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Magazine**



**Third Biennial Conference of the British Reformed Fellowship
in Galashiels, Selkirkshire, Scotland**

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In This Issue ...

Mr. Bill Oomkes reports on the third conference in the British Isles sponsored by the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF). The first was held in Wales, the second, in Northern Ireland, and this one, in Scotland.

There has been steady growth from some 50 at the first to the approximately 120 who attended the latest conference.

The Protestant Reformed Churches support these conferences. They send the speakers at the request of the BRF. They also maintain the mission in Northern Ireland whose missionary (Rev. Ron Hanko) and mission-group (Covenant Reformed Fellowship) have a vital place in the counsels and activities of the BRF.

Significant contacts were made at the conference near Edinburgh this summer. There was the Anglican clergyman who has left the Anglican Church with his congregation on the occasion of that church's approving the ordination of women. There was the preacher from East Germany who labors to bring the Word to the disillusioned and despairing young people in his own and surrounding countries (and who lamented bitterly the divisive, destructive influences of the charismatics from the United States now swarming in that part of the world). There was the young Chinese pastor of a Presbyterian church and his family. There were the Presbyterian seminarians who are determined to preach and defend the gospel of grace. There were the many men and women who received the doctrines of sovereign grace gladly.

This was encouraging, if not exhilarating.

There was also a burden, a heavy burden: the lack, widely, in the United Kingdom of the instituted church that confesses the Reformed faith and practices Presbyterian church government. Many groan under this burden. How they desire the church.

God hear and help them!

—DJE

Making Our Calling and Election Sure

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.

II Peter 1:10

What we are here commanded to do is that which by God's grace we can do, because of what He does. We are not here commanded to make our calling and election sure in God's mind and will. In fact, the word here translated as "sure" means sure in the sense of firm and steadfast. We are not called here to make our calling and election firm and steadfast in God's mind and will, but in our own hearts and minds. Since our God is Jehovah, who is the I AM, our calling and election are firm and everlastingly steadfast in His mind and will. But because we very often behave as those who do not heed God's command to us, we need to be called day-by-day to make our calling and election sure, that is, firm and steadfast in our hearts and minds. For we walk so often as those whom He has not called as His elect.

Let us bear in mind that Peter, who wrote this command, had quite an experience in his own life before he wrote this epistle. Of that experience we read in Matthew 26:57-74. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, was brought before Caiaphas, the high priest, so that the unbelieving Jews could have Him crucified. In this passage we read what Peter experienced that day. He had followed those unbelieving Jews and was where Christ was being charged as worthy of death. There

Peter was confronted by women who said, "Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee." And rather than to reveal his calling and election, Peter swore, saying, "I know not the man." In so doing, Peter was by no means making his calling and election firm and steadfast. But in His grace God made him give diligence to make his calling and election sure. For Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him, namely, that he would deny Him. And he went out, weeping bitterly. He, with heart and mind, went back to his calling and election.

We do well, therefore, to hold on tightly to the truth that our constant calling, every day and everywhere, is to make our calling and election firm and steadfast in our spiritual hearts and minds. Just look up what our God says to us through David in Psalm 139:14. There we read this awesome truth: "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." We sing that truth, as we find it correctly and beautifully expressed in the *Psalter*, number 383, the first stanza, where we read this comforting truth:

All that I am I owe to Thee;
Thy wisdom, Lord, hath fashioned me;
I give my Maker thankful praise,
Whose wondrous works my soul amaze.

Let it then be borne in mind that the Almighty God gives us every bit of our salvation, as a free gift, including the desire for it. He calls us because He, before the foundation of the world, elected us in His Son to be His covenant seed. And in time He

Himself fulfills all that is necessary to realize that salvation in us. In fact, the very day that the human race, represented by Adam and Eve, turned away from God, and in hatred went against Him, God came and promised His elect people that He would bring them back to a spiritual life that would manifest love of Him and unto Him.

Now believing parents do not and cannot give their children the desire and ability to walk in love toward God, and serve Him with heart and mind and soul and strength. No matter how much they desire to do so, not one parent is able to implant that love of God in his children. As we sing it in that song presented a moment ago, we owe God thanks for every bit of our salvation which He gave us, and will give to our children.

Parents cannot give their children spiritual life, or make them thankful for the salvation which God began in them. Parents can teach their children to thank God for the salvation which He began in them. But every elect, born-again child of God, from the oldest to the youngest depends upon God for love of God, and strength, as well as desire, to praise and thank God for the salvation which He began in them.

As God Himself said it to Satan, the day he caused Adam and Eve to die spiritually, *He* will put enmity between Satan and His own elect. He did not say to Satan that He would ask Adam and Eve to have enmity against Satan. He promised to do so Himself; and we must always look at salvation in every child of God as His gift and due to His work. We must, therefore, sing that blessed truth, "All that I am I owe to Thee." What God

declares, and we find in Genesis 3:15, begins all of God's testimony to His elect about the salvation He planned and promises to realize in every detail of that salvation. Promising enmity of Satan He promises His love coming in His elect. What is more, we have in John 6:44 the awesome truth which we must accept and not throw away. There we find God saying that, "No man can come unto me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him."

We should hold on tightly to that truth. For we live in a world wherein the Arminian lie is that God offers us salvation, and will give it to us if we first have the desire for it. But that we desire it is possible only after God has already begun it in us. We do not ever receive any part of salvation until God has already given us a new spiritual life that salvation brings us. One who calls a dead person to do something will find that the person does not even desire to do it. "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

We do well then to take hold of this command that we make our calling and election sure, that is, firm and steadfast in our hearts and minds. We should do so in light of what Peter wrote in preceding verses. For in verse one of this first chapter he calls us to be people "that have obtained like precious faith." And this, because "divine power hath given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness."

This stands clearly and significantly against the false doctrine which is in the church-world today. There is so much claim that God "invited us" to become those whom God will save. God's call then is presented as a request rather than a divine command. God pleads with us to make our calling and election firm and everlasting.

But let us once again go back to what God declared the day that Satan got us to be spiritually dead. He here stated, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." There is much opposition to that truth in many churches today. The false claim is

that God offers and desires to give salvation to all who hear His word preached. And then it is simply a salvation from the punishment for which sin calls. In many churches today the main part of salvation, namely, salvation from that hatred of God which is in our flesh by nature, is not presented. Salvation is presented merely as deliverance from punishment and as God's holy work of visiting in His wrath. But we must hold on tightly to God's declaration to Satan that He will put enmity in the hearts of His elect against Satan and sin. That means that God promises to make His elect hate Satan, and love Him as their God. If we merely want salvation from punishment, we are still acting in hatred against God. We hate punishment, but do not hate sin. In that statement of our God to Satan, then, we are promised the gift of love of God, which means salvation from our sinful hearts and minds. If we do not get that gift we cannot and will not receive the gift of salvation from punishment. Working out our own salvation is not a work rooted in love of God, but is a manifestation of love of our own flesh.

We must therefore bear in mind that the Almighty God predicted what He is going to do, namely, cause His elect to hate Satan and sin, and to love Him as their God, and in that love make their calling and election firm and steadfast. We reveal that in our hearts by God's grace. In His grace God makes us walk as those who love Him. Our fleshly desire often is merely to seek escape from the punishment which we deserve. But God manifests His love of those He eternally chose in Christ. Our salvation is not merely deliverance from punishment. Basically it is our deliverance from our hatred of God. It causes us to love God, and to desire to serve Him with heart, mind, soul, and strength.

In that light we have that command that we make our calling and election firm and steadfast. Incidents like that which happened in Peter's life happen all around us every day. We should therefore hold on tightly to this command of our God through

Peter. The question is how often we, by our acts, say that we do not know Christ as our Savior.

Enjoying the world and its entertainment, especially today by radio and television, is so appealing to our flesh. Satan surely has realized a tremendous development of sin. Even in the church-world the Sabbath is growing in sinfulness, churches allowing and happily committing much desecration of the Lord's day.

The question is whether we, when in God's house on the Sabbath day, sing because we enjoy the music, rather than the truth in that song. We can quickly fall away from the truth in God's Word, and find delight in what man has composed. It is so tempting to sing a song wherein lies are presented, because we enjoy the music and are not bothered by that lie which is sung.

We are not then making our calling and election sure. We are brushing that calling and election aside.

Let us then heed God's Word through Peter. Let us make our calling and election firm and steadfast. Let us walk in love toward God, not in the love of Satan, and what he strives furiously to make us do. Make your calling and election shine forth every hour of every day. □

Not My Will

"Thy will be done, O Father,"

My Savior prayed;
And laying down His life on earth
My sins He paid.

"Thy will be done, O Father,"

So I would pray;
Although I may not understand
What comes my way.

"Thy will be done, O Father,"

Not my own will;
The blessing of Thy boundless love
Is greater still.

"Thy will be done, O Father,"

'Tis best for me;
And I know Thou wilt give me strength
To live for Thee.

Annetta Jansen
Dorr, Michigan

1994?

(The following announcement first appeared in the January 1, 1993 issue of the Standard Bearer where it was promised that, contrary to the prophecy of Mr. Harold Camping, this announcement would run in an October, 1994 issue of the magazine).

Christ did not come, nor did the world end, last month, as Harold Camping prophesied in 1992 in his book, *1994?* I now call on Mr. Camping to repent of his sin of disobeying Christ by predicting the date of Christ's coming and to repudiate the very idea of such predictions. I also

call on him to recognize the error of his allegorical exegesis and to direct his followers to a true Reformed church where sound, grammatical-historical-spiritual exegesis is the basis of all preaching and teaching.

— DJE

The 1994/1995 Standard Bearer: Volume 71

The new — 71st — volume of the *Standard Bearer* begins with this issue. There will be a few changes in the content. A wider selection of active and retired ministers will write the meditations. We will occasionally republish meditations from old volumes of the *SB*.

Rev. Carl Haak will write the expositions of Scripture in the rubric, "Search the Scriptures." These outlines are intended, among other purposes, to help the Bible study groups. Rev. Haak's guides to the gospel of John have already begun to appear.

We have emphasized and expanded the column on missions by asking Rev. Russ Dykstra, Rev. Jay Kortering, and Rev. Jaikishin Mahtani to cooperate with Rev. Ron VanOverloop in producing 12 articles for "Go Ye into All the World."

"When Thou Sittest in Thine House," our rubric for Reformed fam-

ily life, will be shared by Mrs. MaryBeth Lubbers and Rev. Ron VanOverloop.

The staff approved a new rubric that will treat the offices in the church. An elder and a deacon in the Protestant Reformed Churches have agreed to open up this subject.

The other rubrics and writers will remain the same as last year.

We intend to produce two or three special issues featuring particular aspects of the Reformed faith and life. The October 15, Reformation Day issue will be devoted to the topic, "The Reformation and Worship." We solicit the suggestions of our readers as to worthwhile themes of future special issues.

The staff reappointed the editor, staff secretary, general adjunct, managing editor, and special issues committee.

Noticeably missing from the an-

nual staff meeting was Rev. George C. Lubbers. His name is also missing from the list of regular writers on the masthead. The years (85) and ill-health have compelled him to resign from the staff. On behalf of generations of readers, including the present generation, the staff of the *SB* has expressed deep appreciation to Rev. Lubbers for the writing he has done over the past 60 years. His first article appeared in the *SB* in 1933 when he was still a seminarian, and he has written faithfully ever since. The area of his main labor in writing, and a special gift, has been exposition of the Scriptures. The fruits of his exegetical work in the *SB* and in a long preaching ministry are the three books that he wrote after his emeritation in 1978. Two are commentaries, *Freeborn Sons of Sarah: An Exposition of Galatians* (1983) and *The Glory of the True Tabernacle: Jubilee Exposition of He-*

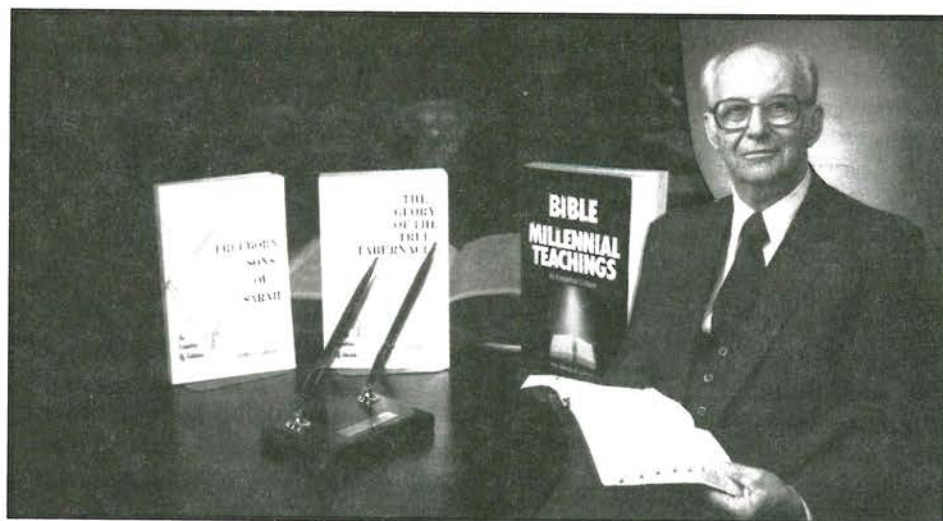
brews (1984). The other is an exegetical-critical examination of millennialism in both its postmillennial and its premillennial forms, *The Bible Versus Millennial Teachings: An Exegetical Critique* (1989). All three books are still in print.

To Rev. Lubbers, our heartfelt, public thanks.

To all the present writers, our thanks as well, and the fervent plea that you meet the deadlines.

May God bless our planning and working, so that the *SB* serves the Word of God in the coming year.

— DJE



Lessons from the Recent False Prophecy of the Date of the End of the World

The false prophecy referred to is that of Mr. Harold Camping, that the world was to end in September, 1994. It was a false prophecy. It was not merely a mistaken prophecy that might be corrected by adjusting the numbers in the mathematical puzzle that is the book *1994*?

The prophecy itself was teaching about a great gospel-truth — the perfection of all of God's purposes in Jesus Christ — that not only had no basis in Scripture but also willfully contradicted Scripture. The Bible clearly teaches that no one, not even the angels, not even the Son Himself, knows the time of the second coming of Christ (Mark 13:32, 33). Thus does the Bible forbid and condemn the forecasting of the definite time of the end.

The prophet, Mr. Camping, presented himself as the one man gifted and authorized by God in the last days to disclose to the world what

Daniel had shut up and sealed in Daniel 12:4, 9. Camping ran, but God did not send him.

As we will discover in the days ahead (I write on September 9, before the consequences of the false prophecy can become apparent), the prophecy will have destructive effects both upon the gullible souls who were deluded by it and upon the cause of conservative Christianity.

The prophecy of September 15-27, 1994 as the date of Christ's return was false prophecy.

Merely to call attention to the failed prophecy serves no good purpose. In view of Camping's reputation as a *Reformed* teacher, those who are jealous for the honor of the Reformed faith could desire that the prophecy be buried in oblivion: "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised tri-

umph" (II Sam. 1:20).

But there are important lessons that Reformed Christians must learn from the debacle of Camping's failed prophecy of the world's end.

Lesson 1. The Reformed Christian must reject those teachers of the Bible who practice allegorical interpretation. These teachers are as unreliable and dangerous as the teachers who deny the full inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. The root of the monumental folly of the prediction of the date of Christ's return is Camping's repudiation, or ignorance, of sober grammatical-historical-spiritual exegesis. The Family Radio expositor of the Bible practices an arbitrary, fanciful interpretation according to which everything and anything in the Bible has symbolical meaning. Ahasuerus is a type of God. Israel's eleven-day journey from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea in Deuteronomy 1:2 represents and teaches that there were 11,000 years

from creation to the coming of the Messiah. The deepest meaning of the 2,000 swine in Mark 5:1-17 is that there are about 2,000 years from the birth of Jesus to His coming again. This is profanation of the Holy Scriptures. This characterizes all the man's handling of the Bible. This is the death of a church and the ruin of the faith.

Lesson 2. The Reformed Christian must insist on having teachers of the Bible, the "pastors and teachers" of Ephesians 4:11, who are trained in sound, solid hermeneutics (the science of interpreting the Bible) and exegesis (the practice of interpreting the Bible). This training is given in a good Reformed seminary. Many cry out today against the seminaries because these distressed saints suffer from products who are either incompetent or unwilling to teach the people the pure Word of God from a Bible believingly regarded as inspired, word for blessed word. God knows there is reason for this lament. But the solution is not sincere, but untrained, laymen with their English Bible and a *Young's Concordance*. Such teachers are as much an evil for the church and for the soul that hungers for the Word as are the graduates from the modernist seminary. Harold Camping is the living proof.

Lesson 3. The Reformed Christian must demand that those who teach him the Word of God be called by God through the instituted church, be ordained into office by the church, and be subject, ever after, to the supervision of the church. This supervision must vigilantly be exercised not only by the elders of the local church

but also by the pastors and elders of the denomination. Mr. Camping was never called by God's church and, therefore, by God Himself to be the teacher of God's church. He is not subject to the oversight of the church. He simply put himself forward as the teacher of the church by virtue of his having read the English Bible for many years and by virtue of his circumstances. He is on his own. Invariably, this spells disaster both for the teacher and for his disciples. The first seventeen articles of the Reformed Church Order of Dordt (which professing Reformed people, churches, and movements ignore to their own peril!) express the Reformed adherence to the biblical principle that pastors and teachers must be called.

Lesson 4. The Reformed Christian must be thoroughly grounded in the doctrines of the Bible as they are confessed in the Reformed creeds and as they are faithfully taught by the church through the office of the ministry. Particularly, the Reformed Christian must know the truths of eschatology, the doctrines of the last things. The Reformed man or woman who knew the basic truths concerning the second coming of Christ was not, and could not be, deceived by Harold Camping. Christ cannot come until Antichrist has been revealed (II Thess. 2), and Antichrist is not Satan himself but Satan's man and worldwide kingdom (II Thess. 2; Rev. 13). Before the end, there will be great tribulation (Matt. 24:21; Rev. 13), and this tribulation is not spiritual apostasy but actual, physical persecution. Besides, no human being knows the exact, definite time of Jesus' coming.

Jesus Himself said so.

There is a good purpose with the false teaching of Harold Camping about the date of the coming of Christ. It is not the lame defense of his foolish prophecy that Camping began to suggest already before it was exposed as false by the event, the defense, namely, that, even though the date was wrong, his prophecy got many to think about the final judgment. Fact is, the natural effect of the false prophecy is that those who believed the prophecy and prepared to meet God on September 15-27, being bitterly disappointed, will give up on a second coming and a final judgment altogether. But God may use the evil of the prophecy to drive His people to the Scriptures to learn the truth of eschatology.

There is need of this.

Camping's is by no means the only error abroad in conservative circles concerning the end.

More importantly still, the end is near. The signs point this out to faith. The great apostasy is well underway. All that remains is the rising of the man of sin and the establishment of the kingdom of the beast with its persecution of the saints:

Then, the Lord will come down from heaven in the body, the dead will be raised, and the final judgment will sit.

Not in 1994.

Not at any knowable or predictable date.

But soon.

Of this we are confident.

The coming of September, 1994 did nothing to quicken this hope.

The going of September, 1994 did nothing to dampen it. □

— DJE

Letters

Unadulterated Calvinism

Thank you so much for your continued excellent witness, exposition, and defense of historic, unadulterated Calvinism in the pages of the *Standard Bearer*. Speaking as an orthodox Calvinist (but still in the PCUSA), the *SB* is the only witness that I know

of today that examines with clear, biblical exegesis, and discerns the precise issues of, the doctrinally muddy thinking in today's ecclesiastical-theological events.

Would you please send me a copy of the issue of the *SB* dealing with the prediction by Harold Camping of

Christ's coming in 1994, referred to in the September 1, 1994 issue of the *SB*?

Also, send me all pamphlets, sermons, and other materials on eschatology, particularly the subjects of the second coming and of the tribulation/rapture, published by the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Keep up your splendid work and witness.

Gaylord M. Sheets
Columbus, OH

RESPONSE:

Materials that you request are in the mail.

— Ed.

Comment on a Book Review

Although I appreciate the Rev. David Engelsma's reviewing the book *The Inquisitor's Secretary* by W.J.D. vanDijk (which I translated from the original Dutch into English) in the July, 1994 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, I was rather taken aback by his remark, "At points, the book is, as the Dutch would say, 'een beetje overvroom' ('a little too pious'). Characters converse by quoting Bible texts to each other."

I hope that he will take it in good grace that I make a few comments on this judgment. First, a more correct translation of the Dutch phrase he uses would be, "a little overly pious." I am sure that is what he means. This statement by itself is mild enough not to find fault with it. Still, it bothers me, especially when he corroborates it by saying, "Characters converse by quoting Bible texts to each other." I am sure that what he means is that when people converse with each other, they frequently quote Bible texts. I grant that at times this can be overdone, but are these characters guilty of that?

Now words can be used carelessly, and I think the Rev. Engelsma

has unwittingly done so. The word "overly" has always a negative connotation: overly strict, overly protective, overly defensive, overly religious, overly critical, hence too much of a (possibly) good thing, and on that account obnoxious, even when we preface it with the minimizing words "een beetje" (a little bit). But can this truly be said of these characters?

It seems to me that the good reverend is not able to place himself sufficiently in the life-or-death situation of these dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus who recently had all come out of the powerful and cruel stranglehold of the Roman church and its corrupt teachings and had begun to taste the liberating power of the Word of God and of the Holy Spirit. Hearing people expound the Word of God, reading it oneself, and especially possessing a copy of it was enough to be caught and eventually martyred for it. I believe it was the world-renowned Dutch historian Johan Huizinga who estimates that between seven and seventy thousand people in the Lowlands had to seal their faith with a cruel death by the sword or at the stake. No wonder they always met in secrecy, where they encouraged and comforted each other by, as the reverend calls it, "quoting Bible texts to each other." To me, however, that was truly testifying to what was their "only comfort in life and death." Let us never forget that every square foot of the land of our forebears was bought with the blood of these first "Reformed" people.

In our present affluent society, where things of time and sense occupy so much of our energy and attention — also in our own circles — "quoting Bible texts in our conversations" is almost considered an anomaly. The question is if that is still adhering to our much-flaunted slogan, *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est*. I think not. I share this in fraternal love.

Cornelius Lambregtse
Jenison, MI

**Determined to Worship
in the Reformed Manner**

Don't you just shake your head and wonder why some CRC members, in my case since birth (and I am now 59), are packing up and leaving what I have always thought to be a part of the pillar and ground of truth, the mother of believers, and joining Protestant Reformed congregations or, in my family's spiritual life, traveling 200 miles round trip to southern Ontario to worship in a Reformed manner in either an Independent or Orthodox Reformed church?

My great-grandfather in Friesland, Feike Arjen Steensma, back in 1880 walked fifteen miles every Sunday as a charter member of the Gereformeerde Kerk in St. Jacobi Parochie, and I do not consider driving 200 miles round-trip to hear Reformed preaching and to rejoice and commune with saints of that most precious, like-minded faith to be that much of a burden.

Fred C. Steensma
Fairport, NY

The Reader Asks

Public Confession of Sin

Recently in Adult Sunday School the following question was raised: "When a public sin has been committed, does the church have the biblical right to demand a public confession?"

Although the question did not get answered, the discussion seemed to favor that a public confession

should be voluntary in order to have real meaning.

Please comment.

Herman VanderVos
Bozeman, MT

RESPONSE:

The article of the *Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* which speaks to your question is Article 75, "The reconciliation of all such sins as

are of their nature of a public character, or have become public because the admonition of the church was despised, shall take place (upon sufficient evidence of repentance) in such a manner as the consistory shall deem conducive to the edification of each church. Whether in particular cases this shall take place in public, shall, when there is a difference of opinion

about it in the consistory, be considered with the advice of two neighboring churches or of the classis."

The answer to your question is, yes, the consistory has the right to demand a public confession, *if it deems this to be conducive to the edification of the church*. The breach caused by the sin must be removed in the most

edifying way for the congregation and the repentant sinner involved. If the repentant sinner is willing to confess his/her sin before the consistory, but is unwilling to make public confession of the sin, he/she would have the right to appeal the consistory's decision to the broader assemblies (classis, synod) of the denomination.

In any event, public confession which is not voluntary is meaningless. Unwillingness to make a public confession on the part of someone who has committed a public sin may very well indicate to a consistory that there is "insufficient evidence of repentance."

— Editorial Committee

All Around Us

■ A Classis in Disobedience

In the August issue we reported that the 1994 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), by a vote of 95-89, refused to ratify a change in its Church Order which would allow women to be ordained as ministers and elders. In two related decisions the synod retained the decision of its 1992 synod which encouraged local churches to allow "women to teach, expound the Word of God, and to provide pastoral care, under the supervision of the elders." Synod of 1994 appointed a study committee to present a definition of "expounding," which presumably would distinguish it from preaching. The synod also urged local congregations which have already ordained women elders to release them from office by June 1995. An estimated 15 of the 900 congregations in the CRC have ordained women as elders.

At least one Classis has decided not to enforce synod's latest ruling on this matter. Classis Grand Rapids East met in special session on July 21 at the request of First CRC of Grand Rapids. First Church had decided they would elect only adjunct elders, a position women were allowed to hold since 1992. Since their regular elders serve two-year terms, they are now at the point of having only the pastor as a regular elder. They requested support and direction from

the Classis. There were some objections that the meeting was called without sufficient notice, but these were not accepted. A majority of the delegates as well as of the large crowd of visitors felt there was an urgency to respond to First Church's request.

After much discussion and many questions concerning how exactly to word the motion, the Classis decided "in principle" to disobey the synod's ban on women in office. Final wording of the motion will be completed at the regularly scheduled Classis meeting in September.

That this is a very serious development ought to be self evident. A Classis has decided to disobey a synodical decision. That's always very serious. It means that Classis East and its member churches have decided not to follow the ecclesiastical way of protesting the synodical decision and thus attempting to demonstrate to the synod of 1995 that the synod of 1994 was in error. What is more, in this particular instance the synod of 1994 made a strong pronouncement on biblical evidence. The main ground for its decision not to ratify the church order change was that "the clear teaching of Scripture prohibits women holding the offices of minister, elder, and evangelist." Another ground stated forcefully that it was therefore impossible to leave ordination of women as an option for local churches since "the synod cannot allow what Scripture does not allow." Classis Grand Rapids East decided "in principle" to "permit its individual churches the freedom to decide whether or not the word 'male' in article 3a of the church order is

operative in their particular settings." Classis, by taking this decision, allows what the synod said "the clear teaching of Scripture prohibits."

Does not this decision of Classis East *de facto* place the entire Classis outside of the CRC? Serious business indeed!

The repercussions of all this are not likely to be confined to Classis Grand Rapids East. Many of the larger churches and prestigious pulpits (Calvin, Plymouth Heights, Seymore Square) reside in this classis. Many denominational employees, as well as professors at both Calvin College and Seminary, are members of the churches in Classis East.

Another, quite different response to synod's decision on women in office comes from the co-editors of *The Outlook*, Rev. and Mrs. Thomas VandenHeuvel. They see synod's decision as a "Window of Opportunity." Though they are "plagued with apprehension that Synod 1995 or a subsequent synod will overturn this year's decision," the VandenHeuvels say, "this battle is over and we must go on now."

The actions of Classis Grand Rapids East would indicate that the battle is far from over. Though it is our fervent prayer that our "mother church" will maintain and enforce its 1994 decision, we are convinced it's only a matter of time before women are allowed to serve in all offices in the CRC.

*The Banner
Christianity Today
The Outlook
Reformed Believers Press Service
REC News Exchange*

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

■ **The Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America**

This denomination, given its long history and its distinctives, took some very important decisions at its synod which met at Geneva College June 18-23. A resolution to resubmit the overture on Query #8 (of the questions put to candidates for office in the RPCNA) to sessions for voting was introduced by Dr. Bruce C. Steward, president of the RP Seminary in Pittsburgh. Dr. Steward's resolution was passed after the proposed Query revision was amended from "... do you promise not to be addicted to wine, and to show yourself to be a model of sobri-

ety, restraint, and sound judgment in all areas of life?" to "... do you promise not to be given to much wine ...?"

The synod also approved several changes and additions to the RP Testimony regarding women's and men's roles. Among these changes or additions are the statements that "the office of elder is restricted in Scripture to men," and "we deny that the exclusion of women from the office of elder hinders any woman's divine vocation or neglects any woman's spiritual gifts for ministry." These additions and changes must now be sent down in overture to be voted on by sessions and elders.

The synod elected Pastor Jerry O'Neill, of the Columbus, Indiana, RPC, president of the RP Seminary. O'Neill was also appointed professor of pastoral theology. He will assume both positions upon Dr. Steward's retirement next year.

In an earlier issue we reported on the "Catholic Evangelical Statement" signed by several leading evangelicals (Michael Horton, Richard Mouw, James I. Packer, *et. al.*). The synod voted to urge Dr. John White, president of Geneva College, to withdraw his signature from the joint statement. Dr. White complied. □

Covenanter Witness

Special Article

Mr. Bill Oomkes

Third Biennial Conference of the British Reformed Fellowship

On July 30, all of the British Reformed Fellowship's interest was focused on the arrival of the conferees

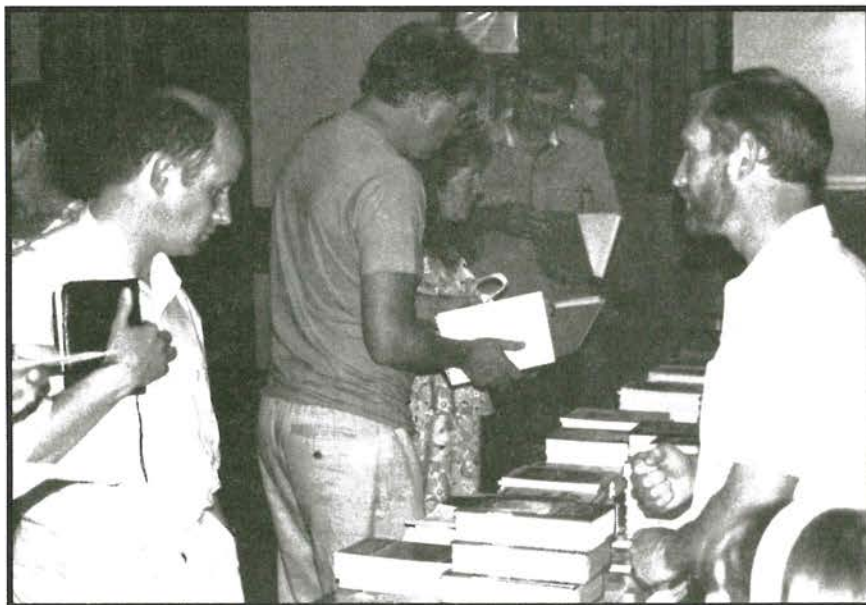
Mr. Oomkes is a member of the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church.

to their third biennial conference, which took place on the campus of the College of Textiles, located in Galashiels, Selkirkshire, Scotland. Most of the 120 who were registered had arrived by the 6:00 p.m. dinner hour. For our family it was our sec-

ond time to a BRF conference, so we were eagerly looking forward to renewing acquaintance with those whom we had the privilege of meeting two years ago, as well as forming new relationships. Those who attended came from Singapore (6), East



Lecturers interact with conferees.



Literature table

Germany (3), USA (16), and the rest from the UK.

A little information about the BRF might be helpful. The British Reformed Fellowship was set up in 1990 by a group of Christians concerned for the defense and propagation of the historic Reformed faith in the British Isles. Their doctrinal basis is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Holy Scriptures and the doctrines set forth in the "Three Forms of Unity" as well as in the Westminster Standards. Their threefold objective is to promote the knowledge of the Reformed faith; to organize meetings, conferences, and preaching services to promote this faith; and, finally, to encourage formation of groups at the local level to promote the Reformed faith. In 1992, they had twenty members, and in 1994, 120 members. With the cooperation of our missionary, Pastor Ron Hanko, they have held numerous meetings in all areas of the United Kingdom. They also publish a 40-page quarterly booklet, called the *British Reformed Journal*. (This is available in the US for £7.00 Sterling annually by writing to the editorial office, 9 Church Road, Thornbury, Bristol, BS12 1EJ, United Kingdom.) In his closing remarks the secretary noted that the BRF had looked for a long time, seeking a denomination that would lend its support to their

cause, and had to go half way around the world to the Protestant Reformed Churches to find it. He also stated that the BRF is most grateful for that support.

The conference began on Saturday night with an "Introduction and Fellowship Ministry" by the president of BRF, Pastor Jim North. He used Mark 6:31 as his theme: "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while." The emphasis was on the call of Christ to come apart from the busyness of the world, to

live in communion, and finally to learn. I am convinced that all of the aforementioned was accomplished in the following week. "The whole week was a foretaste of heaven" is the description given by a first-time visitor. On Sunday we had two worship services led by Professors Hanko and Engelsma, with the morning worship preceded by a 45-minute prayer time. In the afternoon, the children up to age 15 met in one group, and all the other single young people in another group. These were similar to a Sunday School and Young People's Society meetings. Each night "ended" with devotions at 10:00 p.m. Most discussions began after devotions and lasted into the "wee" hours of the morning. In the case of the young people and young adults, who met every night in the Hankos' flat, some of those discussions lasted all night long. They had their own version of a Young People's Convention in Scotland, with the participants from as far away as Singapore. According to our 15-year old daughter, who experienced her second BRF Conference, this gathering was certainly a blessing for all the young people.

The theme of the conference was "The Doctrine of Sovereign Grace." The six speeches given by Professors Engelsma and Hanko were as fol-



Young members of the BRF

lows: "Sovereign Grace and Predestination," which included a discussion of both election and reprobation, of the relation between sovereign grace and predestination, and of the revelation of predestination in the Old Testament (DE); "Sovereign Grace and the Cross of Christ," including a discussion of the relation between the particular atonement of Christ and sovereign and particular grace (HH); "Sovereign Grace and the Preaching of the Gospel," including an analysis and critique of the well-meant offer of salvation and of the preaching as a means of grace (DE); "Sovereign Grace and the Development of Sin," which included the treatment of the idea of grace in the restraint of sin, and how God restrains sin as it develops organically (HH); "Sovereign Grace and the application of Salvation," which dealt with a discussion of how God saves sovereignly in regeneration, faith, and conversion (DE); and finally, "Sovereign Grace and the Circumstances of Life," which dealt with the idea of common grace as it is supposedly found in the good gifts which God gives to man, and also a demonstration of the believer's comfort in particular grace and how grace is his only consolation in the trials of life (HH). All these speeches were followed by a question and answer session. The thoroughness of the speeches gave time for some very thought-provoking and well thought-out comments and questions. Those who attended this conference were well-versed in the Scriptures, which was evident in the discussions. The speeches also proved to be the topic of discussion after devotions. These speeches were well received and greatly appreciated. One Scottish seminary student remarked to me that he appreciated the boldness with which these professors spoke the gospel.

Tapes of these speeches are available for a cost of \$16.00 US from Bill Oomkes, 6299 Wing S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49512 USA; or from Desmond Callender, 127 Cregach Road, Belfast BT6 0LA, Northern Ireland for £8.00 Sterling.

On Monday afternoon, Tuesday all day, and Friday afternoon we toured the different sites where the Covenanters (e.g., Thomas Boston) preached and where they were hanged or beheaded and buried. We were also given a tour of the St. Giles Cathedral where the great Reformer John Knox preached. This was all accomplished under the direction of Rev. Sinclair Horne, the secretary of the Scottish Reformation Society. He also spoke to us on Monday evening on the "Relevance of the Covenanting Witness for Today." He spoke on the history of the Covenanters and the application of their witness for Christians in the modern world. This proved to be extremely rewarding because, as the saying goes, history repeats itself.

These conferences have become a

very important part of our life. Many teary eyes were evident when we said good-bye. One could not help but conclude that our covenant God has used the PRC in an important work in gathering and strengthening His people in the UK. God has used the BRF, the Covenant Reformed Fellowship, and our churches to proclaim the truth of sovereign grace. Pastor Hanko has spoken literally all over the UK on behalf of the BRF. There is much work to be done in the UK. We have seen that the Word of the Lord does not return void. The Lord has surely left a faithful witness in the United Kingdom.

Plans are already in place for the next conference in 1996. A beautiful site has been chosen in East Sussex, England, just south of London. The Lord willing, we hope to see you there. □

Praising Jesus Christ

i.

As long as I shall live below on earth
I render to my King what he is worth
In word and deed, with shouting and with song.
Because he chose me, I am full of mirth;
He wrote my new name long before my birth,
Wherefore my soul makes music all day long.
His precious blood
With joy me flood:
"Thy heart is mine
And mine is thine!"
So sadness flee
And joy fill me
For Jesus is my Lord divine!

ii.

When from the heart I pray with all my might,
When tongue and lips sing praises day and night,
When I serve him as his obedient child —
Then will the world mock me with rank delight,
But I ignore her pride and feel no spite;
Her scorn is impotent, however wild.
What he decrees,
I am at peace.
In him I dwell
Who makes all well.
He is the Best,
The First and Last,
Whom I do love, and ever shall!

—Jacobus Revius (1586-1658)

From: *Over-ysselsche Sangen en Dichten*, II, 3
tr. Cornelius Lambregtse

With

From time to time it is necessary for pastors to remind their catechumens, both young and old, that they must memorize the prepositions in their answers carefully. These little words indicate the relationship that nouns, pronouns, and verbs have in regard to each other. It makes a world of difference whether something is for or against, under or on, before or after. Prepositions form a family of words which show these relationships very clearly. The study of prepositions is important in any language, but never more so than in the Hebrew and Greek. The word *with* deserves our attention in the Scriptures, for it is often used by the Holy Spirit to set forth relationships that can only be called sublime. *With* can indicate sameness of direction; it can show that two or more share in an activity, arrangement, or benefit; or it can reveal a combination, accompaniment, or presence. Although *with* is found hundreds of times in the Bible, we will examine only a few occurrences to show what tremendous truths are set forth by this little word.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Not only do these opening words of the fourth Gospel prove the eternity, the divinity, and the distinct Person of the Son, but they also reveal to us an aspect of the covenant life within the Trinity of God. The Son is in perfect harmony with the Father and the Holy Spirit; He lives the same life, seeks and delights in the same things, has the same motive and goal. The original term suggests that the face of the Son is always toward the Father. The Son had glory *with* the Father before the world was (John 17:5), and in the days of His flesh had favor *with* God (Luke 2:52), and spoke of those things which He had seen *with* His Father (John 8:38).

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Is. 7:14), which being interpreted is, God *with* us (Matt. 1:23). God and man are so united in the virgin's Son that the covenant of God, the might and wisdom of God, the treasures and pleasures of God, become our benefit. Having been justified by faith,

"we have peace *with* God, through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). The God of peace, harmony, unity gives us to share in this blessed virtue. Arguing from the greater to the lesser, the apostle Paul writes that if God did not spare His own Son, "How shall he not *with* him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). Through the resurrection and ascension into heaven, Christ is exalted and enriched with a glory in which all the saints share. We are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs *with* Christ" (Rom. 8:17).

According to Genesis 5:22 and 6:9, Enoch and Moses walked *with* God in the midst of a world that hated them and persecuted them. Living in a world that more and more resembles the world before the flood, as members of the party of the living God, we know Him, walk with Him, enjoy the highest Good, and reveal His praises.

The future of the children of God is bright in light of the promise of the risen Savior, "And lo, I am *with* you, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). The presence of the Lord is our comfort, strength, and sure defense. Although bodily He is in heaven, "with respect to His Godhead, majesty, grace, and Spirit He is at no time absent from us" (L.D. 18). "Your life is hid *with* Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). When Christ sat down at God's right hand, He took His church with Him there; as the Head was raised far beyond death and the evil one, so every member of His body is safely hid in God where they can never be destroyed.

When Christ returns at the end of this world, "the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be *with* the Lord" (I Thess. 4:16, 17). At His coming, the prayer of Jesus shall have been perfectly answered, "that the glory which God has given him might also be given unto them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:22). Then "the tabernacle of God is *with* men, and he will dwell *with* them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be *with* them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3). □

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

John 1:19-34

John the Baptist's Witness to Christ

These verses begin the historical part of John's gospel. In the prologue (vv. 1-18) John has spoken of the deep and weighty truth of Christ's personal deity and incarnation. Now we come to the narration of Christ's earthly ministry. We note that John does not include anything of the first 30 years of our Lord's life but begins at once with "the record" or witness of John the Baptist. (The only details of Jesus' first 30 years are given in Matthew 1 and 2 and Luke 1 and 2.) And that "record" of John the Baptist is to Christ's deity: "This is the Son of God" (v. 34).

John the Baptist is one of the most remarkable personalities in the Bible. His coming was foretold in the Old Testament prophecies (Is. 40:3-5; Mal. 3:1; 4:4-6). His privileged work was to be the forerunner of the Lord (Luke 1:7). He served thus by preaching repentance, with baptism as a sign of the remission of sins (Luke 3:3-9). Jesus called him the greatest of the prophets (Matt. 11:7-9). He lived as a Nazarite in the desert and was filled with the Spirit from his birth (Luke 1:80). Multitudes flocked to the Jordan River to hear him, resulting in the conversion of many people, among whom were publicans and soldiers (Mark 1:5; Luke 3:10-14). His ministry was marked by scathing rebukes of the religious formalism of his day (Luke 3:7-9). John the Baptist, then, was the divinely appointed harbinger

of the Lord whose calling it was to make ready a people for the appearing of Christ and personally to point out the Christ when He appeared (Luke 1:41). Is not this the purpose of the preaching of the gospel by the church today?

Verse 19 informs us that the popularity of John caused the Jews to send a delegation to John the Baptist to inquire concerning his identity. John faithfully and humbly answers their questions and unmistakably identifies himself as the forerunner of the Christ. He also makes plain the reason for his baptizing. John administers the sign of what the Christ will indeed do, namely, baptize with the Holy Ghost. John also shows humble faithfulness to his task by emphasizing the pre-eminence of Christ over the forerunner.

What a moment in the history of the unfolding of God's covenant salvation is recorded in verses 29-34! Here at long last the promised Savior stands before His people in all the grace of God as the only sacrifice for sin. It was for this moment that John had been sent, and it was for this moment that all the people of God had waited for 4,000 years. All the Old Testament promises pointed toward this moment of the coming of the Christ to begin and accomplish the work of God. Really, having completed this task of pointing out the Christ and witnessing of His deity, the work of John the Baptist is completed. Never was there a fuller testimony given to Christ upon earth than that which was given by John the Baptist. We know nothing of the

Christ unless the Spirit gives us to see Him with John the Baptist's eyes and we rejoice in Him as "the Lamb that was slain" (Rev. 13:8).

Outline of verses 19-34

1. John and the Jews. vv. 19-28
 - a. The Jews' inquiry of John and his answers.
 - 1) "Who art thou?" Not the Christ. vv. 19, 20
 - 2) "Art thou Elijah?" No. v. 21
 - 3) "Art thou that prophet?" No. v. 21
 - 4) "What sayest thou of thyself?" "I am the voice...." vv. 22, 23
 - 5) "Why baptizeth thou then?" To prepare the way for Christ. vv. 25, 26
 - b. John's acknowledging of Christ's pre-eminence. v. 27

— the notation is made that all this has transpired at Bethabara on the Jordan River. v. 28
2. John and Jesus. vv. 29-34
 - a. John's great moment: Pointing out the Christ as God's Lamb! v. 29
 - b. John's words of explanation for his baptizing. vv. 30, 31
 - c. John tells of the Spirit's anointing of Christ and Christ's baptizing with the Spirit. vv. 32, 33
 - d. John confesses the deity of Christ. v. 34

Questions for Discussion and Further Study:

1. What was the purpose of the ministry of John the Baptist? What Old

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Testament prophecies spoke of him? Why did he labor in the wilderness? What is the significance of his dress? (Matt. 4:3). Explain the parallels between John the Baptist's ministry and the preaching today.

2. What were the motives behind the Jews sending this delegation to inquire of John concerning his identity?

3. Why did the Jews ask if John were Elijah? How did the Jews understand the prophecy of Malachi 4:4-6?

4. What prophet did they refer to in verse 21? (See Deut. 18:15-18; Acts 3:22; 7:37.)

5. What is the importance of John's using Isaiah 40:3 as the prophecy which explains his identity and mis-

sion? Why did John cry in the wilderness rather than in the temple?

6. What is the significance of John's baptism? (See Luke 3; Matt. 3; Acts 19:1-9.)

7. Discuss the significance of the humility of John before the Christ. How does this speak to us? (I Peter 5:5)

8. What is the meaning of John's words to the Jews in verse 2, when he says "whom ye know not"? (See Rom. 2:17-19.)

9. Were the Jews acquainted with the significance of cleansing with water? (See Lev. 11:15; Ez. 36:25, 26; 37:23; Jer. 33:8; Zech. 13:1.)

10. What are the thoughts suggested by the Savior's title, "The lamb of

God"? (See Gen. 22:8; Ex. 12; Is. 53:7; I Peter 1:19.) Show that already in this title we have implied the truths of substitutionary atonement and satisfaction for sin.

11. Why did the Holy Spirit descend upon Christ as a dove? (See Matt. 4:13-17.)

12. What does John mean when he says that he "knew him not"? (v. 31) How was the Spirit's descending upon Christ at the time of His baptism a crucial sign of His identity and the work that He came to do?

13. What is it to be baptized with the Holy Ghost?

14. Discuss how verse 34 ties into the main purpose of John's gospel. □

In His Fear

Rev. Arie denHartog

Weak and Strong Faith

As Reformed Christians we believe that faith is a gift of God. There is nothing more significant and important about the nature and character of true saving faith than this truth. It is not only difficult for the natural man to believe, it is impossible. Faith is not something simple, a simple decision to "accept Christ," which all men have the natural ability to perform at their own free will. For the natural man faith is absolutely impossible.

It is a devilish delusion that is propagated in many churches that faith is something as easy as the proverbial "rolling off a log." This idea is completely contrary to what the Bible teaches about faith and deceives many

to imagine that they have faith when they do not. Outside of the grace of God no man will ever come to God and believe that He is. The rebellious sinner will never acknowledge God and submit to Him. He is so enslaved to sin and the devil that he

will never of himself for-

sake his sin even

though he knows that

it will lead him to de-

struction. Even when

tormented with the

terrors of the judg-

ment of God the natural

man cannot be persuaded to

flee to God for salvation. No man will

ever of his own freewill accept Christ.

Faith comes only by the mighty and wonderful operation of the Spirit of God in the hearts of His elect. It is a work that He alone can and does accomplish by the irresistible operation of His grace and Holy Spirit according to which He breaks our natu-

rally rebellious hearts and makes us willing and able to believe in Him. None of us believe of ourselves. We believe only because God gave us the wonderful gift of faith. Faith is the greatest gift of God to His elect. All

the other blessings of salva-

tion are received by

God's children

through the gift of

faith. Without faith

we cannot be

saved. Without

faith we cannot

please God. Without

faith we would all perish

everlastingly.

Faith gives us a true knowledge of the greatness of our own sin and the awful judgment it deserves. Faith makes us conscious of the desperate situation we are in. Faith causes us to know the Lord Jesus Christ as the only hope of our salvation and constrains us to flee to Him.

*Even when
tormented with the terrors
of the judgment of God
the natural man cannot be
persuaded to flee to God
for salvation.*

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

Faith enables us to know and understand the mysteries of the Word of God about God Himself and about Jesus Christ the only Savior. Through faith the child of God receives for true all that God has revealed in His Word. Faith makes us wise unto salvation.

Faith is the spiritual bond that unites us to Christ. We are, according to the language of Lord's Day 7 of the Heidelberg Catechism, engrafted into Christ by a true and living faith. This is a wonderful thing. By faith we know Christ spiritually as our Lord and Savior and we are mystically united to Him. Through faith we have intimate communion and fellowship with our beloved Savior and Lord. He lives in us and we live in Him. And we are by faith made conscious of this great wonder. This truth of the wonder of faith is illustrated by our Lord in the beautiful figure of the vine and the branches recorded in John 15. He tells us there that He is the vine and we are the branches. Through our living union with Christ Jesus He abides in us and we in Him.

By faith we rejoice in Christ Jesus, though now we do not see Him, with joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Pet. 1:8). Through faith the perfect righteousness of Christ Jesus becomes ours and we have the blessed assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins through His cross and the knowledge of the favor and love of God for us. Through faith all the blessings of salvation which Christ merited for us on the cross become our possession. Through faith we receive the strength and power of Christ Jesus so that we can boldly say with the inspired apostle Paul: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:14). Through the power of faith we are able to endure the sufferings of this present time, in the hope of the glory that awaits us in heaven. Through faith we have the certain hope of the return of our Lord at the end of the ages and watch daily for the signs of the times with eager expectation of the fulfillment of that hope.

It is good to distinguish faith as God's power working in us and the

activity of our faith. Faith as the gift and power of God is given to us in our regeneration. We are passive in receiving that gift. God does not give us faith because we first asked Him for that gift or because we are ourselves willing to receive it. God by His irresistible grace of regeneration delivered us from our natural rebellion and unbelief and worked faith in our hearts.

Through the power of God we become active in faith. By the activity of faith the elect child of God consciously knows the almighty sovereign God of salvation and relies on Him completely. Faith is active forsaking of our sin and wickedness and going out to Christ. True faith involves denying all confidence in ourselves and depending completely upon Christ and His righteousness, His strength, and His faithfulness. Faith is the activity of the heart of the child of God by which he embraces all of the promises of the gospel, and believes that these promises are true and certain. By faith we find in the gospel all our comfort and assurance.

Only when we understand this about faith can we understand how it is that the gospel everywhere commands us to repent and believe. That command of God demands a conscious and active response of the child of God. In this respect faith is not at all passive. Faith demands a tremendous and constant activity on our part. Even then Scripture clearly states that God works in us "the willing and the doing." Also the activity of faith flows forth from the working of God in us. Nevertheless, by this work of God we ourselves also become consciously willing and active, so that we can rightly say, "I believe. I trust completely in Christ Jesus. All my glorying is in Him alone." (See Canons, Third and Fourth Heads, Articles 11 and 12.) When God in His Word commands us to believe, then we must respond with the heartfelt confession, "Lord, I believe!" In the discourse of John 15 on the vine and the branches Jesus

commands us to abide in Him. He adds to this command negatively the absolute statement that without abiding in Him we can do nothing, and the positive statement that by abiding in Him we shall bring forth fruit to the glory of God.

When we speak of weak and strong faith we have reference especially to the activity of faith and to our calling and responsibility to exercise our faith as children of God. We may never charge God for giving us only weak faith. Weak faith is a disgrace; it is a sin on the part of the child of God. We dishonor God when we fail to exercise our faith and yield to the temptations of sin. Faith is one of the great pieces of the armor of the Christian soldier. We are exhorted by the inspired apostle of our Lord in Ephesians 6 to put on that armor. If we do not put on that armor constantly we will fall miserably before the onslaughts of our enemy, the devil. We must be concerned about and ashamed of a weak faith. It is often the case because of our sinful nature that we have weak faith. This is inexcusable and will have very serious consequences for our Christian life. For this reason we are called to examine ourselves constantly whether we are in the faith or not. We need often to confess the sin of lack of faith and of weak faith that so often characterizes us. We need to repent from that sin and know what we must do about it.

We have a beautiful biblical illustration of all of this in the account of Peter walking on the raging waters of the Sea of Galilee. We can find this account recorded in Matthew 14 for our instruction about strong and weak faith. Peter really was often characterized by a mixture of strong and weak faith, as we so often are. When Peter saw Jesus walking on the stormy sea Peter asked Jesus for permission to come out and walk with Jesus on the fearful billows of the sea. Jesus commanded Peter to come, and by faith Peter went out to Jesus. What exhilaration Peter must have felt at

*We may never
charge God
for giving us only
weak faith.*

first when the power of Christ enabled him to walk on the water. But an instant later Peter was sinking in the sea and crying out to Jesus to save Him. It was necessary for Jesus to catch Peter and keep him from certain drowning in the sea because of the weakness of his faith. After Jesus had lifted Peter into the boat He rebuked Peter sharply with the words, "Oh thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

This account is a vivid illustration of the Christian life. It has many spiritual lessons for us concerning the nature of faith and the urgency of exercising that faith. What wonderful power was given to Peter when He looked at Jesus and went out to meet Him on the tossing waves of the sea! But also how quickly Peter began to sink in the sea when he took his eyes off Jesus. How in a moment Peter could change from strong to weak faith! How beautiful the truth that Jesus responded to the cry of Peter, "Lord, save me!" by catching Peter and delivering Peter from death. Certainly this vividly illustrates that in the final analysis our salvation is dependent on the Lord and not even on the strength of our own faith. What a comfort this is!

Another familiar story about Jesus and Peter illustrates the reality of weak and strong faith. This history is recorded in Matthew. I refer to the whole account of Peter's denial of the Lord and what led to this sad history. Remember how the Lord told His disciples on the night in which He was arrested to be crucified that they would all be offended at Him and forsake Him and flee? At that time Peter, in seemingly strong and bold faith, said that he would never forsake his Lord and that he was ready even to die with Jesus. And remember how Jesus had to warn Peter about denying His Lord that very night. Jesus spoke concerning this as involving the desire of Satan to have Peter and to sift him as wheat. What a dreadful thing this was by itself! Satan is constantly working his evil work to destroy the faith of God's saints. Through this evil work Satan desires to have those who belong to God by faith. The grievous fall of Peter took place as Jesus had prophesied. But no doubt the most important detail of this history is the fact that Jesus, in warning Peter about his impending fall, also assured Peter that He had prayed for him that his faith would not fail.

Once again there are many great spiritual lessons to be learned from this history. How foolish it is for any of us to boast in the strength of his own faith. How miserably even a seemingly strong disciple of Jesus can fall because of the weakness of faith. "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall." Most beautiful is the truth that Jesus constantly prays for the faith of His own so that their faith does not fail.

In our next article we want to consider some of the characteristics of a weak faith. We ought to be concerned about weak faith. Being weak in our faith has very serious consequences. We need to be on our guard against those things that weaken our faith and avoid them. In the life of every Christian, even the greatest of them, faith has its so-called ups and downs. But this does not mean that we may be careless about this. We are called by God to be strong and courageous in our faith. We need strong and robust faith to live in this wicked world. What according to the Word of God are the characteristics of a strong, vibrant faith which pleases God and glorifies His Name? What are the ways in which God strengthens His work of faith in us? □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

Censure at Major Assemblies

At the close of the classical and other major assemblies, censure shall be exercised over those, who in the meeting have done something worthy of punishment, or who have scorned the admonition of the minor assemblies.

Church Order, Article 43

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

The "Censure" of Major Assemblies

The censure referred to in Article 43 is to be distinguished from other forms of censure referred to in the Church Order.

The censure of Article 43 is to be distinguished from the censure of Article 35. Article 35 calls for the presidents of our assemblies "to see to it that everyone observe due order in speaking; to silence the captious and those who are vehement in speak-

ing, and properly to discipline them if they refuse to listen." The censure of Article 35 is exercised by the president while the meeting is in progress, whereas the censure of Article 43 is exercised by the assembly itself "at the close" of the meeting.

The censure of Article 43 is also distinguished from the censure referred to in Article 81. Article 81 provides for the mutual censure of officebearers within the same

consistory, *censura morum*: "The ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons, shall before the celebration of the Lord's Supper exercise Christian censure among themselves and in a friendly spirit admonish one another with regard to the discharge of their office." *Censura morum* takes place in the consistory and concerns itself with the officebearers' "discharge of their office." The question is: "Is there anything in the work of the minister, elders, or deacons which should be criticized? Is encouragement needed by the officebearers with regard to their work?" The censure of Article 43 takes place at the major assemblies, not at the consistorial level. Article 43 does not concern the work of the officebearers so much as their conduct at classis and synod.

The censure of Article 43 is also to be distinguished from the censure referred to in Articles 79 and 80. Articles 79 and 80 refer to the censure of officebearers on account of public, gross sin. This censure is an aspect of Christian discipline and culminates in suspension and deposition from office. The censure called for in Article 43 concerns misconduct at the major assemblies, but not necessarily misconduct so serious that it is to be classified as public, gross sin. This is not to say that misconduct in an assembly meeting, if it be of a very serious nature, may not be reported by the assembly to one's consistory. This may be done. Then it is possible that such misconduct becomes the occasion for the exercise of formal discipline by a consistory.

Censure of those who "...have done something worthy of punishment"

Article 43 calls first for the censure of "... those who in the meeting have done something worthy of punishment."

Article 43 has a place in our *Church Order* because of the situation that prevailed in the early history of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. In the first years after the Reformation, many entered the service of the church who had little expe-

rience in attending the broader assemblies. Often the meetings were characterized by disorder and misconduct. Men would speak out of turn. Tempers would flare. Angry words would be exchanged. To curb this evil and to safeguard the orderliness of the meetings, Article 43 was formulated.

The earliest of the Dutch Reformed synods, the Synod of Wezel, 1568, mentioned several sins that were worthy of the "punishment" called for in Article 43: Unbecoming jests, lewd remarks, lying, slander, insulting remarks, sudden bursts of anger, striving to exercise dominion over the church or over one's colleagues, negligence in handling the Scriptures.

The censure of Article 43 is censure by the major ecclesiastical body. This would be done by official motion from the floor and carried by a simple majority vote. In the name of the body the censure would then be exercised by the president, or, in case the person is no longer in attendance, by the secretary in writing.

The matter of Article 43 ought to be faced at the conclusion of the meetings of the broader assemblies, just as the questions of Article 41 are routinely asked at the conclusion of the meetings of classis. In our churches, the broader assemblies never consider at the end of their sessions whether anyone is worthy of censure according to Article 43. Hardly ever is such censure necessary. Most of the meetings of our broader assemblies are conducted in an orderly way and delegates observe proper decorum. There have been times, however, when censure according to Article 43 was worthy of consideration.

In the earlier history of the Reformed churches the assemblies concluded by facing the question whether anyone was worthy of censure according to Article 43. Our churches ought to consider resurrecting this practice. It would be well at the end of the meetings of classis and synod that the president ask whether any member feels that censure according to Article 43 is required. This forces the body to face the matter concretely

at every meeting. If no one feels the necessity of this, it may then be noted in the minutes that no censure according to Article 43 was necessary.

The concluding minute of the Particular Synod of Alkmaar, 1593, reads: "And furthermore, with this the Synod was concluded; and the censure being held, nothing was found (God be praised!) to be worthy of punishment, but all things took place with edification and peace, and thus the actions were concluded with thanksgiving to God." Well may we pray to God that the same may be said of the meetings of the broader assemblies of our churches!

Censure of those "... who have scorned the admonition of the minor assemblies."

Besides calling for the censure of those who have done something worthy of punishment, Article 43 calls for the major assemblies to censure those "...who have scorned the admonition of the minor assemblies."

It is difficult to know with certainty who are referred to in this part of Article 43. The Synod of Dordt, 1578, spoke of those "... who have scorned the admonition of their consistory." The Synod of Middelburg, 1581, replaces "consistory" with "minor assemblies." From the original reference to "consistory" it has been argued that Article 43 refers to an officebearer who has been admonished by his consistory on the occasion of *censura morum*, but who has not submitted himself to the admonition. A consistory may, then, present this matter to the classis and, if necessary, to the synod.

Another possibility is that someone has scorned the admonition of a minor assembly in that he has not fulfilled a certain mandate from the assembly. It may be that he has neglected to carry out certain work assigned to him by the assembly. Or he has ignored instructions received from the minor assembly.

Most likely, however, the correct explanation goes in a different direc-

tion. The reference is to delegates, consistories, or other individuals involved in ecclesiastical deliberations. These may "scorn" the decisions on the floor of the major assembly. They may speak disparagingly of the decisions of the minor assemblies, or they may demonstrate a refusal to be in submission to the minor assemblies. Their error is not that they disagree with a decision; the right to disagree is guaranteed by Article 31. But their

error is a refusal to consider past decisions settled and binding.

Included in scorn for the decisions of the minor assembly would be scorn for the men who sit at the minor assembly. Frequently this shows itself in protestants who are objecting to a decision of a minor assembly. Often they do not show the proper respect for the officebearers of the minor assembly, generally the consistory. This must not be counte-

nanced by the broader assemblies, but must be censured under Article 43.

Article 43 serves a good purpose in our *Church Order*. That purpose is to safeguard the orderliness of the meetings of the broader ecclesiastical assemblies, and thus the glory of God whose injunction to His church is, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40). □

Day of Shadows

Homer Hoeksema

The Last Four Days of Creation-Week: Introduction

By way of introduction, we wish to emphasize again a principle which is basic to the understanding of Genesis 1 and which is fundamental to our Christian faith with respect to creation, namely, that there is no antithesis between faith and reason, but that the antithesis is always between faith and unbelief. This must be emphasized again and again. The Word of God is not unreasonable, that is, contrary to reasonable conception and understanding. The Christian faith is not contrary to reason. We say this because it is rather fashionable in our day to present matters as though anyone who adheres strictly to Scripture's creation-record is some kind of blind fool who flies in the face of reality and is altogether unreasonable. It has also

become the fashion of the day in the church and in theology to compromise in the face of this charge and to attempt to effect a marriage of Jerusalem and Athens, of creationism and evolutionism, of alleged faith and alleged science.

The result of this unholy marriage is certainly not that creation-faith is upheld, but that the Word of God must be twisted and perverted until it can no longer be recognized in such theories. The attempt is made supposedly to make the church appear scientifically respectable. To make this attempt palatable to children of God who earnestly desire to hold on to the Scriptures, various subterfuges are employed. Thus, for example, it is claimed that the important question is *who* created all things, not *how* all things were created, as though the two could ever be separated. This is done in order to make it possible to maintain that God somehow is the originator of all things, but that nevertheless there was a process

of evolution, or so-called progressive creationism, by which He originated all things and brought them into being. The same attempt is made with respect to the days of creation-week. The days are changed into periods, for example, for but one reason: to attempt to satisfy the claims of evolutionistic scientism.

The sad result of all this is that even in the church today there are those who hold up strict creation-faith to mockery and contempt as something foolish, unscientific, unreasonable, and out-of-date. They take the side of the enemy of the Christian faith and the enemy of the Word of God.

We emphasize this, not because we have to prove that the Word of God is reasonable: this cannot be proved, but can only be pointed out. Nor do we say this because faith in the Word of God is based on human reason and must meet the test of reason: for the Word of God and its authority are absolutely above all testing. Nor

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

do we say this in the vain hope of convincing unbelief on its own rationalistic ground. There is but one cure for unbelief, and that is the grace of conversion. But we say this for those children of God who must constantly bear the brunt of the barbed taunts and mocking jeers of those who assault their creation-faith by this method. The devil is an excellent psychologist, you know. He knows the power of repetition. He knows that if the subtle lie is repeated often enough and by the right people, he can create doubts and wavering in the soul of any child of God, and make him begin to think within himself, "I wonder whether I am right after all." Today there is many a child of God who, impressed by the learning and the theological or scientific status or the sheer numbers of those who cast doubts on the simple creation-truth of God's Word, is assailed by doubt and weakness of faith and becomes inclined somewhat to give up the battle.

There is but one cure for such doubt:

prayerfully and quietly and calmly take your Bible in hand. Read it in its simplicity and its clarity, as the Word of your God. You will find that there is nothing in the narrative of creation

that is contrary to any reasonable conception and understanding of the origin of the universe. You will find nothing whatsoever that is in conflict with the reality of existing things as we know them. The difference between a believing Christian and a modern evolutionist is not that the latter offers a reasonable interpretation of the origin and beginning of things, while the former, against all reality, tries to make himself believe nonsense and foolishness. The difference is that the Christian commences with God and proceeds from the faith that God with wisdom framed all things, while the modern unbeliever starts with nothing and attempts to

show by mere reason how all things from nothing developed.

What is unreasonable about that Christian faith? What is reasonable about that unbelieving evolutionism?

It is reasonable to start with God, and it is unreasonable to commence with nothing. For God is the sovereign reality!

It is reasonable to believe in various creative acts whereby God Almighty called into existence all things and every separate creature. It is contrary to all reason, and in conflict with all experience as well, to present creatures, widely apart and distinct, as evolving from one another.

It is reasonable to believe that God called into being the raw material of the universe, the chaos; that in it He called the light into being; that He created the separation of the firmament, in which the worlds float; that in it by creative power He separated the dry land and the water; that from it He called forth the entire world

of vegetation, creating each plant with the power of reproducing itself after its kind. We say:

... there is nothing in the narrative of creation that is contrary to any reasonable conception and understanding of the origin of the universe.

all this is reasonable! There may be many things that are too deep for human mind to grasp. Indeed, we must expect this in view of the infinite perfections of the divine and the finitude

of the human mind. But there is nothing nonsensical and foolish about it all. There is nothing that cannot be conceived. And all is in harmony with reality and full of wisdom.

God's Creation of the Heavenly Luminaries (Gen. 1:14-19)

What we have stated in the introductory paragraphs is also true with respect to the creation of the heavenly luminaries.

The wisdom of the world objects that the account in Genesis is not scientific. They object because, they say, the viewpoint of Genesis is geocentric. That is, it presents the earth

as being the center of the universe, while science today knows very well that this is not true. They object because Genesis makes the distinction between day and night prior to the existence of the sun. They object because Genesis puts the creation of the vegetable world before that of the heavenly lights. They object, too, because according to Genesis innumerable large worlds are called into existence in a mere day, while much more attention is paid in creation-week to our little globe, the earth. These are some of the objections that the wisdom of the world has raised against the record of Genesis 1.

But let us see what is scientific.

Evolution has its own theories, of course, in opposition to the Word of God. In fact, it is rather peculiar how many theories have been devised with respect to the formation of the heavenly luminaries. But actually, if you have dealt with one, you have dealt with all of them. Let us take one of these theories for a moment, present it simply, and analyze it. It runs, with variations, as follows: the various heavenly bodies had their origin in an extremely hot, fiery mist or gaseous cloud. We may ask at once: whence did such a fiery mist arise? But they do not tell you — because they cannot. Then this fiery mist began to cool off unevenly, and as it did so, it lost its balance and began to whirl. If you ask how it came about that this cooling-off process set in, while that gaseous cloud had been there to begin with for a long time, there is no answer. If you inquire as to why it cooled off unevenly and began to whirl and rotate, and even continued to rotate, with perpetual motion, once it was started, the only answer that can be furnished is that it just happened that way. Moreover, the theory is that as this fiery mist cooled off and began to rotate, there were large portions thrown off into space, and these, in turn, cooled off and began to rotate and revolve, and thus all the heavenly luminaries of our solar system were formed with the sun at their center, inclusive of the earth and its moon. This same process supposedly took

place in other galaxies in the far reaches of space.

Of course, it must be added that this required an astronomical number of years! Certainly, from the point of view of reasonableness, we are not ready to exchange this science, so-called, for the narrative of revelation! Yet even theistic evolutionism attempts the vain compromise of trying to patch up this foolishness with the injection of some religion!

Nor are the objections raised by unbelieving science at all valid.

As to the alleged geocentric viewpoint of the creation narrative, let us note that there is absolutely nothing in the entire narrative — nor anywhere in the Scriptures — that makes the earth locally and physically the center of the universe. We may well remember that the entire narrative is written from the viewpoint of one who takes his position on the earth, and that, too, without a telescope. Thus it is, too, that the language of Holy Writ is not the technical language of the astronomer, but the same everyday language which we speak today. No more than anyone today views the setting sun and declares, "Well, the earth has made another half turn," no more do the Scriptures speak such language. On the other hand, we must indeed remember that the Bible presents the earth as the center of creation from the viewpoint of its significance and its history. The earth was destined to be the home of the highest creature. This is true not merely in view of the fact that the earth is created as the home of man. But it is to be in history the home of the Son of God in the flesh, the King of all, in whom ultimately all things in heaven and on earth are to be united.

Further, as to the objection about the priority of day and night, the answer of the Scriptures is very simple. The light was created before the light-bearers; and God Himself brought about the alternation of day and night, very likely through the concentration of that light. That same prior creation of the light, on the first day, is the answer to the objection that the world of plants was created be-

fore the sun. That vegetable world thrived in the light that God had already created.

Finally, as to the creation of innumerable worlds in one day, we may certainly point out, in the first place, that there is no objection whatsoever to the facts of size and distance which the science of astronomy teaches us — in so far as these facts are accurate and verifiable. We are told that the sun is almost 93 million miles away from our earth and that it is many, many times the size of our earth. We are told, in fact, that the earth is but an infinitesimally small speck in comparison with many of the heavenly bodies. Thus there are many facts about the universe which astronomy has discovered. In fact, men have by no means uncovered all the mysteries of the firmament. To all such data there is no objection on the part of the Christian whatsoever. On the contrary, to faith this simply emphasizes the power and wisdom of our God; and it lends new meaning to such testimony of the Scriptures, "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him" (Ps. 103:11).

Nor do these facts contradict the truth that the heavenly lights were called into existence in one day. Let alone the fact that their material was called into existence on the first day and that the waters above, to which the heavenly luminaries belong, were separated on the second day, so that what took place on the fourth day was that by God's created Word the light that was originally created was dispersed and concentrated in various light-bearers, we may point out that the very data about the size and number of the heavenly bodies serve only to underscore for faith the greatness of the work of the Almighty on the fourth day, when He said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens."

In answer to the question what was created on the fourth day, the Scriptures inform us in Genesis 1:16 of the creation of sun, moon, and stars: "And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day,

and the lesser light to rule the night, he made the stars also." Hence, God created, in the first place, those light-centers which possess and radiate their own light, such as our sun and some of the stars. In the second place, He created those lights which merely reflect the light of these light-centers, such as the moon and the planets and other stars. All of these are included in the creative work of the fourth day.

The creation of the fourth day, therefore, constitutes a marvel of beauty and order. Nothing in all the universe stands still. Everything moves. All the great lights in all the expanse of the heavens move constantly. There is our own earth in its constant rotation and its incessant journeying. There are the planets that revolve, like our earth, about the sun. There are the mysterious, long-tailed comets, which in their long journeys make known to us their presence only occasionally. There are the myriads of stars in their constellations. And all these creatures have their place and keep their paths according to the ordinance of Him who called them all by name. The more that little man is able to probe into the far reaches of the universe with his eye and to discover these works of God's hand and their marvelous arrangement and order, the more amazing becomes the mighty work of God that was formed on the fourth day and is still maintained from moment to moment by the Word of His power.

Small wonder that with the psalmist of Psalm 8 we are taught to exclaim: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (vv. 3, 4). Or consider the silent, yet powerful speech of this work of God as it is articulated in the 19th Psalm: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their

words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and

there is nothing hid from the heat thereof" (vv. 1-6). Or heed the injunction of Psalm 136: "O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever. To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever; To him that by

wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever.... To him that made great lights ... the sun to rule by day ... the moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever." □

Book Review

Understanding the New Age, by Russel Chandler. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993. 367pp. \$10.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma.]

Scanning the shelf entitled "New Age" in the bookstore or library, one finds few books which serve as introduction to the broad scope of the New Age Movement. Most of the books, both those in favor of New Age thought and those against it, treat only a particular aspect of the movement. For one who is new to the study of this movement, this can be both confusing and frustrating. He needs to find a book which furnishes a comprehensive guide to and evaluation of the New Age Movement.

Russel Chandler in his book provides an excellent and readable sum-

mary of the New Age Movement. He traces its origin to the social revolution of the 1960s, and demonstrates how the goals of the hippie culture have now become the ideals of our present society. While many evangelical authors take aim at specific practices of those who trivialize and exploit the New Age Movement, or of those who carry the Movement to its occultic extremes, Chandler exposes the *world-view* of the entire Movement. He lays out for the reader in an understandable way many of the abstract premises that are foundational to every facet of New Age practice. Only after the premises and goals of the New Age thought are brought to light does the author proceed to demonstrate the wide influence of the many individuals and institutions that promote New Age ideals.

What adds to the value of this book is that the author does not simply "report" on the study he made of

the New Age Movement, but he evaluates this movement. We are cautioned against a radical reaction to everything that comes out of this Movement, but we are also warned against the subtle influence this Movement may have on us as God's people. Using Scripture, Chandler exposes the errors of reincarnation, relativism, humanism, and finding salvation in man rather than in Jesus Christ. Although the author is weak on such key doctrines as the divinity of Christ, the authoritative character of Scripture, and total depravity, nevertheless he uses these truths correctly to combat the errors of the New Age.

To those interested in further study of the New Age Movement this book is a welcome addition to one's library. Those who are interested in beginning a study of the New Age Movement are well advised to read this book first before picking up another. □

Report of Classis West

September 7, 1994

Classis West met in Hull, IA, on Wednesday, September 7. For most of the delegates this was the first opportunity to see the beautiful new church building of our Hull congregation. Classis met all day Wednesday, finishing its business around 7:00 in the evening. Rev. Michael DeVries served ably as the chairman of this meeting of Classis.

Classis noted the absence of Rev. Steven Houck, who was recuperating from recent heart surgery, and extended its greetings to him and prayers on his behalf. Classis also extended its farewell and thanks to Pastor Ronald VanOverloop, who has already taken up his new labors in Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church. Pastor VanOverloop played an important

role in Classis West in recent years, serving both as Church Visitor and Stated Clerk. His labors were much appreciated. With gladness Classis West received Rev. Gise VanBaren, now serving in Loveland, CO, into its fellowship once again, after an absence of some 29 years during which he served in Classis East.

Classis spent most of its time con-

sidering two overtures from the Doon consistory. The first overture seeks a change in the procedure for calling a seminary professor. Under the current system, synod elects and calls a professor for service in the seminary. Upon accepting the call to be a professor, the minister becomes emeritus from his congregation and serves in the seminary until retirement, when he is declared emeritus again, but as a professor. The overture seeks to establish a procedure by which the synod elects an appointment to the seminary, with an alternate. The synod would then designate a calling church in the Grand Rapids area, which church would then call the minister who was appointed to teach in the seminary. The man who accepts the call would then have his membership and ministerial credentials transferred to the calling church and be under the supervision of that consistory. Classis West considered the overture and decided to forward it to Synod with approval, recommending only some rather minor amendments.

The second overture, which Classis also forwarded to Synod with approval, seeks a change in the system by which emeritus ministers are

supported and supervised. Under the current system the ministerial credentials of a pastor who "retires" remain with the congregation where he last served, even if he moves and transfers membership to another congregation. The supervision of the minister, together with the responsibility of seeing that his financial necessities are cared for by the churches also belongs to his last congregation, even if they are hundreds of miles from where he now lives. The overture of Doon proposes to give supervision of the emeritus minister's work, support, and spiritual care to the local congregation where he is a member. This would be accomplished by allowing the minister's credentials to transfer with his membership, rather than keeping the minister's credentials in the last church he served. This change involves making a change in Church Order Article 13, as well as the Constitution of the Emeritus Committee.

In other business Classis gave approval to a request from Trinity PRC, Houston, TX, to approach the churches in Classis West for special offerings. These collections would be taken to help offset the cost of the

Conference on Reformed Evangelism which is scheduled to be held in Houston, TX on April 3-5. The congregation of Trinity is promoting this conference heavily, both throughout the churches and in the Houston area. (Any who have not received brochures and registration forms for the Conference may receive such information by writing Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, 214 Barker-Clodine Road, Houston, TX 77094.)

Classis also heard a report from one of the consistories concerning their work in a discipline case. Classis granted approval for the consistory to proceed with the erasure of baptized membership of one who is walking impenitently in sin.

The departure of Rev. VanOverloop necessitated some elections. Rev. Steven Key was elected as Stated Clerk of Classis West, with Rev. Wayne Bekkering as Assistant Stated Clerk, and Rev. Gise VanBaren was elected to serve as an alternate Church Visitor.

The next meeting of Classis West is scheduled to be held in Loveland, CO on March 1, 1995.

Rev. Steven R. Key,
Stated Clerk

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregational Activities

September 5 marked the first anniversary of the first meeting for worship of those who would eventually be organized into the Georgetown PRC of Bauer, MI. One cannot help but stand back and marvel at what our heavenly Father has done in this past year. His faithfulness in the past can only assure all of us of His con-

tinual faithfulness today and in the future.

God in His faithfulness has given Georgetown their first pastor, Rev. R. VanOverloop. It was with much joy and thanksgiving that the congregation of Georgetown, along with others from nearby churches, met at the Hudsonville, MI PRC on the evening of September 1 to witness Rev. VanOverloop's installation.

Prof. R. Decker, as Georgetown's moderator, had charge of that service. He preached from I Timothy 4:16: "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them: and in doing this thou shalt both save

thyself and them that hear thee." This service was followed by a get-acquainted hour in the fellowship hall of Hudsonville.

Rev. VanOverloop began his ministry at Georgetown the following Sunday. He chose for his first sermon that morning a message entitled, "Pray for Me," based on Ephesians 4:19.

Georgetown has scheduled their first annual church picnic for later in the month of September, at which time there will be a welcome program for the VanOverloop family.

We can also include here a note that Pastor VanOverloop now serves as bulletin clerk at Georgetown. You

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

can reach him by phone with any announcements at (616) 662-0257.

On the morning of August 27 the congregation of our Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI held what they refer to as Breakfast at the Beach, a breakfast for members of all ages held at North Shore County Park, on the shores of Lake Michigan.

In mid-August the congregation of our Byron Center, MI PRC met and decided to approve the purchase of a new organ for their church auditorium.

Mission Activities

After Rev. Haak's decline of a call to serve as home missionary to work at San Luis Valley in Southern Colorado, the calling church, our Loveland, CO PRC, formed a trio of men consisting of the Revs. W. Bekkering, A. denHartog, and T. Miersma. And at the congregational meeting held August 28, Loveland extended a call to Rev. A. denHartog to serve our churches in that capacity.

This past summer, while on a two-week preaching assignment to our mission in the San Luis Valley, Pastor J. Mahtani, of our Trinity PRC in Houston, TX, was able to give a slide presentation to the members of the mission entitled, "Evangelism in Houston."

The Council of our Loveland congregation has posted a list of people who attend the mission along with a list of their children and their ages. Members of the congregation have been encouraged to write to one or more of these families in an attempt to get better acquainted.

Young People's Activities

We could not help but notice that the host society of next year's Young People's Convention, the Young People's Society of our Grandville,

MI PRC, was already busy at work, appropriately on Labor Day, with a fund-raiser for that convention. They sponsored a combination Pancake Breakfast and Car Wash at our Hope PR Christian School in Walker, MI.

Denominational Activities

An overflow crowd squeezed into the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI on Sunday evening, August 28, to enjoy an hour of Christian fellowship in both singing songs of praise and in hearing the "Voices of Victory," a quartet of men from a couple of our churches, give a shortened version of a concert. It proved to be an inspirational night of praise to God made up of audience singing and some good old-fashioned quartet four-part harmony as well.

Food For Thought

The radical mistake of the human race is that of pushing God into second, or third, or last place, of putting the will of self in the place of the will of God, of giving higher value to other goals than to the purpose of God.

— G.W. Bromiley □

NOTICE!!!

The Stated Clerk of Classis West is now Rev. Steven R. Key. His address is: 225 Pierce, Randolph, WI 53956.

OPEN LETTER

to the PRC
in America

April 28, 1994

We received with thanks your love offering of US\$1,660.68 to our Church Building Fund.

We are still not given the approval by the relevant authorities to make use of our church for temporary worship. As such, we are still making use of rented premises for our Sunday worship. All the activities that were planned to be carried out in the new church were either shelved or carried out in rented premises.

Do continue to pray with us that we will wait upon the Lord and not be weary and faint.

May the Lord continue to bless you richly.

Yours faithfully,
First Evangelical Reformed Church
of Singapore