speaking, say, by voting at the congregational meeting?"

In reality, the apostle commands the silence of subjection upon the female members of the church in all the life of the institute. The woman may not teach "during worship," but neither may she teach in any other official function of the church institute, e.g., the instruction of the children in catechism. Not only is the woman forbidden to teach in the church, but also she is forbidden to exercise authority over the man in any aspect of the life and labor of the instituted church. She may not rule in the church. And this is basic to the issue of women voting at the congregational meeting, as it is basic to the issue of women elders and deacons.

With such restrictive and weakening interpretation of the two passages that are fundamental to the issue of women officebearers in the church, the decision of the GKN-Lib permitting (in reality, *demanding*) women voting at the congregational meeting welcomed the nose of the feminist camel into their tents.

The analysis of the decision by the magazine of the GKN-Lib, *De Reformatie*, bears this out. This analysis occurred in the September 18, 1993 issue of that religious periodical. With specific reference to the two passages of Holy Scripture that were brought up by the opponents of women voting at the congregational meeting, I Corinthians 14:34-36 and I Timothy 2:11-15, the writer in *De Reformatie* commented:

Slechts twee (!) Schriftplaatsen worden daarin genoemd, waarvan bovendien niet kan worden volgehouden dat zij betrekking hebben op de verkiezing van ambtsdragers (p. 957).

The English translation would be: "Only two (!) passages of Scripture were named therein, about which moreover it cannot be maintained that they have relation to the election of officebearers."

"Only two (!) passages of Scripture." With the significant exclamation mark included.

Thus was the fundamental argument of the opponents of women voting at the congregational meeting dismissed.

But the same dismissal of "only two passages of Scripture" that opened the door for women into the congregational meeting can easily open the doors for them also into the seminary and into the consistory room. In other Reformed churches, it already has. Against those who were opposed to women in office on the basis of I Corinthians 14:34-36 and I Timothy 2:11-15, it was said, "Only two (!) passages of Scripture." In these instances, the dismissal of "only two passages of Scripture" in order to make way for women officebearers was also accompanied by the statement, "And these two passages do not really relate to the issue of women preaching and ruling in the Reformed churches in the 20th century."

The nose is in.

The rest of the camel must be expected to follow. □

— DJE

The Lord's Supper at Home

I have worked for an invalid, a sincere Reformed Christian woman. The Sunday worship services were brought into her home by telephone line. On the Saturday evening before the administration of the Lord's Supper, the elders brought her the bread and wine. Then, on Sunday morning, she ate the bread and drank the wine in her home at the same time that the congregation was partaking at church.

Would this be improper administration of the Lord's Supper?

Ellen VanDenTop
Lynden, WA

ANSWER:

In response to your question we point you to Article 64 of the *Church*

Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches: "The administration of the Lord's Supper shall take place only where there is supervision of elders, according to the ecclesiastical order, and in a public gathering of the congregation."

This article contains two stipulations regarding the administration of the Lord's Supper. 1) It must be under the supervision of the elders. This makes "open communion" impossible. We practice close or supervised communion. 2) The Lord's Supper must be administered in a public gathering of the congregation.

The instance you cite is in violation of this second stipulation. The fact is that the lady in question does not partake of the Lord's Supper in a

public gathering of the congregation, but does so in her own home. There is good reason for this second stipulation. Part of the symbolism of the sacrament is the fellowship which the believers have in the body of Christ. Hence, the people of God congregate at the Lord's Table. Still more, the preaching of the Word must accompany the administration of the sacraments (cf. also Article 56 of *The Church Order*).

Both the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Christian Reformed Church in North America have by synodical decision made exceptions to the stipulations of Article 64. The Protestant Reformed Churches continue to maintain the stipulations of Article 64.

— Editorial Committee

Classical Meetings

The classical meetings shall consist of neighboring churches that respectively delegate, with proper credentials, a minister and an elder to meet at such time and place as was determined by the previous classical meeting. Such meetings shall be held at least once in three months, unless great distances render this inadvisable. In these meetings the ministers shall preside in rotation, or one shall be chosen to preside; however, the same minister shall not be chosen twice in succession.

Furthermore, the president shall, among other things, put the following questions to the delegates of each church:

1. Are the consistory meetings held in your church?
2. Is church discipline exercised?
3. Are the poor and the Christian schools cared for?
4. Do you need the judgment and help of the classis for the proper government of your church?

And, finally, at one but the last meeting and, if necessary, at the last meeting before the (particular) synod, delegates shall be chosen to attend said synod.

Church Order, Article 41.

Rev. Cammenga is pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan

This article introduces the section of the *Church Order* that deals with classical meetings. Articles 41 through 46 concern the meetings of classis and various aspects of the work

of classis. The present article provides for regular and structured classical meetings — this in the interests of decency and good order in the churches. We will treat the main

contents of Article 41 this time. In a future article we will treat the "Questions of Article 41" which are asked of the delegates from each consistory at the close of every meeting of classis.

A classis is made up of "neighboring churches," that is, churches in geographic proximity. From the very beginning, the Reformed churches urged the formation of classes. The Synod of Wezel, 1568, urged that as soon as the war and persecution subsided sufficiently, the Dutch churches should organize classes. The Synod of Emden, 1571, decided: "Besides these consistories, classical meetings of churches located near each other shall be held every three or six months according to the circumstances and necessity." The Synod of Dordt, 1578, ruled: "The classical meetings shall consist of ministers of the Word and elders of neighboring churches which shall meet every month or six weeks more or less according to the circumstances of the congregations, just so three months do not go by (without a meeting) in those places which have been designated by common consent." Some churches did not feel so strongly the urgency of federation, so that the Synod of Gelderland, 1582, found it necessary to urge that "... it is neither advisable nor edifying, that a few churches should continue to exist by themselves, but each church is bound to join itself to a classis."

Early on in the history of our Protestant Reformed Churches the combined consistories met in order to take care of the work of the churches in common. With the formation of an annual synod in 1940, the denomination was divided into two classes, Classis East and Classis West. As a result of the split of 1953-'54, classical boundaries were adjusted, but the two-classis arrangement remained intact. An overture to divide into three or four classes was rejected by the Synod of 1991. As a result, our churches continue to be made up of two classes, East and West.

Constitution of Classis

Each church (consistory) delegates one minister and one elder,

with their alternates, to the meetings of classis. The congregations are to be equally represented, whether small or large, inasmuch as each congregation is a complete manifestation of the body of Christ. In case a congregation is vacant, two elders are delegated. Our churches have permitted deacons to be delegated from our smaller consistories when circumstances make this necessary. There have even been instances in the history of the Reformed churches when non-officebearers were delegated to classis when only one officebearer in a congregation was in a position to be delegated. This is not to be done except in extreme situations.

It is the consistory, not the congregation generally, that selects and authorizes delegates to the meetings of classis. According to Article 41, the serving minister of each congregation is required to be delegated. Article 41 does not prescribe a certain method for selection of elder delegates to classis. Choosing of delegates can either be by rotation or by a free election within the consistory. The usual practice in Reformed churches has been that the elders are delegated by rotation, whether alphabetically or according to length of term served. This is the method followed by most of our consistories. It is to be preferred, since it provides all the elders the opportunity to participate in this vital aspect of the life of the churches. It also serves as a greater safeguard against hierarchy, which might sooner creep in if only the same few were repeatedly delegated.

Classical delegates are to come to the meetings of classis "with proper credentials." A credential is the official, black-on-white, proof of delegation. Each consistory fills out and adopts its own credentials, specifying its delegates, and sends its delegates to the meeting of classis with these credentials in hand. The first business of every classis is to examine the credentials and seat the delegates specified in the credentials. Thus classis is declared to be legally constituted.

Without proper credentials no in-

dividual or delegation is to be seated. If, however, the delegates have forgotten to take their credentials, or for some understandable reason cannot produce their credentials, the classis may take a decision to seat them with the provision that their credentials be sent to the Stated Clerk or to the next meeting of classis. Our churches are small enough and delegates familiar enough with each other that this poses no serious problem.

Having been seated, the delegates are authorized to take part in all the deliberations of classis. Each delegate exercises one decisive vote. In the voting, delegates ought to vote their own conscience. No consistory ought to bind its delegates ahead of time to vote in a certain way. Consistories may advise, but delegates must be permitted the freedom to vote as they deem right and proper. This follows, too, from the fact that our broader assemblies are deliberative in nature. Even though a delegate should have familiarized himself with the agenda and arrived at some tentative opinions, he must come to classis open to the insights and instruction of the other delegates.

Frequency of Classical Meetings

Article 41 requires that classical meetings "... be held at least once in three months (four times yearly), unless great distances render this inadvisable." In our churches, Classis East meets three times a year and Classis West twice yearly. The deciding factor is not so much distance, in our age of modern means of transportation, but cost. Nevertheless, we ought to be more serious about adhering to the requirement of Article 41. Although this would be a bit more costly, especially in the West, our churches are in good enough financial shape that we ought to conform to the requirement of the *Church Order* as closely as possible.

Our *Church Order* makes no provision for the cancellation of a scheduled meeting of classis. Some Reformed church orders contain such a provision. Usually, the calling church and a neighboring church can decide

to cancel a scheduled meeting if there is little or no material on the agenda. Ordinarily, however, this may not be done twice in succession. Perhaps our churches should consider some such addition to Article 41.

At the end of each meeting of classis, the time and place of the next meeting are set. No provision is made in Article 41 for the calling of an early or special classis. However, provision is made for this in the "Classical Regulations" of our respective classes. A consistory can call for the convening of a special classis by gaining the assent of a neighboring consistory and submitting their request to the classical committee. The classical committee, then, informs the churches and prepares the agenda.

Even though the time and place of each classical meeting is set by the last classis, announcements of the convening of the classis are to be made. These announcements are handled by the stated clerks, who send notices to each consistory and place an announcement in the *Standard Bearer*. In this way the churches are kept well informed of the meetings of the broader assembly.

Each classis decides where next it will meet. The Synod of Wezel, 1568, decided that all of the churches in each classis should take turns at hosting the meetings of classis. Article 41 contains no such stipulation. Not every church is conveniently located or is sufficiently large to be able to host the number of delegates coming to classis. Nevertheless, there is benefit to as many churches as are able hosting classis. This gives the members of the various churches opportunity to attend the sessions of classis and to have fellowship with the delegates. Especially for far-flung and isolated congregations this is a very worthwhile experience.

Expenses for the meetings of classis are to be borne by the churches in common, not by the individual congregations or their delegates. If the individual congregations were to bear their own expenses, smaller, financially less able congregations, would be disadvantaged. Classical

expenses in our churches are paid for out of synodical funds, a portion of the annual synodical assessments designated for this purpose.

Classical expenses include the travel expenses of the delegates. The cost of meals and services provided by the host church are included in classical expenses. In addition, elders may be compensated for wages lost while traveling to and attending classis. A limit is set on this reimbursement for lost wages, and in order to claim such lost wage compensation, a delegate must have the prior approval of his consistory.

Chairmanship of Classical Meetings

The presidency of the classical meetings rests with the ministers: "In these meetings the ministers shall preside in rotation, or one shall be chosen to preside; however, the same minister shall not be chosen twice in succession." Why the ministers? There is no principle reason. It is not that the ministers are greater in authority or that their office is superior to that of the elders who are delegated to classis. Article 41 calls for the chairman to be one of the minister delegates for purely practical considerations. Generally the ministers have more experience and are more informed about presiding over meetings. For this simple reason, it is to be preferred that the ministers chair the sessions of classis.

Article 41 provides for two ways in which the president is selected. The ministers may preside by alphabetical rotation, or the president may be chosen by vote of the assembly. The method of rotation is to be preferred and is the practice in our classes. This is another safeguard against hierarchy and upholds the principle of the parity of officebearers, all the ministers being essentially equal in the authority of their office. Nevertheless, if the classis considers it advisable, it may depart from the practice of rotation and elect a president. In this case, however, the same minister is not to be chosen twice in succession.

In our classes the policy is fol-

lowed that at one classis a given minister functions as vice-president; at the next classis he serves as the president; and at the following classis he holds the office of secretary.

The duties of the president have already been treated in connection with Article 34. The *Church Order* makes no provision for the office of vice-president at the classical meetings. The regulations of each classis do, however, provide for a vice-president, whose duty generally is to assume the office of the president if for some reason he is unable or unwilling to carry out his office.

Choosing Synodical Delegates

A couple of important items on the agenda of the classis are referred to in Article 41. One of these items is the asking of the "Questions of Article 41" of the delegates from each consistory at the conclusion of each meeting of classis. More about this next time. Article 41 also calls for the election of delegates to the annual synod: "And, finally, at one but the last meeting and, if necessary, at the last meeting before the (particular) synod, delegates shall be chosen to attend said synod."

Delegates to the annual synod are chosen by the classis, not by individual consistories. An equal number of minister and elder delegates are chosen. Besides the delegates (*primi*), their alternates (*secundi*) are chosen. At present, each of our classes sends five minister and five elder delegates to synod. Delegates are paired with their alternates alphabetically. The alternate who secured the most votes is therefore not necessarily first in line to be called upon to attend synod.

Voting for synodical delegates is done by free election. All the ministers of the classis are considered eligible. Strictly speaking, this would include retired ministers and missionaries. Elder nominees come usually by way of each consistory's credentials. Some consistories have the rule that the elders are all eligible and will be listed on the credentials unless they are able to give good reason to

the consistory why their name should not be included. This is a good policy that also assures a full slate of elder nominees from which to choose.

Delegates to synod ought to be chosen on the basis of individual qualifications. Each classis ought to send, not necessarily its most popular or older, but its most capable men to

synod. Nevertheless, some care should be exercised so that one congregation is not unduly represented at synod. Because delegates are selected by free election, it is possible that a number of delegates be selected from one congregation. It has happened at times that one congregation

sends three or four delegates to a given synod. Some care should be exercised so that delegates are chosen from a number of different congregations. As many of the churches as possible ought to be involved in the labors of the churches in common at the broader assemblies. □

Contribution

Rev. Chris Coleborn

The Calling of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*

June the 12th, 1993, was the 350th anniversary of the calling of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Because the work of this justly famous assembly means so much to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, as it should to any who bears the name "Presbyterian" and "Reformed," we ought to pause to remember what it was about, and to thank the Lord, the King and Head of the church, for using the times and labours of the men who sat and worked on this assembly to help build His church. What a blessing that Assembly has been — to all who love the Saviour and to all who love those truths of the Word of God which most honour

Him. We believe the Reformed faith most consistently summarizes these truths.

Background

Following the Reformation in England, several Protestant groups emerged. Out of one of these, the Puritans, came the English Presbyterians. These early groups were greatly influenced by the work of Tyndale and Hooper, proponents of covenant theology. Later, during the reign of King Edward VI, the Reformation was given royal support. During this time, European Reformers visited England, and the church there was closely knit with the Reformed church on the continent and in Scotland.

The early death of Edward and the ascension to the throne of Mary Tudor brought the Roman Catholic Church to power again, and one of the consequences was the persecution of the Protestants or Reformed Christians. Many of the English Reformers fled to Europe in what is now known as the "marian exile." Some gave their lives as martyrs for Christ and His truth.

Three distinct groups emerged at this time. There were the moderate Reformers, generally Episcopalians,

who thought that the reforms that had taken place under Edward VI were enough. Then there were the Presbyterians, who had close ties to, and links with, the Reformed church in Switzerland, and finally there were the Independents.

When Elizabeth I came to power, her policy was in favour of the Episcopalian moderate reform group. She ignored the Presbyterian Puritans, and thought of the Independent Puritans (Congregationalists and Baptists) as dangerous subversives. This forced the Presbyterians and Independents into secret meetings. Under God's blessing, the Puritans' understanding of the Bible was spread by faithful preachers and writings, and many in England became convinced Puritans. Eventually the majority of the elected members of the Parliament of England were Puritans, and this resulted in the Parliament becoming very supportive of the Puritans, most of whom were now generally Presbyterian but with some Independents. The Presbyterians believed that the authority for state and church was ultimately Christ's good ways and rule by His Word, the Bible. However, the monarchs of England/Scotland and their followers believed that the king had

* Last year, Presbyterians celebrated the 350th anniversary of the meeting of the Westminster Assembly. This assembly produced the confessional, catechetical, and church political documents of the Presbyterian churches—the Westminster Standards. This article commemorates the historic event of the calling of the assembly. The Rev. Chris Coleborn is pastor of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Brisbane, Australia.

— Ed.

absolute authority over the nation and church.

Eventually, due to the excesses of King Charles I, the Parliamentary-Presbyterian group gained the greatest following and support in England. At this time, there were great troubles economically, socially, politically — in fact, in all departments of life. They faced the same sort of problems that face our country now, only far worse. This group also had the support of the Presbyterians of Scotland. There had been a great work of God in Scotland, so that the land was deeply persuaded that Presbyterian beliefs and practices were the most biblical. The Parliament then abolished episcopacy as the National Church in England.

In Scotland, in God's providence, a development similar to that in England occurred. Charles I had tried to force the Presbyterian Church (the great majority church in the nation of the Reformation) to accept that he, the king, had authority to tell the church how to worship, and what to believe. The church, however, was deeply persuaded that only King Jesus, speaking to His people in the Bible, had that authority, and not King Charles I. The Scottish Parliament, "The Four Tables," met, and as the nation was overwhelmingly Presbyterian, the Parliament supported the Presbyterian cause as just and right. The king would not listen to the Parliament, however. The nation then, under the leadership both of the church and Parliament, called the nation to prayer and fasting, and it was decided to bind all the Presbyterians in a National Covenant, to be faithful to the King of the church, the Lord Jesus. The king continued to oppose his Parliament and people, contrary to the constitution of the land, and even raised an army to force them to do his will. The nation and church rallied under their Parliament, and their banner was, *For Christ's Crown and Covenant*. When King Charles saw this opposition he did not use his army against the Scots.

When the English Parliament met (with a Presbyterian majority), the English felt they had much in com-

mon with the Scots, and asked them to join with them in drawing up a common Confession of Faith for the Christians of England, Scotland, and Ireland. The Scots agreed, provided the basis of that common work was a Scriptural agreement or covenant. This covenant was called *The Solemn League and Covenant*. It bound the nations, by God's grace, to work together for a biblical basis for the church and nations. The English agreed to this, and then requested the aid of the Scots at the Westminster Assembly. The church and the Parliament of Scotland sent commissioners to attend the Westminster Assembly to help it in its work. The original commissioners were five ministers, Alexander Henderson, Samuel Rutherford, Robert Douglas, Robert Baillie, and George Gillespie. There were three ruling elders: John, Lord Maitland, afterwards Duke of Lauderdale; Archibald Johnston of Warriston; and John, Earl of Cassilis.

The Calling and Work of the Westminster Assembly

On June 12th, 1643, the Parliament of England summoned an Assembly of Divines to meet at Westminster to do several things. They were to act as advisors to the Parliament with biblical and spiritual advice. More importantly, however, they were to draw up a biblical constitution for England, Scotland, and Ireland. It was believed that one of the best ways to solve the problems of the nations was to turn sincerely and truly to the Lord and His ways for us, and to establish the nation on a proper spiritual basis, and that this would lead to the solving of the problems of the land to a wonderful extent. The gospel and truth of Christ and the grace of God would heal the country. A representative of each English county was chosen.

The Assembly sat for five and a half years, from 1643 to 1649, to draw up the Westminster Confessional Standards. The Assembly met four times a week, with over one thousand one hundred and sixty-three recorded sessions. One hundred and fifty-one

divines were called to meet. About twenty-five never attended. Those present worked at the confessional standards with prayer and fasting, the diligent study of God's Word, and Christian debate. They laboured, in the words of the historian J. Wylie, to build a "temple in which three nations might worship; to erect a citadel within which three kingdoms might entrust their independence and liberties."

The Assembly consisted of a few mild Episcopalians, five Independents, and the majority, about one hundred, Presbyterians. The Assembly drafted a Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and Form of Government and a Directory for Public Worship.

The Events that Followed the Meeting of the Westminster Assembly

The Westminster Standards were speedily adopted by the Scottish church and Parliament. The English Parliament did not adopt them because of the military power and influence over the Parliament of the Independents. One of their soldiers, Oliver Cromwell, became the military dictator of the three kingdoms. Sadly, because of this, the English church was never given the opportunity to adopt them, as was the church and Parliament in Scotland.

Oliver Cromwell, who supported the Independents, alienated the Scots, and in 1648, because of his military power, purged the Parliament of England of all 140 Presbyterians, leaving about 50 Independents. This "Rump Parliament" tried and executed Charles I, and set up a military dictatorship under Cromwell. It terminated the Presbyterian establishment in England, and while Presbyterians were allowed to worship, it granted special privileges to the Independents (Congregationalists and Baptists).

The kingdoms returned to a monarchy following the death of Oliver Cromwell, and, sadly, this brought a return of the royal extreme episcopal group, with their despotic claims, to power. The Solemn League and Covenant was abjured, and the govern-

ment tried to force Presbyterians and other Puritans to deny their faith in both England and Scotland.

After years of persecution of the Presbyterians in England, Scotland, and Ireland, the Lord finally brought King William and Queen Mary of the royal house of Orange in Holland to accept the thrones of Scotland and England. Queen Mary was a descendant of the royal house of Scotland and England, a Protestant daughter of James II. The Presbyterian churches of England, Ireland, and especially Scotland were able once more to serve the Lord according to the summary of His Word, the Bible, which they believed was most faithfully summarized in the Westminster Confessional Standards.

Some Principles of the Men of the Westminster Assembly

The men of the Westminster Assembly were unashamedly attached to the following grand principles:

1. They were greatly persuaded of the truth that Almighty God has revealed Himself and His will for both faith and life through the Mediator of the Covenant, Jesus Christ. This

is not mere dogma. It is life, and it is to be a hearty, warm, and personal belief that impacts upon all of our life. We are to have a "new heart" from the Lord; Christ Jesus is to be *our* King; we are to be bound to Him in His everlasting covenant, if we are to find true life in this world and the next.

2. They deeply believed that the visible and true church of the Lord Jesus had obligations to teach what *absolute* God had to say about civil rulers and civil life and its limits and duties, as well as about the church and its life and calling.

3. They held, in the light of God's Word, that liberty, justice, and prosperity for daily true life, natural and civil, not just spiritual, is had in Christ Jesus and His covenant, and belonged to the common people to enjoy and possess as much as to the aristocracy and scholars.

4. The Divines were very concerned to give a consolidated form and statement to one hundred and fifty years of biblical study, begun and rediscovered at the time of the Reformation. They prayerfully laboured to confess true biblical Christianity as a faith that uplifted Christ,

gave the Lord the glory due to His name, and was for our happiness and good.

The Work of the Westminster Assembly and our Church Today

The Westminster Confessional Standards, that fruit and labour of such godly and good men, are what the Evangelical Presbyterian Church unashamedly holds as its confessional standards in 1994. We continue to believe that these standards most consistently summarize the truth of God's Word. We have a godly and great heritage in these standards. We believe they are the ways for the glory of God and our good in both church and nation. May Christ Jesus, the King and Head of the church, guide us as a church in our day and age by His Word and Spirit into those truths of His Word that bring healing to individuals, families, and nations, and establish and keep His true church in our day and age faithful to Him and the faith of our fathers.

Let us thank God for the work of the Westminster Assembly that was called to meet on the 12th, June, 1643.

□

All Around Us

Prof. Robert Decker

■ The Reformed Church of Japan

The General Assembly of this denomination (9,000 members) is working on statements on evangelism and the doctrine of election. They hope to have these statements completed by their 50th anniversary in 1996. The RCJ is also working on contemporary supplements to its main confessional statement, the Westminster Confession.

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The Assembly also named a study committee to review a report on women in church office which had been adopted by the 1992 General Assembly. We have no idea what is stated in the 1992 document. We hope and pray that the RCJ will maintain the biblical teaching on this matter and not allow women to serve in church office.

The Assembly established formal ecclesiastical relations with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in North America. In another action the Assembly addressed a letter to the government in which they expressed opposition to a government plan to construct a Shinto monument for Japanese soldiers who died in World War II. Shintoism is a native Japanese

religion, which offered a rationale for earlier Japanese imperialism.

According to the Rev. Richard Sytsma, a missionary of the Christian Reformed Church in North America and a fraternal delegate to the RCJ assembly, the denomination has a vigorous home mission program and is working in five outlying areas in Japan or its territories.

REC News Exchange

■ A Significant Withdrawal

In January the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA) terminated their membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC). These churches suspended their membership in 1988, but postponed a final

decision until their synod of this year. This withdrawal of the South African churches is significant when one considers the fact that this denomination was one of the founding members of the REC (formerly called Reformed Ecumenical Synod). The other founding members of the REC are the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN) and the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC). Several smaller denominations have recently withdrawn from the REC, but this is the first of the larger, founding member churches to withdraw.

The reason given for the withdrawal was the membership of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the REC. The RCN, the South African churches charged, no longer shared the same fundamental beliefs. The RCSA also expressed their dissatisfaction with the REC's toleration of membership in both the REC and the World Council of Churches. The Dutch churches are members of the WCC.

The RCSA did not accept a proposal to unite with two black daughter denominations. They instead requested further conversations. The advisory committee of the synod remarked that deep-seated differences existed, and that forcing union would have serious consequences for the churches. The proposal for unity called for the three national synods to become one. The three national synods are presently defined by race and language. The synod decided that such a union was not essential to the nature of the church. This matter will be reviewed at the next synod which meets in three years.

The RCSA reported a stalemate in their relationship with the CRC. The CRC has suspended bi-lateral relations with the South African churches, and the latter said that they had made no progress in the discussions since 1991. The synod instructed its ecumenical delegates to seek new relationships with other denominations.

REC News Exchange

■ An Explanation is in Order

So it is with the merging churches in the Netherlands. The two Reformed denominations and the Lutheran who are involved in "together on the way," have produced a booklet called *Church Conversations*, which deals with issues that have surfaced during the union process. It covers three basic areas, namely, the confessions, birth membership, and the idea of the church of the fatherland. In the January issue of *Kerkinformatie*, B. Wallet, the secretary of the union process, outlined the basic ideas.

Wallet admitted that the Reformed confessions were a dead letter for many church members. For a minority they have remained the basic summaries of the faith and have current relevance. The booklet suggests that the members look at the church from the center. That is, they should recognize that through the preaching of the Word and celebration of the sacraments the church confesses salvation in Christ. From there members could recognize the dated character of the confessions, whether they fully agree or not. Furthermore, Wallet argues, the church says more in its praise and worship, in its prophetic witness, in its priestly prayer and diaconal deeds than ever can be put in words in a confession.

In the Netherlands Reformed Church (NRC) there is a category of members called birth members. These are people who have loosely associated with the church, but have never been baptized. The NRC created this category to make people eligible for the church's nursing homes. Wallet suggests that the nature of the church should be God's electing action through the Word and sacrament (Whatever this means?! RDD). Grace is the watchword of the church. When thinking from this center, Wallet says, one understands that the church is not a closed community. Wallet may write and say as he pleases, but the fact is that the church is closed to all who refuse to repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ!

The question of the church of the fatherland is one of history. History is the terrain where God works and makes His salvation real. There is a firm belief among some NRC members that the Reformation in the lowlands was a place where the hand of God was present. The church that arose there ought to be seen as something God planted.

As we commented previously, this union of the three Dutch churches does not bode well for the future of Reformed faith in the land of our fathers.

REC News Exchange

■ Noted American Cleric Dies

Norman Vincent Peale, a prolific writer and considered by many to be the patriarch of the twentieth-century self-help movement, died the day before Christmas at his farm north of New York City. Peale had suffered a stroke a few weeks earlier. He was 95 years old.

Ordained a Methodist, he transferred to the Reformed Church in America (RCA) when he became pastor of the Marble Collegiate Church in New York City. Peale served there from 1932 until he retired in 1984.

Dr. Peale is probably best known for his book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*. This book, published in 1952, remained on the best-seller list for more than three years.

Peale was a member of the RCA. But was he Reformed in his thinking? Hardly. His biographer, Carol V. R. George, wrote, "He knew that to talk about sin, suffering, and guilt was not going to produce the numbers he wanted." American religious historian, Randall Balmer, is quoted as saying, "His genius was in the simplicity of his message ... that message fit the tenor of the times in the middle decades of this century. It was a message of hope, optimism, and American middle-class values."

Would to God it had been the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ! □

Christianity Today

Chapter 3

The First Three Days of Creation (cont.)

God's Creation of the Light (Gen. 1:3-5)

By way of introduction, we call attention to the fact that in this passage of Genesis 1 we have what must be interpreted as an unmistakable sign that the creation-record is not of human origin, and that Moses did not write the creation-narrative except as he was infallibly inspired by the Creator of all things Himself. We find this indication in the fact that in the Genesis narrative light is presented as being created first. On the one hand, the ordinary man-of-the-street, who is unschooled in the intricacies of such studies as astronomy and physics and in all the ramifications and significance of the reality that is called light, certainly would not think of presenting the creation of light as the first work of God the Creator if he were to concoct a creation-story. He is surrounded by light on every hand, and the reality of light is so commonplace that he takes it for granted; but he would never have thought of making this God's first creation. He might probably place first in such a man-made account the creation of the heavenly luminaries—the sun, moon, and stars. But he certainly would not give first place to the creation of light, nor would he think of distinguishing between the creation of light and the creation of the heavenly luminaries.

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

The Bible, however, does so; and thereby it presents us with a distinguishing mark which sets it apart as the unique, divine record of a unique, divine work.

On the other hand, this same aspect of the creation-narrative ought to constitute a very striking testimony to the modern man of science. For it would appear that if anything is plain in the light of all the modern research into the nature and activity of light and into the nature of energy and into the interaction of light and physical matter, it is this, that, in the reality which is called light, man confronts one of the ultimate and insoluble mysteries of our universe, a reality that is basic to all existence and which can be studied, and whose behavior can be investigated and to a certain extent explained, but which can itself ultimately not be explained. Certainly, the man Moses in his time did not and could not possibly know all that men today have discovered concerning light. He certainly knew nothing about such things as the wave theory or the corpuscular theory of light; nor could he know anything about such an involved thing as the quantum theory. And yet in the Genesis record the creation of this light, which is so basic to the existence of the entire universe, is placed first.

There is but one explanation for this. That explanation is not to be found in the knowledge and investigation of Moses or of any other man, but in the knowledge and revelation and infallible inspiration of the Most High, who created all things at the beginning. This is one of the marvelous aspects of the Genesis record which ought not to be overlooked.

It behooves us, therefore, to assume an attitude of deep humility and to be silent as the Lord our God tells us concerning His work on the first day. For from Him, and from Him alone, do we receive the answer to the question concerning the origin of that mysterious reality called light.

When we face the question what God created on this first day, we may well begin with a confession of our ignorance with regard to the essence of light. We do not know what it is. A certain Dutch poet, having been blind, and his eyesight having been restored, exclaimed in wonderment: "Light! What is light? Heights of the heavens, depths of the seas, and thou, oh earth, answer me! What is light?" And so it is, indeed. We walk in the midst of this wonder, and pay little or no attention to it, so insensible have we become because of sin.

Nevertheless, we may say something about light, in order to see some-

In the reality which is called light, man confronts one of the ultimate and insoluble mysteries of our universe.

thing of its significance, and in order that we may be brought to contemplate and appreciate a little the wonder work which God accomplished in this creation.

Then we may say, in the first place, that physical light is of the very essence of the existence of all matter in the universe. That is evident from this very passage in Genesis and from many passages of Scripture which speak in one way or another of light. The chaos was dark, absolutely dark, and as such was utterly lifeless. The waste and void spoken of in Genesis 1:2 was without light: darkness was upon the face of the deep. And it was therefore without that life, that energy, which is essential to the existence and form of all things. There was no movement whatsoever in it, and there was no revelation in the darkness. There was no communication possible in it. It was simply dead. But by the brooding of the Spirit life and energy is engendered into that motionless chaos, and things begin to stir and to move. And the very first manifestation of that fact, that the Spirit brooded upon the waters and engendered life-energy into that dead chaos, is the light. That was the first expression of life and movement in the chaos. God said, "Let there be light." By the Word of God the reality called light is separated from the rest, thinned out into the invisible atmosphere; and its motion, or waving, or vibration, is so formed as to be light. Light is the very life-energy of the material universe.

In this connection, we must not overlook the fact that in the six days of creation we have in each case only one central expression of what God created on that day. Light means much more than only the light as we understand it in the everyday sense. Also the atmosphere, that which we sometimes call the "ether," must have been created on that day. And the movement that is caused in that "ether," that exceedingly rapid motion, is called light. But to this creation belongs much more. Light also implies heat. The two, as we know, are very closely related. The original chaos

must also have been cold, as well as dark—absolutely cold. The universe as it is now is full of heat. And there is no other proper place for the creation of this heat than on the first day. Together with the light, therefore, heat was created. That light and heat are also the condition of all other existence and of all life. Power and energy are implied in the light. Electricity is in the light. Fire is in the light. Magnetism belongs to the creation of the light. Radioactivity belongs to that same creation. All these related realities belong to the one category of the formation of physical light. Moreover, that light is the life also of the living creatures. Plants and animals and man cannot live without light and heat. All of these have light as the very condition of their life. Take it away, and they could not exist.

We must remember, too, that light is the means of communication. Light moves, we are told, with the unimaginable speed of 186,000 miles per second. It moves against various objects, and it moves back, is reflected from those objects. And when it reflects from those objects, it contains the picture of those objects in it. That picture is caught by the eye of animal and man, and reveals in picture form the object that is reflected by the light. Light, therefore, reveals. It is the means of communication between man and the world, between man and man, between God and the world, and between God and man. This is also suggested when Scripture here states specifically in connection with the first day that "God saw the light, that it was good." The idea is expressed here that in the light is the reflection of the world to God Himself, and that the light is the means of communication between God and the world, and, by implication, between God and man. The light that God created was good. It served the purpose whereunto God created it. God saw the light, that it was good. In this same connection, we must not forget that color and form and number and movement are all conditioned by the light.

Hence, light as the first creation

of God is the basic condition for the existence of every creature. If we consider this work of creation in its broadest scope, we can understand somewhat why it is God's first creative work. The sacred record informs us that light is created in antithesis to the darkness, that is, not to the absolute darkness that is mentioned in verse 2, but in antithesis to the darkness of the night. For we read that God divided the light from the darkness, and that God called the light Day and the darkness He called Night.

Darkness itself, in the absolute sense of the word, is nothing. And in that sense there was darkness before the light was created. God did not create the darkness: He is the Father of light. Absolute lifelessness, deadness, coldness, motionlessness, nothingness, is the darkness of the original chaos. But the text speaks here of the darkness of the night. This suggests that not all darkness was removed on the first day. The absolute darkness is no more. It is dispelled by the light. But the shadows are left; and our night is a shadow of turning. On the first day the light is so formed by the creative Word of God that it is divided from the darkness. God caused that division by His almighty, creative Word. The result is that already on the first day the light is so formed that it does not shine everywhere at once. The darkness of the night from the very first day forward alternates with the light of day. There are those who suggest that the light of the first day must have surrounded the entire unformed mass of the earthly creation at first, and that at the end of each day, in the evening, God removed that light, destroyed it, and brought about the night.

Now it may be granted that it is very difficult for us to form any conception at all of the earth in the midst of the original chaos, prior to the finishing of creation. But it is also extremely difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of it that God destroyed and recreated the light every time during the first three days, before the sun was created. This is an extremely

difficult conception both because it seems inconceivable that God would destroy a creature which He first made, and because that creature, light, included too many other things. On the basis of the fact, therefore, that the earth was already separated from the heavens in the very beginning, and on the basis of the fact that light is movement and that it is the condition of the existence of all matter, it may be suggested that already on the first day the light was placed by God in some central position and that the earth

rotated, and that in this way the alternation of day and night were created. For we must also remember that the division of the light from the darkness and the alternation of the Day and the Night is the work of God's creative Word. We read specifically in the text: "And God called to the light Day, and to the darkness He called Night." These expressions suggest, therefore, that God separated the light from the darkness on the very first day, and that He left it so, and that He created day and night in

their alternation from the very first. Thus we have the night and the darkness as a shadow—not as the original darkness, but as a shadow left to remind us of that darkness. God created the antithesis. The night is the antithesis of the day; and the darkness is the antithesis of the light. God lets part of the darkness remain, in order to show the beauty of the light, and He reveals Himself antithetically also in nature. The light always shines in the darkness. □

Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass

Prof. David Engelsma

3. The Great Apostasy

Another sign of the end of the world is apostasy. "Apostasy" means departure. You find this mentioned as a sign of the end in II Thessalonians 2:3, where, in the original Greek language, the word "apostasy" is used: "that day (i.e., the day of Christ, the day of Christ's second coming—DJE) shall not come, except there come a *falling away* first." Literally, the words "falling away" are the word "apostasy," so that the apostle says that the coming again of Christ will be preceded by an apostasy.

Apostasy is something that takes place within the churches. People who once knew and confessed the truth depart from the truth; those who once were close to Christ fall away from Christ.

Jesus foretold this apostasy in Matthew 24 in answer to His disciples' question: "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Although the word "apostasy" does not occur, this is what the Lord spoke of in verses 11-13:

And many false prophets shall rise and shall deceive many. And be-

cause iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Verse 24 also speaks of this:

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

The cause of apostasy, according to Jesus, will be false prophets. Many false prophets will deceive many people, so that they fall away from the truth. The seriousness of being deceived and falling away is indicated when Jesus says, "But he that shall endure unto the end... shall be saved." The implication is that those who are deceived will not be saved. False prophets, therefore, pose a threat to the church, to us and our children. It was the purpose of Jesus in forewarning us of the false prophets to put us on guard against these clever, destructive emissaries of the devil. To shake us into watchfulness, Jesus spoke the astounding words of verse

24: "If it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Therefore, the question is an urgent one: who and what are these false prophets, and what is the nature of their work?

We can answer the question, "What is a false prophet?" only by first asking and answering another question, "What is a true prophet?" A prophet is a man sent by God to speak God's Word on God's behalf. Two things about a prophet stand out: God sends him, and he speaks the Word of God. The importance of the work of the prophet is that God uses it to save His people. For the prophet brings the Word of God, and the content of that Word is God's love and grace in His Son, Jesus Christ, unto the salvation of everyone that believes. Through that Word of the prophet, God brings the elect to faith in Jesus Christ, by which faith we are saved. God saves men by the truth! God saves men by the preaching of the truth! Romans 10:13-15 teaches this: whoever calls on God shall be saved, but no one can call on God unless he believes in God, and no one can believe unless he has heard God,

but no one can hear without a preacher, or prophet.

The Chief Prophet and Teacher is Jesus Christ Himself. He is God's great Servant sent into the world fully to reveal to us God's counsel concerning our redemption. He is the One who in all ages reveals the truth in the hearts and minds of God's people. It is Christ Jesus who today gives the church pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11), and it is He who speaks in their preaching, so that God's elect hear Jesus Christ and are taught by Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:21).

In this light, we can understand what false prophets are. They are preachers and teachers who claim to be sent by God, but are not. They are false as regards their origin and credentials. Outwardly, they appear pious and religious. For this reason, Paul in II Corinthians 11:13, 15 refers to them as those "transforming themselves into apostles of Christ" and "ministers of light" (v. 14). In Matthew 7:15, Jesus noted their deceptive, false appearance when He called them wolves in sheep's clothing. The fact is that they are sent out by the devil, and, therefore, Paul calls them Satan's ministers in II Corinthians 11:15.

These prophets and preachers are also false as regards their message, or word. It is not the truth, but the lie, although they herald it as the gospel. They claim to teach the truth. They come with their Bibles in hand and spout texts left and right. But they corrupt and adulterate the truth, and they pervert the gospel.

Thus, the false prophets deceive many. Many are fooled by their appearance and message. The wolf is welcomed into the fold as a sheep, and there he promptly devours men's souls.

The presence of false prophets is no new thing at the end of the ages. False prophets plagued the church throughout the Old Testament times.

Think of their opposition to Jeremiah. They were in large part responsible for the spiritual decline of Judah that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and in the Babylonian captivity. False prophets arose within the New Testament church soon after the apostolic times and deceived many. In fact, the apostles themselves had to oppose the Gnostics, who denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, as I John shows. Then the Arians appeared who denied that Jesus is God. There was also the false prophet Pelagius, who denied that man is by nature totally depraved and who taught that man's salvation depended upon man himself. There has been continuous succession of false prophets in the world, working in the sphere of the church, from the time that the father of lies himself, that ancient deceiver, the devil, contradicted God's Word in the Garden of Eden. But they increase as the end draws near. At the end, says Christ, the false prophets will be multitude, and they will deceive many. Culminating in the false prophet of Antichrist, they will deceive the whole world, except those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 13).

The attitude of Jesus and of all Scripture toward the false prophet is quite different from the religious toleration so warmly praised today in the churches. Scripture calls them wolves, seducers, evil men,

antichrists, and heretics. This must be the attitude of us who are Jesus' disciples, even though it gains us the reproach of being unjustly called fanatics and bigots. For only then will we beware of false prophets and only then will we keep them out of our congregation and churches. Tolerance of the false prophet is surrender to him. Even such a thing

as the practice of our time to speak of "liberals" and "conservatives" in the church is an unbiblical, dangerous thing. It soon leads people to suppose

that liberals and conservatives are equally Christian and equally have a place in the congregation. The Bible knows nothing of "liberals" and "conservatives" — politics, maybe, but not Scripture. Scripture knows only of faithful pastors who bring the Word and faithful saints who receive and confess the Word — who belong in the church — and heretics who corrupt the Scriptures and those whom they deceive — who have no place in the church and must be cut off.

There is good reason for Jesus' condemnation of the false prophet. First, the false prophet denies the truth which glorifies God. Secondly, he denies Jesus Christ, who is the truth. And, thirdly, the false prophet leads man away from salvation to damnation. Nothing less than this is his work. Matthew 24 implies this when in verse 13 it states that only those who endure, only those who are not taken in by the false prophets, shall be saved. The false prophet causes many to fall away!

Since the meaning of apostasy is that people who once professed Christ do so no longer, that many who once manifested themselves as good members of the church forsake her, and that many who once confessed the truth depart from the truth, the question arises: can believers fall away?

This is impossible. No saint, chosen by God from eternity, born again by the Spirit and believing in Christ with a true faith, can be deceived, fall away, and perish in hell. The very words of Christ in verse 24 that are a strong warning to us concerning false prophets prove that the saints cannot apostatize. Christ says, "If it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." The plain implication is: It is not possible, and, therefore, they shall not deceive the elect. As Jesus taught in John 10, none that the Father gave to Jesus as His sheep shall perish. This is necessary comfort for us who believe, as we see the number and subtlety of false prophets and as we look forward to an increase in the future. They will not deceive us, nor will we fall away. But this comfort is no ground for carelessness. God keeps

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us and our children in the way of giving us this warning about false prophets and in the way of our heeding this warning by rejecting the false prophets and their messages.

If the apostasy before the end does not mean the falling away of the saints, what does it mean? How does the falling away actually take place? First, the deceiving of many, and their falling away into perdition, happens over a period of time in the course of several generations. At a certain time, a church becomes contemptuous of the truth or accepts false doctrine. From that time on, the deception increases and the departure from the truth becomes greater and greater. The inevitable result is that the deception becomes total: The Word of God disappears altogether; the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of those originally guilty of heeding false prophets are unbelieving and go lost. This is one way in which Jesus' words, "Many shall be deceived," are fulfilled. There is deception on a gigantic scale. It is not that individuals here and there are deceived, but entire denominations of churches fall away.

A second way in which apostasy occurs is the departure of individuals who for a time, and maybe even for a long time, were members of the church, confessed the truth, seemed to love Christ Jesus, and showed themselves as believers. Under the influence of some strange wind of doctrine or the allure of the riches and pleasures of the world, they fall away. They leave the church; they love Christ no more; they deny and despise the truth. Invariably, they take their families to destruction with them, not only their wife and children, but also their grandchildren. Now, they never were true believers. They were the reprobate seed that the devil is always sowing in Jesus' wheatfield. The apostle John had his eye on them when he wrote in I John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." The trouble with them is that they are careless about the truth.

They often remain rather ignorant of it. Above all, they do not love the truth. So, they can forsake it.

Men's lack of heartfelt love for the truth of God's Word is the reason why God punishes them by giving them over to deception, so that they fall away. For apostasy is not only the devil's work. It is also a judgment of God on men. This is Paul's teaching in II Thessalonians 2:10-12. God sends many people a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, so that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. The reason for this terrible, but just, judgment is: "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." God cannot stand contempt for the truth of His Word.

It is important that Jesus' disciples, the church, know that apostasy is a sign of the end of the world. For one thing, we do not expect that the church is going to grow tremendously in numbers and that almost the entire world will be converted to Christ. This is not Scripture; this is not Matthew 24. Not only do many never join the church, but there are many who are deceived and whose love waxes cold. Not only does the church not grow numerically, but there are many who fall away. We preach and teach diligently, both to the saints within and the unbelievers without, and we leave the outcome in God's hands; but in the light of the Scriptures, we look for the church to become smaller and smaller. We do not despair when we see the apostasy taking place, even though we grieve.

As a sign of the end, apostasy speaks to us of the certainty and the nearness of the end of the world. Apostasy prepares the way for Antichrist. Antichrist will persecute the church. Then, Christ will come on the clouds. And the time of the great falling away is now! It is impossible

to miss this sign today. A huge part of that which has the name of the Christian church remains enslaved to the lie of salvation by works from which the Holy Spirit delivered us through the Reformation and its gospel of justification by faith in Christ alone. The cults grow with all the astounding speed of a cancer, and their growth is from the body of the Christian churches, i.e., by way of the apostasy of many. And what dirge can lament

the pitiful condition of the Protestant churches today? There is forsaking of the truth of the infallible inspiration of Holy Scripture; of the truth of the Deity of Jesus Christ; of the truth of atonement in the blood of the cross; of the truth of salvation by grace alone, and not by man's works or free-will. As they leave the truth, they also forsake holiness of

life, permitting the violation of all of God's commandments. And all of this must pass as Christianity. To such an extent are men deceived.

Does Christ give you eyes to see this sign? Then, look for the coming of Christ, which is near. And be spiritually awake, sober and watchful. This was Jesus' purpose when He told His disciples of the coming of false prophets and their deception of many. This comes out in the words of verse 13: "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Endurance is required of us. The false prophets tempt us. Effort is made to deceive us. Only those who endure shall be saved. We must endure.

How?

By knowing and loving the truth! Know and love the gospel of the Scriptures! Hear it in the preaching every Sunday. See that your children hear it in catechism, every week. Study the Bible with other saints who love the truth, and read it daily yourself.

This is the Spirit's way of preserving you to the end, that you may be saved. □

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Recent Developments in Church State Law

■ Abortion Protestors Suffer Legal Setback

We therefore maintain that the [abortion rights advocates] may maintain this lawsuit if the [protestors] conducted their enterprise through a pattern of racketeering activity. We hold that RICO contains no economic motive requirement.

U.S. Supreme Court,
National Organization for Women (NOW) v. Schiedler, et. al. (1994)

The U.S. Supreme Court held in January that abortion rights advocates may use a federal racketeering law to sue abortion protest groups that organize confrontations at abortion clinics across the nation. The case pitted the National Organization for Women (NOW) against a coalition of anti-abortion groups called the Pro-Life Action Network (PLAN), including Randall Terry's Operation Rescue (OR).

NOW leaders hailed the ruling as a stunning victory against PLAN's "nationwide campaign of terror" against abortion clinic employees. Randall Terry denounced the decision as a "vulgar betrayal of over 200 years of tolerance towards protest and civil disobedience."

NOW had brought a civil suit in Chicago against PLAN for an injunction and damages under the Rack-

eteer Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) chapter of the federal Organized Crime Control Act. NOW alleged the abortion protestors fell within the scope of this anti-racketeering law because the protestors were allegedly members of a nationwide conspiracy characterized by a pattern of racketeering activity. This activity allegedly included threats of actual force and violence to induce clinic doctors and employees to give up their economic right to practice their profession.

The lower federal courts ruled in favor of PLAN and OR, holding that a RICO suit required the defendants' enterprise to be directed toward some profit-making or economic goal. But NOW, aided by briefs filed by the Clinton administration, took the case up to the U.S. Supreme Court, arguing that RICO suits did not require proof of a profit-making goal by the defendant enterprise.

The Supreme Court agreed (see headline quote above) and accordingly NOW was permitted to proceed with its suit against PLAN and OR in Chicago. Of course, NOW will still have the burden of proving "a pattern of racketeering activity," but proof of an "economic motive" will no longer be necessary in RICO suits.

Many constitutional scholars are concerned about this seemingly expansive application of RICO which was originally intended to target the Mafia and other organized crime figures. And since RICO contains a triple-damage provision, PLAN and OR are now exposed to potentially

devastating judgments which could bankrupt these organizations.

There is some indication that the Court this summer may clarify its views on the freedom of speech rights of peaceful abortion protestors. Meanwhile PLAN and OR will be forced to defend these RICO lawsuits in the future.

■ Church-State Test to be Reviewed

Constitutional scholars are eagerly awaiting the U.S. Supreme Court's decision this summer in the case called *Board of Education v. Grumet*. This case has attracted nationwide attention because it involves the most hotly debated issue in church-state law — the use of public funds for the education of children in a religious setting.

The suit involves the village of Kiryas Joel, located 40 miles north of New York City. The small community is highly populated by Satmar Hasidim, a strict Jewish sect that educates their children in private schools, segregating the boys from the girls and speaking Yiddish more than English. These schools, however, do not have resources for special education programs for disabled children.

The Hasidic parents historically sent their disabled children to a nearby public school system, but complained that these children were "traumatized" by attending schools outside their community. The public school officials, however, refused to accede

Mr. Lanting, a member of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, is a practicing attorney.

to their request to set up a special school at a site in the Hasidic village. In an attempt to resolve the standoff, the New York legislature created a special public school district (consisting of one small building) to provide special education exclusively for the disabled Hasidic children.

But in 1990, some officers for a state public schoolboard association brought suit, contending the special school district for 200 Hasidic disabled children violated the non-establishment clause of the First Amendment. The New York courts all held the school was unconstitutional, stating that it had the "primary effect" of advancing religion since it acceded to "the demands of a religious community whose separatist tenets create a tension between the needs of its handicapped children and the need to adhere to certain religious practices."

But the Hasidic school officials plan to argue to the Supreme Court that their special education school "has, at most, the affect of accommodating the needs of a community of devoutly religious people." They also will argue, strangely enough, that the educational program at the challenged school is secular and non-religious, and that none of the teachers are Hasidic Jews.

For the last 20 years, the Court has looked to the *Lemon* test (from the 1971 decision in the case of *Lemon v. Kurtzman*) to resolve Establishment Clause ("Congress shall pass no laws respecting an establishment of religion....") cases. Under the *Lemon* test, government action passes constitutional muster only if it has (1) a sectarian purpose, (2) a primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits religion; and (3) does not foster excessive government entanglement with religion.

Many of the justices have indicated they may be anxious to jettison the *Lemon* test in favor of a new "coercion" test or a "government endorsement" standard. If so, this school case could be a landmark decision in this controversial area of church-state law where even the Supreme Court justices are often bitterly at odds.

This case also bears watching because a possible re-tooling of Establishment Clause jurisprudence could have profound impact on the constitutionality of parental tuition vouchers proposals that are currently being considered by a number of state legislatures.

■ Clergy Convicted for Failure to Report Child Abuse

A California appellate court recently upheld the criminal convictions of a senior pastor and an associate pastor who were convicted by a jury for failing to report a case of child molestation to state agency authorities. All states now have such child abuse reporting laws. Many of these laws require even ministers to report instances of child abuse to state child protective agencies.

In this case, the senior pastor was the president, and the associate pastor the principal, of a private school operated by the church. The church and the school shared buildings and facilities. A 17-year-old high school senior was referred to the senior pastor after she reported to her teacher that she was being molested by her stepfather. After the pastor confronted him with the allegations, the stepfather confessed. The senior pastor later presented the girl with a letter of apology from her stepfather and told her that he had been sent to a "retreat" for counseling. The stepfather was also required to confess his sin in front of the entire congregation.

The pastor then urged the girl to return home with her parents. The girl reluctantly did so, but soon after graduation ran away from home and reported the incidents to local law enforcement. The state authorities not only prosecuted the stepfather—they filed a criminal suit against the pastors for failing to report the case to a state agency. California law provides that "any child care custodian ... shall report a known or suspected instance of child abuse to a child protective agency immediately...."

The pastors appealed their convictions, arguing that the law violated the First Amendment guarantee of religious freedom to "handle problems within the church" using biblical principles of discipline. They also argued that application of the child abuse reporting law to pastors constituted forbidden excessive state entanglement with religion.

The California court disagreed. Upholding the pastors' conviction, the court held: "The state may justify an inroad on religious liberty by showing it is the least restrictive means of achieving some compelling state interest. There is no indication teachers and administrators of religious schools would voluntarily report known or suspected child abuse. The protection of all children cannot be achieved in any other way."

Accordingly, it is becoming increasingly clear that whenever a minister (or school teacher, for that matter) is aware of or suspects child abuse (defined as physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect of a child under 18 inflicted by a parent or guardian), he should consult with a local attorney to determine whether state law requires him to report the abuse to local authorities, regardless of whether church discipline has been initiated. □



March 2, 1994
Hope Protestant Reformed Church
Redlands, California

Classis West held its regular March session in the warmth of southern California. The warmth was that of the weather, but especially it was that of the fellowship of the saints of the congregation located so far away from any of its sister-congregations.

An Officebearers' Conference was held the day preceding the meeting of Classis. This gave the members of that congregation who were able to do so an opportunity to have more fellowship with the brethren of the Classis. The theme of the Conference was "The Reformed Practice of Catechism Instruction for the Youth." A volunteer committee of two ministers chose this excellent topic and arranged the day into four periods. The keynote address was given by Rev. Richard Moore, who spoke on "Our Calling to Faithfulness in Catechism Instruction." This was followed by two sectionals. A choice had to be made between "Elders Teaching Catechism" by Elder Ed Gritters (a member of Hope, Redlands) and "Teaching Church History in Catechism" by Rev. Arie denHartog. After a delicious lunch Rev. Steve Key spoke on "The History of Catechism Teaching in Reformed Church History," which was followed by discussion. Rev. Ronald VanOverloop introduced the subject "Practical Applications in Catechism Instruction," which was followed again by some lively discussion. Once more it was the experience of all who attended that these Conferences not only are times for rich fellowship, but also give opportunity to exchange ideas. Our prayer was that the result of the Conference would be that the covenant youth receive the most benefit, through the renewed zeal with which each pastor and elder returned to the catechism room.

Classis met the following day. Rev. Wayne Bekkering began the session with a devotional based on II Corinthians 4:6, 7. He showed the emphasis of the text to be the fact that officebearers are servants of the Lord, which position is the source both of proper humility and great encouragement. Rev. Arie denHartog then took the chair.

The agenda of Classis was short. There were regular reports from the Classical Committee, the Stated Clerk, and the Reading Sermon Committee. At the March meeting, the Church Visitors annually give their report. It was a great encouragement to hear their report, as they related their joy at finding love, peace, and unity in the churches. They heard the officebearers testify of each other's zeal and dedication. In order to lend variety to their visits, the Church Visitors annually discuss a particular theme. The theme of "Officebearers as Examples to the Flock" worked out very well. Usually the idea of being an example is frightening to every officebearer. However, the best example officebearers can give is not one of perfection but one of admitting their faults and trusting in the Lord. While no officebearer can be perfect, by God's grace each can attain to confession and childlike faith. While perfection was not found by the Church Visitors, they reported being greatly encouraged by many evidences of God's gracious blessing.

The consistory of the Doon, IA congregation was given the responsibility by the September, 1993 Classis to exercise care and supervision of the saints in Isabel, SD. After the tiny congregation in Isabel lost all but one of its officebearers, Classis, in September, 1993, advised the saints there to hold a meeting to vote to disband. This was grounded in the fact that

they could not select a diversified consistory from the members remaining, that there was little organic life because the total membership was ten souls, that there was little prospect for internal growth, that church extension work had failed, and that it would be for their spiritual good that they move to another congregation, even though such a move might be difficult. At this meeting of Classis, Doon reported that the majority of the male confessing members did not wish to vote to disband. In September Classis had told the saints in Isabel that if the advice to disband was "not followed they would by that fact be setting themselves outside the federation of the Protestant Reformed Churches." After noting this fact, Classis adopted a letter to the saints expressing grief that their advice had not been followed. In the letter Classis expressed its earnest desire that they "as God's people, may experience God's blessing in a well-rounded congregational life under the oversight of the officebearers of God's church."

In other business Classis received a letter of thanks from Trinity, Houston for the financial assistance they received for moving their pastor from Singapore. A request from Trinity for additional subsidy for 1994 to cover medical insurance for their pastor and his family was passed on to Synod with approval.

Subsidy requests for 1995 were received from Bethel (\$21,300), Edgerton (\$12,000), First, Edmonton (\$32,252), Immanuel, Lacombe, Alberta (\$16,677), Pella (\$22,500), and Trinity, Houston (\$34,000). These requests were examined, and forwarded to synod with the approval of Classis.

Loveland's request for classical appointments was granted as follows: VanOverloop — April 24 and May 1;

Houck—May 22 and 29; Dick—June 19 and 26; Lanting—July 17 and 24; Dykstra—August 14 and 21; Moore—September 11 and 18.

Voting for synodical delegates resulted in the following: **Ministers:** *Primi:* R. Dykstra, C. Haak, R. Moore, C. Terpstra, R. VanOverloop; *Secundi:* W. Bekkering, A. den Hartog, M. DeVries, S. Houck, T. Miersma. **Elders:** *Primi:* Allen Brummel (Edgerton), John Feenstra (Hope, Redlands), Henry Hoekstra (Hull), Ron Koole (Loveland), Henry

VanderMeulen (Lynden); *Secundi:* Ray Ezinga, John Hoksbergen, Jack Lenting, Eric Ophoff, Bert Worries, Jr.

Rev. R. Dykstra was elected to serve a three-year term on the Classical Committee. Rev. S. Houck was elected to serve a three-year *primus* term as Synodical Deputy and Rev. C. Terpstra to a three-year *secundus* term. Rev. G. Lanting and Rev. R. VanOverloop were elected to be church visitors, with Rev. C. Bekkering as alternate.

The meeting may have been shorter than usual and the business concerning Isabel sad, but the fellowship experienced was rich. It is a great encouragement for difficult labors when you know that that brother in every sense of the word is toiling beside you.

The next meeting of Classis will be in Hull, Iowa on September 7, 1994.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Ronald VanOverloop
Stated Clerk

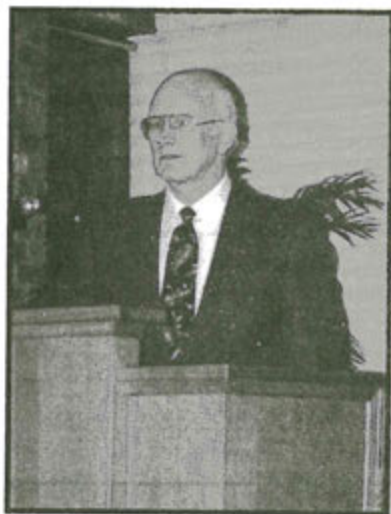
News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregational Activities

What better place for us to begin this installment of the "News" than with a report of the organizational meeting of our churches' 26th congregation—the congregation of our Georgetown PRC, presently meeting in Bauer, MI. Organization took place on the evening of March 2 in the auditorium of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, the church chosen by Classis East to oversee this organization.

Rev. G. VanBaren, Hudsonville's pastor, chose for his text that evening



Rev. Gise VanBaren

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

the passage found in Isaiah 43:21, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." And he entitled his sermon, based on that text, "A People Formed for Himself." The underlying theme in that message was that this newly organized church, like the church of all ages, is formed by God to show His praise. It is a church formed solely for that purpose. After this brief message, the actual organization took place. The charter members of Georgetown PRC consisted of 28 families and one individual from the Hudsonville, MI PRC, two families each from Grandville and Faith, one from Southeast, and finally one newly



Signing Formula of Subscription



Georgetown's newly elected officebearers



Fellowship time

married couple from the Third Christian Reformed Church in Zeeland, MI, and the Calvin CRC of Holland, MI — for a total membership of 145 souls.

The meeting continued with the election of three elders and two deacons, their signing the Formula of Subscription, and their installation into office. The evening concluded with a closing doxology and benediction, followed by refreshments in Hudsonville's Fellowship Hall.

What a blessing to have an opportunity to exchange greetings with friends and families gathered to witness this historical event.

For your information, we also include here the name, address, and phone number of Georgetown's bulletin secretary. She is Tammy Bouma, 5486 36th Street, Hudsonville, MI 49426, (616)-669-2262.

When one of our congregations in Classis West volunteers to host a meeting of Classis, they make the most of that opportunity. The congregation of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA hosted last month's Classis meeting, but they sandwiched that event between other activities. Because some ministers in the Classis had to be in Redlands over a weekend, Hope invited three different ministers to preach for them. On Sunday, February 27, Rev. R. Moore, from our church in Hull, IA and Rev. M. DeVries from our church in Edgerton, MN preached for them. The next Sunday Rev. R. Dykstra, from Doon, IA preached

both services. While in Redlands Rev. Dykstra also gave a slide presentation of his recent trip to Ghana on behalf of our Foreign Mission Committee. And on Thursday, the day after Classis, Rev. Dykstra was the guest speaker at a special Hope Christian School chapel.

On the day before Classis met, Redlands Church also hosted an officebearers conference on the subject "Catechism Teaching." They also planned an evening of different sporting activities and fellowship at their church and school.

In an attempt to make the catechism collection a more significant part of the catechism classes, the consistory of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI decided to designate the collections for a worthwhile cause. So, for the rest of this year's catechism season, these collections at Faith will be for Faith Christian School in Randolph, WI.

The Council of the Byron Center, MI PRC has once again made Bible reading schedules available to their congregation. These schedules were intended to encourage Byron's members systematically to read through the whole of the Scriptures, and to promote the private reading of the Scriptures.

Evangelism Activities

In late January there was an organizational meeting of a Church Extension Committee of our Loveland, CO PRC.

At their January meeting, the Council of the South Holland, IL PRC received a request from a Bible study group in Florence, Kentucky to have a visit from their pastor and another council member in order to preach for them and investigate the possibility of a Reformed work in that area. South Holland's Evangelism Committee has had contact with one of the men from this Bible study group for over two years, and this man, along with another, also visited South Holland's services in August of '92. The Council decided to send their pastor and a council member sometime in the spring of this year.

Young People's Activities

In early February, the Young People's Societies in the West Michigan area were invited to attend a Mass Meeting held at the Hope PRC in Walker, MI. Rev. J. Slopesma, Hope's pastor, spoke on the theme, "The Problem of Sexual Immorality."

The Young People's Federation Board just recently completed their annual apple pie fund-raiser. Members from each society in the Grand Rapids, MI area were asked to call members of their church to obtain orders. The young people got together on Saturday, March 5, at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI, to make pies to fill those orders. Between 7:30 a.m. and noon, these young people turned out 1,300 apple pies. After expenses were met, the profits were designated for this year's convention in Lynden, WA, the first week in August.

Minister Activities

Rev. G. VanBaren, presently pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, has received the call to serve as Loveland, CO PRC's next pastor. □

Food For Thought

If you believe what you like in the gospel, and reject what you like, it is not the gospel you believe but yourself.

Augustine

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

The Lord willing, on March 25, 1994, our parents and grandparents, **ARIE and ANN GRIFFIOEN**, celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. We give thanks to our heavenly Father for giving us God-fearing parents. It is our prayer that God will continue to bless them and keep them in His care for the years to come.

"For the Lord is good: his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- * Kurt and Debra Griffioen
Roger, Gerald
- * Douglas and June Griffioen
Jeffrey, Emily, Steven, Todd,
Esther, Betsy, Lucy
- * David and Phyllis Griffioen
Jennie, Jill, Joy
- * Robert and Kristi Buitert
Thomas, Michael

Jenison, Michigan

Mass Choir Concerts

(over 170 voices)
of the Protestant Reformed
Churches

Sunday, April 24

9:00 P.M.
Sunshine Ministries
3300 E. Beltline, Grand Rapids

Saturday, April 30

7:30 P.M.
Dimnent Chapel
Hope College Campus, Holland

... for His name alone is excellent!
Psalm 148:13

TEACHER NEEDED!!

Covenant Christian High School is seeking applicants for a part-time Special Education teacher. Applicants for this position are asked to call Agatha Lubbers, Administrator (616) 453-5048, or write the school at:

1401 Ferndale S.W.
Grand Rapids, MI 49504.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 24, 1994

MR. and MRS. JOE VAN KAMPEN celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them and thank God for the years they have shared together. May God continue to keep them in His tender care and richly bless them.

"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Numbers 6:24-26).

- * Dan and Mary VanKampen
Michael, Andrew
- * Bruce and Cheryl Jabaay
Julie, Richard, Brian, Lisa
- * Larry and Pat Dutmer
Jodie, Betsy, Ross
- * Steve and Cindy VanKampen
- * Joe and Deb VanKampen
Laura, Kane
- * Mark and Cindy Ophoff
David, Kristin, Bradley

Holland, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The faculty, staff, and student body of the Protestant Reformed Seminary extend their deepest sympathy to Seminarian David and Mrs. Higgs and children in the sudden death of Mrs. Higgs mother,

MRS. GREATBATCH.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Prof. Robert D. Decker,
Rector

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 11, 1994 in the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan, at 9 A.M. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk by April 11, 1994.

Jon J. Huisken,
Stated Clerk

REMEMBER:

Introductory
subscriptions
to the
Standard Bearer
are still
half-price
(\$6.00 domestic,
\$7.50 foreign).

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a favor!