



THE **STANDARD BEARER**

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

**Do I have meager provisions?
Am I ill?
Is my house ramshackle?
Am I imprisoned?
Am I even now being persecuted?
Yet, I will thank Him
for the salvation given to one
so undeserving.**

See "The Reformed Family: Saying Thanks" — page 88

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November 15, 1994**

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In This Issue ...

Our readers in the United States will celebrate the National Thanksgiving Day in accordance with the requirement of Article 67 of the Church Order of Dordt on November 24. Our Canadian readers already celebrated Thanksgiving Day on October 10. Both the meditation by Rev. John Heys and the article by Mrs. MaryBeth Lubbers, "The Reformed Family: Saying Thanks," reflect on a Reformed, Christian thanksgiving, and its importance.

This issue signals the beginning of two, new, provocative series. In his article, "Cross-Cultural Missions — Its Biblical Basis," under the rubric, "Go Ye Into All the World," our missions-column, Rev. Ronald VanOverloop launches a series of articles on this subject. He is cooperating in this series with Rev. Russ Dykstra, Rev. Jay Kortering, and Rev. Jaikishin Mahtani. All are, or have been, involved in missions, Rev. VanOverloop as a former home missionary of the PRC; Rev. Dykstra as a longtime member of the Foreign Mission Committee of the PRC; Rev. Kortering as minister-on-loan from the PRC to the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore; and Rev. Mahtani as himself the fruit of missions and formerly pastor of the Covenant Reformed Church of Singapore.

Ruling elder Ed Gritters of the Hope PRC, Redlands, CA begins a study of the work of the elder and the deacon in the Reformed church. Mr. Gritters, who has served both the Redlands congregation and the Protestant Reformed denomination in the office of elder for many years, will treat the office and work of the elder. His articles will be followed by a similar treatment of the office of the deacon by one who has been a deacon in the PRC. We chose "Ministering to the Saints" as the name of the rubric. If our readers address questions about these offices, and the practical exercise of them in the congregation, to our writers, the length of the series might profitably be extended beyond that which we envisioned.

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, Rev. Ron Cammenga, and Prof. Herman Hanko continue their series. Rev. Bruinsma speaks to our young people about maturing to a godly "independence." Rev. Cammenga enlightens us concerning the policy and practice of church visitation. Those in the PRC and other Reformed churches who are not officebearers will appreciate his including the actual questions that are asked of councils at church visitation by the delegates from the classis. Prof. Hanko relates the stirring history of a man who is rightly to be regarded as a "Reformed church father," Guido de Brès.

All of this and more, in this issue.

—DJE



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Thankful for a Blessed Victory

But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 15:57

In this verse the apostle Paul presents the blessed truth that God gives us the victory which He realized through Christ Jesus our Lord. To appreciate this blessed truth, we must consider what we need and what we by God's grace receive.

The word "but" wherewith this verse begins reveals that through Paul our God presents a blessed change, which He realizes through His Son. In verses 50 through 56, the apostle Paul presents the awesome truth that our flesh and blood cannot, and do not, inherit the kingdom of heaven. In fact, through Adam and Eve, and all their seed which are not saved by our God in His grace, comes the torment of hell.

For death is not simply physical separation from this earth and from friends and loved ones. Death brings to hell the souls of those not chosen in Christ; and when Christ returns, also the bodies of these enemies of God and Christ will be cast into everlasting torment. The Book of Revelation reveals that in several passages.

For us, therefore, is the important question as to whether we believe in Christ Jesus as our Savior, or belong to Satan, and cling to his lie, which he spoke to Adam and Eve, namely, that we are gods, and can do what we please.

If, however, we are by God's grace called to be His people, we have a wonderful victory, as Paul states it here in this verse presented above. Our Lord Jesus Christ earned for us a victory which we do not deserve, or even want, as far as our flesh is concerned. Indeed we want deliverance from pain and physical misery; but that is not the basic victory which we receive through our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, we will in heavenly glory be freed from pain, and from every kind of misery. But the victory of which the text speaks is the triumph our God realizes for us over Satan and the sin into which he caused us to fall.

What we should continually — not merely occasionally — bear in mind is that every sin, no matter in what form it comes, is an act of hatred against God. Every sin is doing what Satan wants men to do because he hates God and wants us to live in hatred against our God. Every sin is an activity of going against God with heart, mind, and strength. It always is an act in which we do what Satan taught mankind to do, namely, become a god, and do what pleases man's flesh, rather than do what glorifies and pleases God.

The victory of which Paul wrote is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ. According to Scripture, it is our victory over Satan and sin. Our God declared that to Satan, telling him that He is going to put enmity against Satan in the hearts of some of mankind, and that He will bring forth Christ, who would be born of Mary without the work of a man. Christ will be the Son of God, brought forth through the virgin Mary.

Still more. Take note of the fact that we are spoken of here as those who are given a tremendous victory through His Son, who was born out of that virgin. We did not, and will not, get a victory because of what we did. Our text states emphatically: "God giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

We therefore owe our God thanks for giving us that blessed victory. Of it we sing from stanza one of our *Psalter*, number 383:

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.

This is the versification of what we find in Psalm 139:14, where we read: "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." That song confesses that we have been given a victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, a victory over Satan and sin.

Therefore, on our Thanksgiving Day, but also on every other day, we are called to thank God for this victory which He realized through His Son Jesus Christ. We did not personally win over Satan and sin. It is a victory which our God realized through His Son. We must not brush aside the truth that, no matter what happens, God is getting this victory for every elect child whom He chose eternally in Christ. Therefore we have this calling to thank God for giving us this victory. We find that astounding truth in Romans 8:28 in these words: "And we know that all things work together

Rev. Heys is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." We have this victory one hundred percent because, as the above text states, God gives it to us through His Son.

Let us bear in mind that this gift of God is the basic element of our salvation. It makes the other parts possible, such as deliverance from the everlasting punishment which we deserve by nature. The very desire for salvation is part of the victory over Satan and sin; and it becomes ours because God gives us this victory. We do not gain it by our own power before it has already been given to us.

We should bear in mind, and hold on to tightly, the fact that in our text God through Paul promises us the victory which He announced the day when Satan got us to hate God, and act as though we are gods. He told Satan that day, that He would put enmity in us against this devilish angel, who got us to commit this terrible sin. He promised to make His elect love Himself and have enmity in their hearts against Satan. That basically is the victory which God gives us through our Lord Jesus Christ. That indeed is a most precious gift.

The sad situation in the church world today is that salvation is presented merely as deliverance from the punishment which God told Adam would come upon those who break His law, as we read in Genesis 3:3. And on Thanksgiving Day, relief from that punishment is presented as that for which we should give thanks to God. The sad thing is that Satan uses so many material things to get church members to turn away from spiritual matters, and to get them to be concerned only about deliverance from the misery and pain, bringing joy to their flesh, but not to their souls.

There was a time, in the past, when Satan was not as victorious as he is today in the church world when he attacks members of churches in order to make them his disciples, not Christ's. Consider the awesome

change that has come in the church-world today, and that raises serious questions about church conduct and behavior. People consider that to be their victory which actually is their defeat by Satan.

Even on the Sabbath Day, what men consider to be their victory actually manifests their defeat. We, today, have automobiles, radios, and television sets which can bring church members along with Satan and his friends, who are citizens in his kingdom of darkness. Earthly pleasures are sought on the Sabbath Day. God gave us that Sabbath Day so we could worship Him, and be busy *all day* with spiritual matters. Things formerly condemned as sin, some churches present today as church victory. They manifest thankfulness for material things, brushing spiritual things aside. They enjoy, and sing songs, because they enjoy the music. They will applaud soloists and choirs for the music, not for the truths which were sung. In fact, sometimes they want and request singing, enjoying it more than the preaching. And how often do we give serious thought to what we are singing? We sing with our voices; but are we singing with our hearts and minds?

What we should bear in mind is that the day sin entered into man's life, the salvation which God promises in Genesis 3:15 is deliverance from Satan and sin. That victory which God gives us ends Satan's devilish victory over us. And God told Satan that He would put enmity in the hearts of His elect against him, and the sin which he caused man to love. That is why in John 3:3 we read: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." Implied is the blessed truth that, in the hearts and minds of the elect, God will implant love of Himself, and of all that which this love would produce. As we read in Ephesians 2:1, God quickens us, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

The awesome question, however, is whether God has given us that spiritual victory over the bond-

age of sin into which Satan got us. The question on Thanksgiving Day, but also on every other day, is whether our God has given us thankfulness for this gift of freedom from Satan and the sin into which Satan had gotten the whole human race; and whether we find in ourselves that love of God that makes us want to glorify Him by our speech and works.

By God's grace we will, not merely on Thanksgiving Day, thank Him for that blessed salvation, which Christ earned for us. By all means we must do that on Thanksgiving Day. But our calling is to do so every day. Every day we must fight the sinfulness of our flesh, and the boasting of what we are and did. That victory for which we thank God is not a victory which we realized. We must thank God because He giveth us that victory. As we read in verse 50, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." No, thanking God for giving us this victory is thankfully praising God for what He did in His grace. Take a strong hold of that truth: We *thank God* because He *giveth us the victory* through His Son, who is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Salvation is, from beginning to end, and as far as every detail of it is concerned, God's gift to us. Therefore we are here called to thank God, and not boast of what we did. We enjoy that victory; but if we do this correctly, we attribute every bit of that victory to our God, as the song quoted a moment ago presents that truth: "All that I am I owe to Thee."

Hold on tightly then to the truth which our God presents to us through Paul. Call every bit of your salvation the gift of God's grace; and thank Him for the victory which He realized for His elect.

If we do that sincerely, we reveal that we have been given victory by our God, through His Son. Praise God then from whom all blessings flow. □

PRC Featured in a Dutch Daily Newspaper

Offer of Grace Flatly Contradicts Election according to the Protestant Reformed Churches "We Say that the Truth is Logical"

This was the bold headline on page two of the second section of *Reformatorsch Dagblad* on Friday, August 12, 1994. *Reformatorsch Dagblad* is a daily newspaper published by Reformed men and presenting the Reformed perspective on the news. It circulates widely throughout the Netherlands.

The article was the result of interviews that correspondent Klaas van der Zwaag conducted earlier this summer with the Rev. Richard G. Moore, pastor of the PRC of Hull, Iowa, and with the editor of the *Standard Bearer*. van der Zwaag translated the interviews into the Dutch language and wrote the article as the twelfth in a series in the Dutch paper on churches in America ("Geloven in Amerika").

The questions put to the Protestant Reformed ministers were good, pointed questions, calculated to bring out the basic, distinctive beliefs and practices of the PRC. If the written form of the interview with the editor of the *SB* is an indication, Mr. van der Zwaag got the answers straight and did justice to the positions on various, important doctrinal and ethical issues of the PRC. Not every nuance was captured, nor was every qualifying phrase included, but this cannot be expected in the publishing of an interview.

The full-page article is a good introduction of the PRC to the readership of *Reformatorsch Dagblad*.

Supposing that the readers of the *SB* will be interested in this introduction of the PRC to the Dutch, I have translated the article into English. What follows is my translation of the article on the PRC in the August 12, 1994 issue of *Reformatorsch Dagblad*, without editorial comment. (Anyone interested in a copy of the original article, reduced in size, can obtain it by writing or calling the business office of the *SB*.)

The offer of grace makes God dependent upon man. God is sovereign in election and reprobation. These conceptions in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) resemble in many respects those of the spiritual father of the Reformed Congregations in the Netherlands ("Gerefor-

meerde Gemeenten in Nederland"), Dr. C. Steenblok. However, in practice the PRC draw different conclusions. This denomination opposes conversion as an "extraordinary mystical experience." Also every confessing member is obligated to partake of the Lord's Supper.

The PRC came into existence in 1924 after a conflict in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) over common grace ("algemene genade"). At that time the CRC deposed the preacher Herman Hoeksema and a number of consistories because they repudiated the doctrine of common grace. Hoeksema also fiercely opposed the "well-meant offer of grace," irreconcilable, on his view, with the unconditional decree of election and reprobation. The PRC is a small denomination of 26 churches and about 6,000 members, almost all of whom live in America. Theologically, the denomination is very active. That appears, among other indications, from a conversation with dogmatics professor David J. Engelsma, professor of theology at the Protestant Reformed Seminary in Grand Rapids, and with Rev. R. G. Moore in Hull (Iowa).

Against Misunderstandings

According to Prof. Engelsma, many outside the PRC have a mistaken notion of the doctrine of the PRC:

People think that we do not preach the gospel to all men. What we really oppose is the presupposition that God has a sincere desire to save everyone who hears the Word of the preaching. We maintain that the gospel is preached to everyone and that God calls everyone to faith in Jesus Christ. With this,

however, it holds perfectly that God wishes only the salvation of the elect. He gives His grace only to those who have been predestinated to eternal life.

When asked about this, Prof. Engelsma says that the doctrine of his church shows significant similarities to that of Dr. C. Steenblok. His book concerning covenant, calling, and baptism, he has read with (some) agreement. Just as was the case with Steenblok in his day, also the PRC are criticized for rationalism and hyper-Calvinism.

We say that the truth is logical in this sense that there can be no contradictions between the various truths of the Bible. All of the doctrines that make up the entire body of truth are harmoniously related to each other. If the truth would be contradictory, theology would become a theology of paradox, just as Karl Barth speaks of "yes and no." God does not will that everyone be saved. Either He accomplishes this will or He is unable to fulfil that will and is accordingly a frustrated, an impotent God.

A Twofold Calling

Prof. Engelsma defends the idea of a twofold calling: an external and an internal calling. The faith of the Reformation is, according to him,

constantly threatened by Arminianism and by hyper-Calvinism.

We are criticized for hyper-Calvinism as though we would deny the responsibility of man and would not call every man to conversion. Such a condemnation is unfair and unjust. We must indeed watch out for it that we are so fearful of Arminianism that we no longer call to conversion. In that regard, we have no hesitation to call the unconverted to conversion. We are very definitely committed to the task of missions and evangelism.

At the same time, Engelsma says that Christians can do nothing in their own strength.

We can in our own strength have no sorrow over our sin or be active with a view to justification or in sanctification. When God calls us to repentance and conversion, He Himself gives the strength to accomplish that and to make His calling effectual. When I stand in the pulpit and call to repentance and faith, God works through this preaching, especially through the command of repentance and faith.

Prof. Engelsma thinks that the external and internal aspects of the call must not be separated from each other, as that takes place, in his judg-

ment, in the Reformed Congregations in America (Netherlands Reformed Congregations).

For them, truth is experiential. My main objection against their doctrine is that they maintain that there must be a mystical experience before you are assured of your faith. With this I have great difficulty. The danger is then that feeling replaces faith. Of course, we must oppose exclusive head-knowledge, but faith in Christ is not the same as feeling. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of trust. There are times that I feel it — that is a wonderful, heavenly experience. But also the opposite is the case, but then faith still remains. My second objection is that the (required) feeling is viewed as a mystical experience. For the most part, you do not have such experiences under the preaching, but you enjoy them usually in private, sometimes even in the middle of the night. In my opinion, there are people who believe, but do not come to the Lord's Supper on account of their uncertainty and doubt. That, in turn, causes doubt concerning their soul's salvation, for feelings are always uncertain and changeable. Faith is assured in the promises, not in feeling. I view this as spiritual navel-gazing. □

(to be concluded)

Letters

Augustine against Date-Setting

Thank you for the informative and well-written editorial in the October 1, 1994 issue of the *Standard Bearer* concerning the false prophecy of Mr. Harold Camping. The Bible forbids any date-setting. Also the great St. Augustine, living in the

fourth century, A.D., warns against this sort of thing when he writes in his exposition of the Psalms, ch. VI:

"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no neither angel, nor Power, neither the Son, but the Father alone" shows clearly enough that no man shall arrogate to himself the knowledge of that time, by any computation of years (volume

VIII, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*).

If not even the angels in heaven know the hour and time of Christ's coming, what possible chance do we as human beings have of knowing the exact time of the Lord's return?

Barney Sikma
New York, NY

Guido de Brès: Author of the *Belgic Confession*

Introduction

Part of the power and enduring value of our confessions is the fact that they arose out of the life of the church. They were not drawn up by men sitting in ivory towers, contemplating the truth of Scripture but far removed from the battle for the faith. They breathe the life of the church's struggles.

The Heidelberg Catechism was written in the struggles between Calvinism on the one hand and Lutheranism and Romanism on the other hand, as these struggles were bitterly fought out in Frederick's Palatinate. The Canons of Dordt arose out of the fierce battle with Arminianism which all but engulfed the churches in the Netherlands in the first part of the 17th century. The *Confession of Faith* (*Belgic Confession*) was written and reflects the bitter persecution of the saints in the Lowlands in the early years of the Reformation.

It is persecution which gives to the *Confession of Faith* its moving power. The affirmations of the confession, "We all believe ..."; "We confess ..."; "We believe and profess ..." take on new meaning when we understand that they are shouts that arise from scaffolds, burning piles of tinder, deep prison cells, and cruel torture chambers.

Its author, Guido de Brès, died

on the scaffold for his faith. To his story we now turn.¹

Early Life And Conversion

Guido de Brès was born in Mons in 1522², the fourth child of a family of glass painters. In Mons the art of glass painting had been highly developed, and Mons deservedly had an international reputation for the skill of its artists. Guido himself was trained for this work.

Guido's family carried on the traditions of the guilds in Mons, although the children were split on Reformation doctrine. John, the oldest, while remaining Roman Catholic all his life, helped Protestants in times of persecution. Christophe was a seller of glassware, but spent his entire life distributing Bibles and Protestant literature, often at great risk to his life. Jerome became a cloth dyer and remained within the Romish Church. Marlette, the only girl, married a Protestant in Valenciennes and, with her husband, was deeply involved in Protestant affairs.

The city of Mons was on the border of France and the Lowlands, that part of the Lowlands which is now Belgium. Here Lutheranism had first come and had been eagerly studied by the citizens; but the Huguenots from France soon followed with the purer Reformation doctrines of John Calvin.

Guido, already in his teens, heard from others Reformation truths and could not help but listen to the stories of those who, already then, were being killed for the sake

of the gospel. He was only 14 when the news reached him of Tyndale's cruel martyrdom.³ It may have been Tyndale's willingness to die for the sake of translating the Bible into the language of the people that led Guido to study the Scriptures. But it was through this study that God led him to true faith in Jesus Christ.

Guido decided, perhaps because of persecution in the Lowlands, to go to London and join a refugee church in East London. East London was a haven for refugees from many different countries in Europe who were forced to flee because of persecution. And so in that part of London could also be found a Walloon⁴ congregation, to which Guido joined himself. The refugees had peace in England because of the benign rule of Edward VI who, though young, favored Protestantism.⁵ Here he studied for the ministry and listened to the powerful

¹ It is very difficult to find any material on Guido de Brès; but an outstanding popular biography has been written by Thea B. Van Halsema which bears the title: *Glorious Heretic: The Story of Guido de Brès*.

² Schaff, in his *History of the Creeds*, claims the date may have been 1523.

³ The translator of the English Bible who died for his faith in the Lowlands.

⁴ French-speaking citizens of the Lowlands.

⁵ Edward died after only a few years on the throne and "Bloody Mary," who followed Edward, began a systematic persecution of Protestants which forced many to flee again to the continent.

preaching of the great Reformers á Lasco and Martin Bucer.

Work In The Lowlands

But Guido's love was for his native land, and in 1552, at the age of 30, he returned — as an evangelist and traveling preacher. From that moment on, his life was in almost constant danger.

His first field of labor was the city of Lille, in which a large secret Protestant community had been established under the name, the Church of the Rose. From Lille he went to Ghent, where he published a tract entitled *Le Bâton de la foi*,⁶ a stirring defense of the Reformed faith.

Guido enjoyed a brief interlude at this time. Traveling to Frankfurt in Germany, Guido met Calvin and was persuaded to come to Geneva. In the three years he spent in Geneva, Guido learned the Reformed faith more perfectly, mastered Greek and Hebrew under Beza and Calvin, and was more fully equipped for the gospel ministry. During this period (1559), he also married Catherine Ramon and with her had four or five children, the oldest named Israel, and the second, Sara.

While Guido was in Geneva, Charles V⁷ retired, weary and careworn, to a monastery in Spain, and his cruel son Philip II came to the throne determined to stamp out all "heresy," especially in the Lowlands. While, therefore, up to this time persecution had been sporadic and relatively light, it now became more severe and bitter.

de Brès, after returning again to the Lowlands, was forced to travel in disguise and under the pseudonym of Jerome. Although the cities in southern Belgium and northern France (Lille, Antwerp, Mons) were the area of his labor, his headquarters was in Doornik, where he ministered to the congregation which had chosen as its name, the Church of the Palm.

Here two former ministers had been burned at the stake for their

faith; here the congregation knew de Brès only as "Jerome"; here the meetings of the congregation were always held in secret and at night, with small groups of not more than 12 attending at one time.

In spite of the problems which the congregation faced, de Brès organized the church with elders and deacons and faithfully administered the sacraments.

But even this situation did not remain, for a more radical group of the believers, under the leadership of Robert du Four, thought it cowardly and unfaithful to Christ to keep their faith secret. The group, several hundred strong, moved in public procession through the city singing Psalms in open defiance of the authorities. The next night, September 30, 1561, 500 Protestants gathered for the same purpose. The result was that Roman Catholic investigators were sent with orders to suppress Protestantism in the city.

Although Guido managed to hide until December and flee in safety, all the information of the secret congregation was discovered, Guido's true identity was found out, the people of the church were forced to flee or be killed, and Guido's rooms were ransacked and his papers (including letters from Calvin) were burned. Guido was hanged in effigy.

Guido concentrated his work for several years in northern France, perhaps some of the quietest years of his ministerial career. Although also in France persecution against the Huguenots raged, in Guido's area the church had peace. He worked in Amiens, Montdidier, Dieppe, and Sedan, building up the congregations and preaching faithfully the gospel.

But he could not refrain from making periodic trips into his own country, a "lion's den" of danger. He traveled three times to Doornik, his old congregation, once to Brussels to meet with William of Orange concerning matters of union between Calvinists and Lutherans, once to a secret Synod of the Reformed

Churches held in Antwerp (the password for entry was "Vineyard") where de Brès' Confession⁸ was adopted as the official confession of the Reformed Churches.

In 1566 de Brès went to Valenciennes to become a preacher in the church there, a congregation which called itself the Church of the Eagle. While the Protestant faith grew so rapidly that the Roman Catholic authorities dared not interfere in the religion of God's people, certain radical elements once again stepped forward and created trouble. Stirring up large mobs, they went through all the cathedrals smashing, burning, destroying anything that in the least smelled like popery. Philip II, infuriated at this, sent troops to lay siege to the city, which surrendered on Palm Sunday, 1567. Although de Brès escaped with four companions, he was soon captured and imprisoned.

His Martyrdom and Importance

The sad story is now soon told.

He spent the first part of his captivity in a prison in Doornik, where he could receive visitors. Many of his visitors, however, were enemies who came to taunt him. But just as was the case with the apostle Paul (Phil. 1:12-14), Guido's imprisonment became an occasion for him to witness to the truth. When a princess, along with many young court ladies, came to mock, and the princess said in horror at Guido's heavy chains, "My God, Mr. de Brès, I don't see how you can eat, drink, or sleep that way. I think I would die of fear, if I were in your place," Guido responded: "My lady, the good cause for which I suffer and the good conscience God has given me make my bread sweeter and my sleep sounder than those of my per-

⁶ "The Staff of the Faith."

⁷ Ruler of the Holy Roman Empire and present at Worms during Luther's stirring defense.

⁸ See below.

secutors." And, then, still responding to the princess, "It is guilt that makes a chain heavy. Innocence makes my chains light. I glory in them as my badges of honor."

Soon Guido was transferred to Valenciennes and thrown into a dark, cold, damp, rat-infested dungeon known as The Black Hole. In spite of the cold, the hunger, the horror of this hole, Guido wrote a tract on the Lord's Supper and letters to his friends, his aged mother, and his wife. A letter to his wife is an especially moving testimony of his faith.

My dear and well-beloved wife in our Lord Jesus.

Your grief and anguish are the cause of my writing you this letter. I most earnestly pray you not to be grieved beyond measure.... We knew when we married that we might not have many years together, and the Lord has graciously given us seven. If the Lord had wished us to live together longer, he could easily have caused it to be so. But such was not his pleasure. Let his good will be done.... Moreover, consider that I have not fallen into the hands of my enemies by chance, but by the providence of God.... All these considerations have made my heart glad and peaceful, and I pray you, my dear and faithful companion, to be glad with me, and to thank the good God for what he is doing, for he does nothing but what is altogether good and right.... I pray you then to be comforted in the Lord, to commit yourself and your affairs to him, he is the husband of the widow and the father of the fatherless, and he will never leave nor forsake you....

Good-bye, Catherine, my well-beloved! I pray my God to comfort you, and give you resignation to his holy will. Your faithful husband, Guido de Brès.

Guido was publicly hanged on May 31, 1567 at the age of 47. He was pushed off the ladder while comforting the crowd which had gathered and urging them to faithfulness to the Scriptures. His body was left hanging the rest of the day

and buried in a shallow grave where dogs and wild animals dug it up and consumed it.

Guido de Brès is the author of our *Confession of Faith*, although he was assisted by Adrien de Saravia (professor of theology in Leyden), H. Modetus (chaplain of William of Orange), and G. Wingen. It was written in the vain hope that it would persuade the cruel Philip II to see that the views of the Calvinists were truly biblical and stop persecution against them. Roman Catholics had lumped the Calvinists with the radical and wild-eyed Anabaptists who rejected the authority of magistrates, and the Confession sets the Reformed faith over against Anabaptism.

The Confession was thrown over the wall in Doornik and ultimately did reach the king, but it served only to arouse Philip to greater fury against the saints of God.

In a letter which was added to the Confession, Guido and his co-workers protested against being called rebels against authority, solemnly averred that though they number over 100,000 and are cruelly oppressed by "excommunications, imprisonments, banishments, racks, and tortures, and other numberless oppressions which they had

undergone," they obey their government in all things lawful, and that "having the fear of God before their eyes, and being terrified by the threatening of Christ, who had declared in the Gospel that he would deny them before God the Father, in case they denied him before men, they therefore offered their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire."

From this spilled blood God caused to emerge a confession of faith which has held a special place in the hearts of Reformed believers. It is as if, knowing that the confession was written in blood, the saints receive it as a sacred trust, precious and vibrating yet with the faith of their fathers.

Our fathers both *knew* what they believed and *were faithful* to it, even to death. We have received, by the Spirit of truth, the glorious fruit which God worked through them. It is entrusted to our care that we may be faithful to it and teach it to our children.

We ought earnestly to pray that we may know as they did the faith, and that we may be faithful to it as they were, for persecution shall soon also be our lot. □

Confession of Faith

Article XXII

Of Faith in Jesus Christ

We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ, with all his merits, appropriates him, and seeks nothing more besides him. For it must needs follow, either that all things, which are requisite to our salvation, are not in Jesus Christ, or if all things are in him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith, have complete salvation in him. Therefore, for any to assert, that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides him, would be too gross a blasphemy: for hence it would follow, that Christ was but half a Savior. Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean, that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our Righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all his merits, and so many holy works which he has done for us, and in our stead, is our Righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with him in all his benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.

Cross-Cultural Missions — Its Biblical Basis

The last command of the ascending Christ to His church was that it "go into all the world" and preach the gospel "to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

Local congregations and denominations must, to the best of their ability, take the glorious gospel of grace everywhere, to every nation and people. God has elected His people out of every nation, tribe, and tongue to manifest the diversity and extent of His grace. This universality and diversity of the church serve as the occasion for those already saved to take the "good news" to as many as they can, even into different countries with their different cultures.

The gospel crosses cultures. It is greater than any one nation and culture. It may not be limited to any one race of people. It cannot be restricted.

During the whole of the old dispensation the good news of salvation in the Messiah was brought, with rare exceptions, only to the descendants of Abraham. The message of salvation was almost exclusively given to Israelites. The result was that this salvation and its message became an essential part of the life and daily practice of that particular nation and people. The few individuals from outside of the physical seed of Abraham who were saved were obvious exceptions to the

rule; and then (except for the Ninevites) they were saved in the way of being brought into and becoming a part of Israel. The corporate organism of those whom God saved was identified with the nation of Israel. The church and the nation of Israel were seen to be one and the same.

The new dispensation introduces the truth that God saves people "out of every nation." Jews and Gentiles are made to be one in Christ. Instead of being "without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world," non-Jews who believe are "now in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2). The middle wall of partition between the two is broken down. Circumcision and uncircumcision do not amount to anything in themselves.

The crossing of cultures with the gospel began in earnest after the Spirit of the ascending Christ was poured out on Pentecost. The Spirit was given to believers from many different nations, and the good news about the coming of the Christ was proclaimed in many different languages.

The task of taking the preaching from one culture into another is no easy task. It was extremely difficult immediately after the Spirit was poured out upon people from every nation. And it is very difficult today.

The apostle Paul was very conscious of what happens when the gospel crosses from one culture into another. So distinct was the presen-

tation of the gospel to the uncircumcised from its presentation to the circumcised that the inspired apostle speaks of two gospels: "the gospel of the uncircumcision" and "the gospel of the circumcision" (Gal. 2:7). The apostle was inspired to use similar language when he wrote to the Corinthians for the first time, and said that to the Jews he came "as under the law," and to the Gentiles he came "as without law" (I Cor. 9:20, 21). This strong language does not imply and may not be made to imply that the gospel was or is to be changed in any sense. But this language is used to make clear that the manner in which the gospel is to be brought is going to be different. Paul is inspired to use this language to show that the same gospel is to be presented differently, depending upon the audience to whom the gospel is being preached.

In the epistle to the Galatians we are taught that the gospel had to be presented differently to those who had no knowledge of and background in the Old Testament Scriptures, in contrast to those who do have that knowledge and background. The one and same gospel had to be preached differently. It is the same gospel, but its presentation is so distinct that it is called "the gospel of the uncircumcision" in contrast to "the gospel of the circumcision."

These different presentations of the same gospel brought criticism upon Paul. Some charged him with preaching a false gospel. In the first two chapters of his letter to the Galatians he defends himself and the

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gospel he had been preaching among the Gentiles, which included the Galatian churches. Paul labors to show that what he preached among them was not of or from man, but was of and from God (1:11, 12). To substantiate this claim, Paul describes his conversion (1:13-16) and his early ministry (1:16-24). Then he speaks of the conclusion of the leaders of the Christians at the "Jerusalem Council" (2:1-10), namely, that God had committed to him and Barnabas the responsibility of preaching the good news of Jesus Christ to the heathen, even as He had committed to Peter, James, and John the responsibility of preaching the good news of Jesus Christ to the Jews. His unique ministry to the heathen was acknowledged and accepted by the church. Finally, Paul is inspired to describe a time when he was forced to confront Peter when Peter foolishly and sinfully conducted himself as if one had to become a Jew to be truly saved in Jesus Christ. The apostle goes to such length in his inspired epistle to the Galatians in order to show that while the gospel is the same, the manner of its presentation is to be distinct, and this distinction is not to be judged as compromising the gospel.

The Holy Spirit saw fit to include in the book of Acts the record of some of the sermons preached by the apostles. These sermons are examples of the presentation of the gospel and its demands upon those who hear it. In Acts 13 we find a sermon Paul preached to an audience in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (13:16-41). The hearers in that synagogue that Sabbath day were Jews ("men of Israel" — verse 16; "children of the stock of Abraham" — v. 27) and Gentiles who had been proselytized into the Jewish nation ("ye that fear God" — vv. 16, 27). Paul's presentation of the gospel to this audience was based on the Old Testament Scriptures and on God's relationship to Israel and His promise to David. There is obviously no need for this

audience to have an explanation of who David, Moses, and John the Baptist are. No explanation is needed when quotes are made from Psalm 2, Psalm 16, and Isaiah 55.

In Acts 17 the Holy Spirit records another sermon. This sermon, preached by the same apostle who preached in Antioch's synagogue, is a sample of the kind of sermon which was preached to the heathen. There the apostle Paul is presenting the gospel to philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics, to the men of Athens. In this sermon the apostle does not quote from the Old Testament, nor does he refer to figures of the Old Testament, but he begins by declaring God to be Creator and Sustainer of the universe. This sermon of the apostle is not to be judged a poorer sermon than the one preached to the Jews in the synagogue in Antioch. It is rather to be seen as evidence that the one and same gospel is to be proclaimed in different manners, depending on the audience. The sermon is of the same high quality as that preached in the synagogue in Antioch. The difference is not in the gospel presented, but in the manner of its presentation to different cultures. Whether to the Jews and proselytes of Antioch, or to the Gentiles on Mars' Hill, Paul condemned sin and demanded repentance and belief in Jesus Christ.

Further biblical evidence of the necessity of distinct presentations of the gospel, dependent on the culture of the audience, is found in I Corinthians 9:19-22. Paul declares himself to be first and foremost a servant of Jesus Christ. This servitude compelled him to preach (I Cor. 9:16). But Paul is also a servant of the audiences to which he preached ("I made myself servant unto all" — v. 19). Because the minister is a servant to God, he must make himself a servant to others. He serves his Master by serving his Master's people. Like the Master, missionar-

ies and pastors are called, not to be served, but to serve those to whom they preach. It is this servitude to the audience which demands a presentation of the gospel which they can most easily understand.

Paul describes his servitude to those to whom he preached as being "made all things to all men" (v. 22). "To the Jews" Paul conducted himself "as a Jew," that is, "as under the law" (v. 20). The Jews to whom Paul brought the gospel believed themselves to be bound to the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. They were still observing the temple service, the sacrifices and feasts, circumcision, and the distinction between clean and unclean food. Paul knew that in Christ he was free from having to observe the ceremonial laws. But for the sake of the gospel which he brought to the Jews, Paul lived *under*, that is, in observance of those laws. This does *not*

mean that Paul compromised biblical principles by taking up Jewish ritual and practice. But it does mean that, when among Jews, Paul observed Jewish custom concerning things indifferent. Paul did not consider it a sin to

observe a ceremonial law, if this observance was not done as a means to acquire salvation and righteousness. He preached Christ from the Old Testament Scripture, but concerning food and drink he lived as a Jew. Though he was free to eat whatever food he wanted, he abstained from that which had been forbidden by ceremonial law, so as not to give offense. In order not to offend the Jews to whom he came with the gospel, Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3). For the same reason Paul took upon himself an old dispensational vow (Acts 21:23ff.). But Paul refused to have Titus circumcised when those who demanded Titus' circumcision said it was necessary for salvation (Gal. 2:1-3). Paul's observance of the ceremonial laws did not compromise

the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ alone, but it was an accommodation in order to win the Jews and to avoid being a stumbling block to them.

On the other hand, to the Gentiles Paul came "as without law" (v. 21). In Christ, Paul and we are made free from needing obedience to the law to be saved. But salvation in Christ enabled Paul and enables us to keep the law by loving God and our neighbor. So when Paul was among the Gentiles, then he preached Christ and demanded repentance and obedience, but he refused to live and act as a Jew. Paul also refused to demand that the heathen conform to Jewish traditions and practices. As much as possible Paul lived as the people with whom he labored.

The purpose for the distinctive presentations of the one gospel, according to the inspired apostle, is "that I might gain the more" (v. 19), or "that I might by all means save some" (v. 22). This does not mean that Paul saw himself as the one who was gaining or saving people. Rather, Paul was conscious that God is pleased to use earthly means to perform His miracles of saving and strengthening His people. God can

use anything He wants or nothing at all, for nothing is impossible with Him. But He is pleased to use means, and the Scriptures show us that the means He normally uses for bringing the gospel is the preaching by ministers and missionaries. God's sovereign use of the preaching of ministers and missionaries does not relieve them of their responsibility to present the gospel in the preaching in the best possible way and to the best of their ability. In fact, from a certain perspective, God's use of these men increases their responsibility to do the best they possibly can do. Paul was fully aware of this responsibility. He knew that those who preach the gospel can offend unnecessarily by their conduct. It is a terrible sin to cause offense by conduct. Those who preach the gospel have the God-given responsibility to conduct themselves with "meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15) and to see that their "speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). They are to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16). Paul used this approach because he desired the salvation of those to whom God sent him to preach.

Paul adapted himself, in his presentation of the gospel, to the weak. His purpose was to bring them to Christ. Paul did not adapt himself to the stubborn, because his purpose was not to further man's own interests. But in as far as he is able before God, Paul sought to live among the people to whom he preached the gospel, in such a way that he would not by his personal conduct unnecessarily offend the hearers.

Taking the gospel across cultures requires wisdom, much wisdom, but it must be done. We must learn from the experiences of the early New Testament church, for they are recorded as an example for us.

It is the intent of the four men responsible for this rubric during this volume-year to deal with the subject of cross-cultural missions biblically and practically. What is involved in bringing the glorious gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ to Singapore or Ghana or Jamaica? It is our prayer that these articles will make it easier for all to understand the issues and difficulties of taking the gospel to other lands. We covet your prayers, your interest, and your questions and responses. □

Ministering to the Saints

Mr. Ed Gritters

The Office of Elder — An Overview

By the time this article appears in print, letters will have again been sent by our various consistories to certain confessing male members somewhat as follows: "The Consistory informs you that your name

has been placed on nomination for the office of Elder. Please let us know if you have valid reasons why you would be *unable* to serve...."

Unable to serve? Sometimes the nomination comes as a surprise, especially to those who receive it for the first time. But as you ponder your answer, you may already have turned the question around: "Lord, *who* — really — is *able* to serve?"

And rightly so, for who of us is worthy of so great a task? And I, even as I struggle to write these words, know full well some would say of me, "Why him?" — and I, without defense.

With this, the Lord willing, we begin a short series of discussions of "eldership" in the church of Christ. Some of the things we hope to examine at this time are the back-

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ground of the office of elder, its scriptural basis, the virtual disappearance of the office during what we sometimes refer to as the "Dark Ages" (or, more appropriately, through the development of the Romish church hierarchy), the Reformed view of Eldership, as well as the qualifications for the elder, both the necessary qualifications, and the desirable.

Since we believe the elder is appointed by, and serves as the representative of Christ in His ruling (kingly) office, we must first have a clear understanding of how the elder's position relates to this same office as it comes to expression in the entire body of believers in their roles as prophet, priest, and king under Christ. In these offices common to all believers, the saints take a vibrant and active part in all the affairs of the church. Within this setting, Christ, through the congregation, calls certain believers to the *special* offices of prophet (ministers), priest (deacons), and king (elders). Through these special offices, and in a unique relationship to the fellow-members of the congregation, Christ rules His church. And it is on this latter office, namely of elder, that we focus our attention. That this special office is separate and distinct from the general kingly office shared by all believers is clear from the scriptural admonition, "Obey them that have rule over you, and submit to them" (Heb. 13:17).

Now it is of utmost importance to see that this office of ruling, or authority, is not one earned or merited. It is not even bestowed on the officebearer by the congregation. Christ Himself, the only ruler and King of His church, through His servant representatives, not only instituted the office but also fills it by the activity of the Holy Spirit.

That the church of God through all ages was historically ruled by elders is abundantly clear from the Scriptures. The Old Testament makes reference time and again to the "elders of Israel." Although the origin of this office in Israel is not

recorded, the emphasis is obviously on the "elder," as opposed to the "younger." This is clearly inferred in the account of King Rehoboam's foolish decision to forsake the counsel of the old men and to consult with the young men who were grown up with him. The rationale for this, we believe, is that with age comes knowledge and experience; but, more importantly, knowledge and experience tried by the fires of God's Word and Spirit brings forth wisdom and understanding. Solomon, in a spirit of true humility, properly chose wisdom (cf. I Kings 3:9). What more important qualification could there be "to judge this thy so great a people"?

It is in the New Testament, however, that the office of elder, or bishop, more clearly evolves as the organ through which Christ directly rules His church. (We will not quote all of the many scriptural references to the establishment and use of the elders' office, and its requirements). We know from Acts 14:23 that Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every church as their missionary work progressed. From various other verses recording divinely-inspired instruction to the early church, we may briefly summarize the primary duties of the elder, namely, to feed (oversee) the Lord's flock as His representatives (John 21:16; I Pet. 5:2); to rule over and care for the church of God (I Tim. 3:4, 5; 5:17); to preserve sound doctrine (preaching) and guard against error (Tit. 1:9-11); and to teach (I Tim. 3:2). Other texts are Acts 15:22; 20:17ff., Titus 1:5-9; and I Peter 5:1-3. We will quote others when we examine the qualifications for bishops.

Before looking at the present-day Reformed concept of church government, we note that it is of historical significance that the office of elder virtually disappeared during the third and fourth centuries as the early church became more and more hierarchical, with the governing of the church vested in the pope and his appointed bishops. With this came a devastating deterioration in

the quality of the preaching and teaching in the Romish Church until the time of the Reformation. It was under John Calvin's leadership in the Reformed church of Geneva that the New Testament office of elder was once again restored to its Christ-ordained administrative role. From this providential care of God for His church comes the guidance that has evolved into our standards for church government as expressed particularly in our Church Order and the Form of Ordination for officebearers. We believe the above history is basic to a proper discussion of the office of elder in our church of today.

When we speak of the office of elder, we should note that the Bible uses the words "elder" and "bishop" interchangeably. Consequently, the same word is used for the office of "prophet" and "king." We know, however, that these two offices are separate and distinct, but also equal. This is apparent from I Timothy 5:17 where we read, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, *especially those who labor in the word and doctrine* (preaching)." This adds another dimension — ministers (preachers) are included with the elders who rule well. So, there is some overlapping of the offices, namely, the pastor is also a *ruling* elder. Now, is the ruling elder also a teaching (preaching) elder? The answer, of course, is Yes and No.

But we reserve further discussion of this for a later article.

The Editorial Staff of the *Standard Bearer* suggested that this rubric be essentially practical — not theoretical. I fear the foregoing leans toward the theoretical, but our hope is that this may set the stage for a more practical look at the elders' office. At another time, we hope to look at the qualifications of the ruling elder, his duties, his relationship to the offices of the minister and the diaconate, his responsibilities to the flock of Christ, and the congregation's responsibilities to their elders. We will see that the work of

the elder requires devotion, determination, and hard, hard work. As weak vessels, standing in Christ's stead, ruling His people, how could it be otherwise!

Until then, I would encourage you — ask you — especially those

of our readers who have been newly nominated, or elected as elders, to read some of the following: Prof. H. Hanko's "Notes on the Church Order"; Prof. W. Heyn's *Handbook for Elders and Deacons*; and *The Elders Handbook* by Berghoef-

DeKoster. These books, and others, are in your church's or your pastor's library. Read them. Study them. Do it now. You will find them extremely helpful, interesting, and informative. I did! □

Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

Recent Developments in Church-State Law

■ IRS Requires Substantiation for Charitable Contributions

The new law disallows a deduction for any contribution of \$250 or more that is not substantiated by a written acknowledgement from the charity.

IRS Revenue Procedure 90-12
(1994)

The treasurers of our churches, schools, and denominational organizations should be aware of new IRS rules regarding charitable gifts effective for 1994. The new rules declare that no charitable deduction will be allowed for gifts in excess of \$250 unless the taxpayer provides the IRS with a written receipt from the charitable organization.

These written receipts for gifts of \$250 or more must contain the following information to conform to IRS guidelines: (1) the name of the donor taxpayer; (2) a description of the gift (property or cash); (3) itemization of each gift in excess of \$250;

(4) a statement by the charity declaring that no goods or services were furnished the donor in connection with any contribution or that the goods and services provided were of "insubstantial value" or consisted of "intangible religious benefits."

For example, if a person regularly contributed \$50 per week to his church's general fund, but contributes a single gift of \$300 to the church's benevolence fund and \$500 to the church building fund, the \$300 and the \$500 gifts must be listed separately on the receipt furnished the donor at year end.

Moreover, as mentioned above, the written acknowledgment or receipt must state that the donor received no goods or services in consideration for the gifts or that their value was "insubstantial" or consisted of "intangible religious benefits."

When the taxpayer does receive something of value in connection with his contribution (e.g., a book or a power tool at a fund-raising auction), the receipt must indicate the extent to which the contribution exceeded the value of the goods or services received.

Although these new rules were undoubtedly designed to thwart abuse of charitable contribution de-

ductions, these expansive regulations will regrettably entail additional bookkeeping and accounting work for treasurers of charitable institutions, including our churches and schools. The IRS has recently promised additional regulations interpreting this new law. Accordingly, school and church treasurers should consult with their local C.P.A. to formulate for donors year-end receipts that comply with these new IRS requirements.

■ Parochial Schools Now Subject to Age Discrimination Act

Are parochial schools subject to the federal Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA)? Yes, ruled a federal appeals court recently.

The case began when a Catholic high school refused to renew the contract of a math teacher who had been employed by the parochial school for the five previous years. The school argued his dismissal was occasioned by his failure to begin classes with prayer and failure to attend Mass with his students. The teacher alleged he was dismissed because of his age.

The ADEA makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate

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against any employee or applicant on the basis of age. An "employer" is defined as "a person engaged in an industry affecting commerce who has twenty or more employees...." The ADEA does not specify whether religious institutions are "employers" within the Act.

The school argued that the case should be summarily dismissed because, as a religious institution, it should be exempt from the ADEA's anti-discrimination provisions. (The lower court had held that application of the ADEA to a parochial school would give rise to an untoward risk of excessive government entanglement with religion). The federal appeals court disagreed and held the parochial school subject to the age discrimination act.

The appellate court brushed aside the school's concern that the government would be evaluating religious motivations for dismissal or reassignment of employees of religious institutions, and stated:

Given that the religious duties that the teacher allegedly failed to carry out are easily isolated and defined, we are confident that the able district judge will be able to focus the trial upon whether the teacher was fired because of his age or because of his failure to perform religious duties, and this can be done without putting into issue the validity or truthfulness of Catholic religious teaching.

The court then went on to say that *even if* the age discrimination inquiry would "present serious entanglement concerns" between church and state, religious institutions would nonetheless be subject to the ADEA simply because Congress did not specifically make them exempt from the ADEA.

Comment. Other recent cases have held private schools to be subject to federal laws prohibiting discriminatory action based on gender. It now seems clear that most religious institutions including churches and private schools (with greater than twenty employees) will be sub-

ject to federal laws prohibiting discrimination based on race, gender, national origin, and now age. Although religious institutions may still discriminate based on religion, the alleged religious reason may not be a pretext for discrimination based on gender, race, or age. One wonders how long religious institutions will remain exempt from "religious discrimination" and regrettably be held to the same laws as secular organizations in this regard also. See *DeMarco v. Holy Cross High School*, 4 F.3d 166 (2nd Cir. 1993).

■ State Supreme Court Holds Killing of a Fetus is Murder

During a robbery in California, a pregnant woman was shot and the fetus was stillborn as a result of the injuries. The assailant was charged and convicted by a jury for murder of a fetus during the course of a robbery.

The defendant appealed, arguing that the trial judge erred in refusing to instruct the jury regarding the "viability" of the fetus. The prosecution contended that no viability instruction was necessary because

California law does not require a fetus to be viable to support a fetal murder charge.

The California Supreme Court upheld the conviction, declaring that third party killing of a fetus with malice aforethought is murder so long as the state can show that the fetus had progressed beyond the embryonic stage of seven to eight weeks.

Comment. The California Supreme Court, of course, made a sound decision in upholding the state fetal murder statute. But the defendant's argument is compelling: If mothers and doctors can kill a fetus prior to viability (24 weeks?), how can a robbery defendant be convicted of fetal murder without regard to viability?

This case clearly illustrates the absurdities resulting from the *Roe v. Wade* decision permitting abortion — killing a 15-week fetus during a robbery is murder, but terminating a 15-week fetus in a clinic is an "abortion." This California Supreme Court decision deserves much more notoriety than what it will undoubtedly experience. See *People v. Davis*, Calif. Supreme Court (May 16, 1994).

Lord, Lead the Way

If there be someone, Lord, who needs a smile,
If one must be assured life is worthwhile,
If I today must walk the extra mile,
Lord, lead the way.

If there be someone, Lord, who is in need;
If I be called to do a kindly deed;
If I must go and sow the precious seed,
Lord, lead the way.

If there be someone, Lord, whose faith is weak,
If I must go a wandering soul to seek;
If I be asked to turn the other cheek —
Lord, lead the way.

For if I live for others I will see
That any joy I bring will come to me,
But all my strength, O Lord, must come from Thee,
Please lead the way.

Annetta Jansen
Dorr, Michigan

The Reformed Family: Saying Thanks

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you."

Philippians 1:3

In America it is the time of harvest and thanksgiving.

All across this vast land, bountiful crops are being gathered in. Thousands of acres of golden grain have been reaped. Great dunes of corn tumble out of capacious granaries. Fattened hogs and sleek cattle are led to market. Fruits and vegetables, exotic and common, are stockpiled. Dainties fit for demigods — this is America's daily bread.

The earth yields her increase; the Reformed believer receives a cornucopia of blessing. "He gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Psalm 68 puts it this way: He daily loadeth us with benefits.

Ever since October 3, 1863, when Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a national day of Thanksgiving, the citizens of America have celebrated Thanksgiving Day on the last Thursday in November:

I do, therefore, invite my fellow citizens, in every part of the United States, and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday in November next as a day of thanksgiving praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens.

Abraham Lincoln

With or without presidential

proclamation, the Reformed believer delights in thanksgiving. To God, first of all. Thanks is our joyful refrain for blessings innumerable — life, health, liberty, shelter, clothing, food convenient for me (Prov. 30:8), family, friends, church, school, work. For salvation in Jesus Christ.

Just as Paul tells the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17), so, gratitude to God should be as regular as our heartbeat.

Do I have meager provisions? Am I ill? Is my house ramshackle? Am I imprisoned? Am I even now being persecuted? Yet, I will thank Him for the salvation given to one so undeserving. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines: the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:17 and 18). Correctly it has been said, "It isn't what you have in your pocket that makes you happy, but what you have in your heart." A thankful heart, like the golden grain spilling out of its granaries, brims over in praise to God and gratitude to each other.

Already in the Old Testament, harvest blessing called for celebration. Israel celebrated thanksgiving in its sacrifices and feasts. Passover, the Feast of Firstfruits, and the Feast

of Tabernacles were all occasions of thanksgiving. When the people of Israel arrived in Canaan and planted their own crops, they took a sheaf of grain and waved it before the Lord. In this manner, they acknowledged that their daily bread came from God's hand. They expressed gratitude to the Lord of the harvest.

At the Feast of Firstfruits, Israel was instructed to bring their harvested crops as gifts to God. At the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites cut branches from trees and made booths to live in for a feast of thanksgiving which lasted for a week.

Ruth and Naomi shared in the festivities of Bethlehem's barley harvest; Nabal and his men celebrated the shearing of sheep.

So, today, harvest is the tangible fruit of one's labors. Whatever one's work, at whatever time of year, the reaping of bounties after months of arduous labor — whether that be raising children or cabbages — calls for thanksgiving.

With or without
presidential
proclamation,
the Reformed believer
delights in
thanksgiving.

Unquestionably, the Reformed believer delights in giving thanks to God. Does he also express that heartfelt joy in thanks to his neighbor? Just as one cannot keep the first table of the law (showing our love for God) without keeping the second table (showing love for our neighbor), so it is impossible to express thanks to God but withhold thanks to one another. To paraphrase, how can one thank God whom he has not seen, if

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he does not thank the neighbor whom he has seen? Perversely, however, the simple thank you to one's fellow believer is far more difficult to express. But the added benefit is that while one is busy thanking his fellow saints, one really has precious little breath left for criticism. (Read Colossians 3:14-17.)

Husbands should be busy thanking wives. Wives should be diligent in thanking their husbands. I think of the old husband who lay dying, wracked with pain and the accompanying unpleasantness of a body that would no longer obey him. He apologized to his wife for the demeaning tasks which she had to perform for him, humiliating both to him and to her: She answered with a love that had become steadfast and deep through the years, "Say not another word; this is small thanks for 50-some years of wonderful marriage to you."

Thank you to the father who labors tirelessly in an unglamorous job to provide his family with food, shelter, and clothing, driving around in an older car so that he will not lag behind with the Christian school tuition. Thank you to the mother who keeps the home and gives of her very life for the well-being of the family. Thank you to the minister who brings sharp words of admonition and soft words of comfort. And the minister thanks his parishioners, as Paul did in I Thessalonians 2:13, for receiving the Word of truth.

Just think of the courtesy of Paul who, almost without exception, begins and ends each of his letters to the churches with thanks for all the saints in general and for certain saints, specifically. Paul thanks workers, fellow prisoners, co-laborers which were a comfort to him (Col. 4:11), those that refreshed his spirit and that of their fellow saints (I Cor. 15:18), those who were not

ashamed of his chains, beloved brethren, faithful ministers, examples to other believers (I Thess. 1:7). "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you..." (Phil. 1:3). Paul freely and lavishly thanked the loved ones in the churches, using words of affection and intimacy. He was not reluctant to express his feelings of gratitude to his fellow believers. The 16th chapter of Romans is essentially a touching litany of thanks for everyone who assisted Paul, however humbly, in his ministry. It includes men and women, although it begins with thanks to a woman. Being courteous, chivalrous, grateful are not maxims of Benjamin Franklin or Emily Post, but God-breathed Christian virtues from the apostle's own pen. Moreover, it is a sign of the perilous times in which we are living that men are unthankful (II Tim. 3).

This should teach us to be effusive with our thanks to each other: employers thanking employees for long hours and faithful years of service, and employees thanking employers for regular work to earn the daily bread; children thanking parents for all the benefits of home, and parents thanking children for the joy and warmth they bring to an otherwise cold and sterile world; thank you to Christian school teachers, and to supportive parents who willingly sacrifice to build, equip, and maintain the Christian school; thank you to each saint with special words of encouragement and praise; thanks for any service rendered, no matter how insignificant it may seem; thank you with our mouth, telling each other of the great benefits in Jesus Christ and for each other. For we are all blocks, fitly joined together, even though we do not fully understand where or how each fits in. This we do know, we need each other on this earthly pilgrimage — and it is cer-

This we do know,
we need each other
on this
earthly pilgrimage
— and it is certain
that we will not
pass this way
again.

tain that we will not pass this way again. The grave is silent (Ps. 6:5). It can render no thanks.

Jesus also had something to say about expressing gratitude. In a small village He cleansed ten lepers. Only one turned back, falling down on his face giving thanks. "And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" (Luke 17:17). Giving thanks, being thankful, expressing our thankfulness to God and to one another, is not the optional Christian life. It is the very essence of Christianity.

We in America celebrate an earthly harvest. It is only a simple picture of the great harvest when the wheat is decisively separated from the tares, and all the grateful saints are gathered into God's garner.

When we all get to Heaven!

What a Day of Thanksgiving that will be! □

*Make a joyful noise unto
the LORD, all ye lands.*

*Serve the LORD with
gladness: come before his
presence with singing.*

*Know ye that the LORD
he is God: it is he that hath
made us, and not we our-
selves; we are his people, and
the sheep of his pasture.*

*Enter into his gates with
thanksgiving, and into his
courts with praise: be thank-
ful unto him, and bless his
name.*

*For the LORD is good; his
mercy is everlasting; and his
truth endureth to all genera-
tions.*

Psalm 100

Church Visitation

The classis shall authorize at least two of her oldest, most experienced and most competent ministers to visit all the churches once a year and to take heed whether the minister and the consistory faithfully perform the duties of their office, adhere to sound doctrine, observe in all things the adopted order, and properly promote as much as lies in them, through word and deed, the upbuilding of the congregation, in particular of the youth, to the end that they may in time fraternally admonish those who have in anything been negligent, and may by their advice and assistance help direct all things unto the peace, upbuilding, and greatest profit of the churches. And each classis may continue these visitors in service as long as it sees fit, except where the visitors themselves request to be released for the reasons of which the classis shall judge.

Church Order, Article 44.

Historical Background

The practice of church visitation is of long standing in Reformed churches. Already the Synod of 's Gravenhague, in 1586, adopted the practice. Our present article is in essence that adopted by the Synod of Dordt, 1618-'19. The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, in 1914, revised the article in the *Church Order of Dordt* in one respect. Dordt had specified the purpose of church visitation as "... discern(ing) whether

the ministers, consistories and schoolmasters fulfill their office faithfully ..." and that the church visitors "... direct everything to the peace, upbuilding and the greatest profit of the churches and schools." The CRC revision of 1914 dropped the references to the schoolmasters and the schools.

Although the practice of church visitation is long-standing, it was not immediately introduced into the Reformed churches. Early there were many who feared that such a practice would encourage hierarchy and rob the local congregations of their autonomy. The question was put to the Synod of Middelburg, 1581: "Whether it would be good besides the classical meetings also to introduce annual visits to the churches, or to appoint Inspectors or Superintendents, but with proper limitations. Answer: It is unnecessary and dangerous." Nevertheless, in a short time the fears of what such a practice might lead to were overcome and the benefits of annual church visitation were seen.

Principle on Which Church Visitation is Based

The principle on which church visitation rests is the mutual responsibility that sister churches have towards each other in the fellowship of a denomination. It is not a matter of lording it over another consistory or prying into the private affairs of a consistory. But it is a matter of all the churches of the classis being concerned for the welfare and faithfulness of each other.

This principle is well put by the following writers.

Church visitation is mutual in character. By means of this institution the churches watch for each other's welfare and advise and admonish each other when necessary. Church visitation is not an institution of supervision, exercised by superior officers over inferior officers. Neither is it supervision exercised by an authoritative superior body over inferior bodies. The various churches comprising a classis, being all equal in authority, supervise each other. (VanDellen and Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary*, p. 195.)

On the one hand, the Reformed churches were afraid of hierarchical elements while, on the other hand, they were aware of the need to keep watch over each other, not in a supervisory manner, as if they had authority over one another, but in the manner of equals who hold each other to their word and see the need to help and warn one another if the need should arise. (VanOene, *With Common Consent*, p. 216.)

Church visitation is in essence this, that representatives of the churches come to inquire whether this sister church maintains the faithfulness to the covenant of the churches by living up to the adopted order. (VanOene, p. 217.)

There is a clear, biblical basis for the practice of church visitation. According to Acts 11:22, 23 Barnabas was sent by the church at Jerusalem to the church at Antioch to investi-

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gate reports which they had received about their sister congregation. In Acts 15:36 Paul leaves on his second missionary journey in order to "... visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do." Clearly, the apostle was not merely interested in "visiting" socially with the brethren. But it was his purpose to make inquiry with respect to the spiritual condition of the congregations and officebearers — to "... see how they do." Essentially, this was church visitation.

The Church Visitors

The church visitors are appointed by the classis. Each classis appoints at least two ministers to do this work. Two are required so that they may function officially as a committee on behalf of the classis. "At least two" implies that, if the classis deems it necessary, the number may be greater. Three ought to be appointed, or an alternate to the two, since circumstances may prohibit one of the appointees from being able to function and because neither of the two appointed is in a position to visit his own consistory.

Church visitors are "authorized" by the classis. They are appointed to their position by the vote of the classis. But they are not simply "appointed," they are "authorized." That bespeaks authority. The church visitors come with the authority of the classis that sends them.

The appointment of the church visitors is an annual not a permanent appointment. Within the year of their appointment they are to visit all of the churches of the classis. At the end of the year, their term as church visitors expires. And although the same men may serve again, they must be reappointed by the classis.

The article requires that the church visitors be competent "ministers." This is not for principle reasons. It would not be improper for elders to serve as church visitors. There can be no principle objection to the appointment of elders as

church visitors, perhaps a team of one minister and one elder. The *Church Order* of the CRC, Article 42a states: "The classis shall appoint at least one committee composed of two of the more experienced and competent officebearers, two ministers, or one minister and one elder, to visit all its churches once a year." It is more for practical reasons that our *Church Order* assigns the work of church visitation to ministers.

According to the article, those appointed are to be the "... oldest, most experienced and most competent ministers...." The main requirement is that the church visitors be the most competent of the ministers of the classis. Generally, the most competent are also the oldest and most experienced. The work demands this experience and competency. Church visitors find themselves in many different situations. They are confronted with different problems and are asked advice in perplexing situations. It stands to

reason that they must be men well versed in the principles and practices of Reformed church government, as well as possessing practical wisdom that comes only with a number of years of service in the ministry.

The Actual Visits

The annual visit by the church visitors must be announced to the congregation. The consistory must be informed in time to make such an announcement. The decisions which our churches have appended to Article 44 include that, "The visitors shall give the congregations at least eight days' notice of the day and hour of their proposed visit." The congregation as a whole must be aware of the visit. One reason for this is to make it possible for any member to meet with the consistory and church visitors.

At the visits, one of the visitors functions as the president of their committee, asking the questions and

Questions for Church Visitation

Questions to the Full Consistory

1. Is the Word administered at least twice on the Lord's Day?
2. Is the Heidelberg Catechism regularly explained in the services for divine worship, so that no doctrine is left untreated?
3. In the reading services, are sermons used as much as possible which are produced in our own circle?
4. Is the Lord's Supper celebrated at least four times a year preceded by a preparatory sermon and followed by an applicatory sermon?
5. Does the consistory see to it that catechism classes are regularly conducted? Does the consistory determine the material for instruction? And does it see to it that the classes are regularly attended?
6. Are consistory members chosen in agreement with the rules of the Church Order?
7. Does the consistory meet regularly in accord with the needs of the congregation, at least once a month?
8. Are all matters coming before the consistory treated according to our Church Order and are the minutes properly recorded and kept?
9. Is censura morum conducted among the members of the consistory before each Lord's Supper?
10. Is family visitation conducted faithfully, so that each family receives an official visit once a year?
11. Is church discipline faithfully exercised according to God's Word and the Church Order?
12. Is the consistory aware whether there are members of secret organizations in the congregation, and if so, is church discipline applied to them?
13. What is the spiritual condition of the congregation? Is there unity, peace, and love?

14. Do the children of the congregation, when they come to years of discretion, seek admission to the Lord's Supper? And if they are remiss, are they pointed to their obligation and treated as the need requires?
15. Is the congregation busy in the extension of God's kingdom, especially in the promotion of missions, to the best of its ability?
16. Are the synodical assessments faithfully paid, in agreement with the stipulated regulations?
17. Are the funds of the church and the poor fund and all proofs of possessions kept in a safe place so that no occasion is given for mistrust nor difficulties can arise on leave of office or death, and is the congregation properly incorporated with the State? Are the archives in order?
18. Does the consistory see to it that the parents send their children to the Christian school?
19. Are the Forms of Unity signed by all the members of the consistory, the ministers, elders, and deacons?

Questions to the Elders and Deacons in the Absence of the Minister

1. Does the minister in the preaching and in the administration of the sacraments do his work faithfully according to the Word of God, the Forms of Unity, and the Church Order?
2. Does the minister faithfully explain God's Word so that the congregation is built up through his preaching?
3. Does he regularly conduct the catechism classes, visit the sick faithfully, and does he take part in family visitation?
4. Does the minister reveal himself as a worthy example?
5. Is he devoted as much as possible to the exercise of his office?
6. Does he receive sufficient income to take care of the needs of his family, taking in consideration the character of his work?

Questions to the Minister and the Deacons in the Absence of the Elders

1. Do the elders regularly attend the services for divine worship as well as the consistory meetings?
2. Do they at set times attend the catechism classes to see how they are conducted and attended; and do they assist the minister when the need requires it in catechizing?
3. Do they see to it that Christian discipline is exercised, and that everything is done honorably and in good order?
4. Do the elders visit the sick and others in agreement with the calling of their office?
5. Do they try to prevent and remove all offense in the congregation, and try to comfort and instruct the members?
6. Do they conduct themselves as examples to the congregation in their family and outward walk of life?

Questions to the Ministers and Elders in the Absence of the Deacons

1. Do the deacons attend regularly the services for divine worship as well as the consistory meetings; and in case such meetings are held, do they also attend deacons' meetings?
2. Are they diligent in the collecting of the alms and do they faithfully realize their calling in the care and comfort of the poor and oppressed?
3. Are the collections counted in the presence of the minister or one or more of the elders?
4. Do they administer the finances wisely in consultation with the minister and the consistory?
5. Do they in their family and outward life and walk reveal themselves as exemplary Christians?

directing the discussion, and the other functions as the secretary and examines the consistory minute books. For the visits, an adopted set of questions is followed (see insert). First there are questions put to the whole consistory. Then follow questions to the elders and deacons in the absence of the minister, to the minister and deacons in the absence of the elders, and to the minister and elders in the absence of the deacons.

Although the adopted questions must be asked and answered, the visitors are not restricted to these questions. There may and ought to be more extended discussion of certain of the questions. Related additional questions may also be asked.

It is profitable that the church visitors choose a theme and conduct the visitation from the perspective of this theme. Possible themes include: mutual supervision among the officebearers; denominational responsibility; the importance of the example of the officebearers; the officebearers' attention to the youth of the congregation (in light of the fact that Article 44 itself calls special attention to the youth); the importance of holding to the traditions; the church's calling to be a witness in the community; the unity of the church and the calling of the officebearers to promote the unity of the congregation.

Although the church visitors are to conduct an annual visitation of every congregation in the classis, they ought also to be available to consistories for special consultation. Usually special visits will be made at the request of a consistory. It is not impossible, however, that the church visitors take the initiative and call for a special meeting. This is certainly within their rights and "authorization" by the classis. The visitors may feel the necessity of doing this if there are reports of serious problems in a congregation that perhaps threaten its continued existence. If a consistory is facing a difficult problem and feels the need for help and advice, it ought to feel free to call upon the church visitors

before having to apply to the classis itself for help.

Church Visitors' Reports

Having been appointed by the classis, the church visitors must also report to the classis: "After completing the visitation of all the congregations, the visitors shall with requisite discretion, compose a report of their activities to be delivered at the next following classis." Church visitors must give an account of their work to the classis. The obligation to report indicates that they did not visit the churches in their own authority, but received their mandate from the classis. This report is to be given with "requisite discretion," for the protection of individuals and of consistories.

Besides the annual report read on the floor of the classis, the church visitors are also to keep a record of their visits in the various congregations: "They shall record their findings and actions in a book, which can be consulted at the next visitation, and which can be kept in the classical archive."

Purpose of Church Visitation

As far as the individual churches are concerned, the purpose of church visitation is the upbuilding of the congregations. Since the upbuilding of the congregations depends on the faithful labors of the officebearers, inquiry is made into the faithfulness of the officebearers, including the godliness of their walk and the purity of their doctrine. Since the future of the congregations is with the children and young people, special attention is paid to the labors bestowed on the children and youth. And since the upbuilding of the congregations is served by observance of "the adopted order," the church visitors must inquire whether all things are done according to our *Church Order*. This is the main reason for the inspection of the consistory's books, to be assured that the adopted order is being followed by the consistory.

If the officebearers are found negligent in their calling, the upbuilding of the congregation de-

mands that the church visitors "fraternally admonish" them.

As far as the officebearers are concerned, church visitation serves to encourage them to faithfulness and diligence in their respective offices. Church visitation affords an opportunity to remind the officebearers of the importance of their labors, and to stir them up to even greater diligence.

As far as the classis and, even more broadly, the denomination is concerned, the purpose of church visitation is the preservation of the purity of the churches. It is the means to assure that all the sister churches are living faithfully within the denomination. It is the means by which the churches carry out their calling of mutual supervision. And it is the means to protect and to strengthen the unity of the churches.

May God continue to use this institution for the blessing of our churches! □

The Strength of Youth

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Asserting Independence

While in my teens I gave no thought to the meaning of being a teenager or just where I was in my development as a human being. I was too busy getting on with my life to worry about this. Besides, I

simply did not care! Now, as I look back on these years, I think that it would have been helpful to understand this about myself: what was there about my teenage years which was distinct from childhood and adulthood?

Perhaps this does not interest you either at this stage in your life. But relax for a few minutes and read anyway. Maybe you will discover a few tips that might be useful as you

assert your independence as a young man or woman.

In his book entitled *The Secret of Christian Family Living*, Ralph Heynen attempts a description of the teenager.

The adolescent is required to live as gracefully as he can in two worlds, the lingering world of childhood and the opening world of adulthood. He is seldom sure of which of these two areas he occu-

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pies at a given time. In a sense these young people are still children. They still have some of the feelings of dependency of childhood. And yet, they have a strong desire to be independent. They need their parents, and yet they desire to break the ties of parental controls.

Now, I realize that you may not view yourself in this particular way. It may seem that this definition of adolescence describes a teenager as nothing more than a confused, overgrown kid who is trying to act like an adult. Let me assure you that this is far from the case! A teenager is not a kid anymore! He has reached the age of puberty. He has definitely gone through certain physical, emotional, and psychological changes in his life that separate him from his little brothers and sisters.

Yet, this description of an adolescent is accurate. In every person's life there is a certain period during which he makes a change from childhood into adulthood. That was true of me and it is true of you too. A person does not simply change into an adult overnight. It is a gradual process through which a young man and woman must go in order to master what it takes to be independent. It is a sad and harmful thing when children are cast out into the world to fend for themselves prematurely, that is, before they have reached a certain age of maturity.

That you stand at the brink of adulthood, but have not yet quite entered it, makes these years very special in your life. You have left childhood behind, and stand at the door of maturity. The teenager is a young adult. Yet, you would have to be quite proud not to admit that this whole area of adulthood is new to you. You have had no previous experience in it and therefore are ignorant of its demands and responsibilities. You do not yet have the wisdom by which you can assert your independency from mother and father. All this you have to

learn. This is why the teenage years are referred to as adolescence; they are years during which one comes of age, grows up, becomes mature.

There are three very important questions you will need to answer during these years. When you answer these for yourself, then you will be ready to become independent. The first and by far the most vital question is: what will be my spiritual commitment? Will I walk in the way of God's commandments and Word? Will I love God and live my life in service to Him? Or will I choose to walk in the way of sin and unrepentance? Will I despise the ways of God and take my place with the rest of the ungodly in this world? This question, of course, has everything to do with the other two questions a young person must answer. Those are: what will be my life's work? And, whom will I choose to be my life's mate, if I choose to marry? You must make commitments in all these areas before you can truly call yourself an adult or a mature individual.

I know, there are those who do not wish to face these questions. They are indeed difficult to answer. Some young people do not wish to grow up and become responsible for their lives. But these questions will not go away. They press themselves on the teenager. This is why the teenage years can be so difficult. You, as young people, are not children anymore! Yet the fact remains: to become independent of mother and father you must be ready to stand alone spiritually, financially, and emotionally. You must be able to say with Paul in I Corinthians 13:11, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." Until we can put away childish things we have not become mature enough to be independent.

There is more to all of this. Not only is the teenager caught between

childhood and adulthood, but he is caught between two spiritual forces at work in this world as well. Think about that for a moment! There are two worlds that surround Christian youth: the world of righteousness and the world of unrighteousness. Both of these worlds exert a tremendous amount of pressure on a young man and woman. There are parents, teachers, and ministers who constantly urge the teenager to walk in a way of holiness, to serve God and to love Him above all else. Before the shift from childhood into adolescence this was fine. We simply accepted what they taught us as true. Now, however, we want to be free to make this decision for ourselves. We want to be independent. And sometimes, to show that we are not kids anymore, we deliberately reject the urging of our parents and follow the other spiritual force that pressures us.

The wicked world surrounds us and waits in the shadows. She is as a beautiful woman with all her charms and allurements. She constantly beckons from the sideline, offering us her ways as an alternative to the ways of our parents and church. These are ways of sin and rebellion against God and His Word. Yet, these ways seem so much more simple, so much less demanding than the ways of holiness that our parents taught us in our childhood.

Thus does the wicked world put its pressure on us as youth without our even realizing it. And we are suddenly swept up in the battle of the ages — a battle that we would just as soon ignore, but which forces itself upon us.

Now, do not get me wrong. I do not wish to discourage you. This time of your life is marked by strength and vitality. God strengthens you that you might assert your independence and learn your particular place in life. I write these things only to help sort things out, in order that the transi-

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tion from childhood to adulthood might take place as smoothly as possible.

There are two roads to becoming independent. There is the way of the world. In this way we reject the church, the old paths of our parents, and, worst of all, the God of our salvation. The spiritual commitment we make is to walk in the way of unbelief, turning our back on the truth of the Scripture that parents taught us during childhood. Having answered this question, we then choose a vocation that may violate scriptural principles (perhaps union membership or Sabbath desecration). The spouse we choose need not have any spiritual moorings either. What she believes is of no consequence to this decision we make. We then assert our independence by leaving father and mother behind and making a new life for ourselves in this world. This is one way of asserting our independence.

The other way, the right way, is to follow in the spiritual ways we were taught as a child (provided, of course, these were the ways of God and the Scripture). The right way to assert independence is to remain faithful to God and His cause in this world, and to take our place in the midst of Christ's church as an active, enthusiastic member. This will in turn determine what vocation and what spouse we choose. In this way too we can assert our independence. We can leave father and mother and make a life for ourselves in this world and in the church.

So ... which will it be? I cannot plan your life. Parents cannot determine your future life. *You* must determine where you want to be when you have finally reached maturity. All we can do as pastors, teachers, and parents is to instruct and admonish. The rest we leave in

the hands of our almighty and ever faithful God who by His grace alone works in the hearts of sinners. As parents we are thankful for the work He has accomplished in us through the cross of Jesus Christ, and we are

confident that the same work He has per-

formed in us He also accomplishes in your hearts. To be sure, that does not remove the struggles you confront while asserting your independence, but it ought to encourage you.

There are several means God gives you as covenant youth that will assist you in becoming mature, independent adults. If you make use of them, the many difficult and burdensome questions you must answer for yourselves will become lighter. The first is the Word of God. We learn from the Bible that God's Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light upon our path in this world. No, it is not a ready-made handbook that will tell us exactly what we must do in a given situation. It will not tell us, for example, what job we must choose or who will be our wife or husband. But the Word of God will lay out for us the spiritual principles required of us to make decisions in these areas of our lives. This will make our struggles easier. In this connection, do not forget that careful application of the preaching of God's Word assists us too in the many questions and problems we confront.

A second means God has given us is Christian adults. Christian parents, teachers, and pastors are not a bane; they are not a source of harm or ruin for us. Rather, they are a boon, a blessing or benefit given by God on our behalf. We must not view the Christian adults God has given us in our lives as the enemy, but as those who will help us

through the hard times. If you take time out to probe beneath the hard veneer that we as adults can sometimes wear, you will find that we are human beings who have experienced the same pains and difficulties you have. Please, young people, please, do not allow our own imperfections, inconsistencies, and sins to keep you from talking to us!

The final means God gives you to ease your burdens is prayer. What is prayer good for in this respect? First, by means of prayer you must ask God to direct you in your decisions. Christ promises us in Matthew 7:7, 8, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Secondly, by means of prayer you ask that God's will be done in your life in order that you might find contentment and peace even when things do not seem to go your way. Finally, by means of prayer you can find forgiveness where you have taken the wrong turn and have ended up in failure. Prayer will certainly assist you as you assert your independence.

When finally all those struggles are behind you, when you have answered in the right way all those important questions for yourself, then you will look back across those difficult teenage years and thank God for His grace! I know I often do that in my life. How often I was tempted to turn down the wrong path. By God's grace alone I am what I am. What godly, covenant adult does not feel that in his heart? What child of God does not thank his God every day anew for the guidance God gave him and still gives him in his life?

Rest assured in God's promise to you, Christian young man and woman: "I will never leave you or forsake you." That promise is the rock to which all of us must cling. That will lead you too as you make the transition from childhood to adulthood. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Denominational Activities

This year's Fall Ladies' League Meeting, made up of ladies from PR churches in Iowa and Minnesota, met at the Doon, IA PRC on October 11 to hear Rev. R. Dykstra speak on the topic, "The New Age Movement in Our Day," based on Isaiah 5:13-30.

Our Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI played host to this year's Mr. & Mrs. and Adult Bible Societies League Meeting on September 27. This year's meeting featured Rev. R. Cammenga, speaking on "The Importance of Society Life in Our Churches." A collection was taken for Rev. Kortering, to be distributed to needy ministers with whom he comes in contact in his work in Singapore.

Also on September 27 there was the annual Fall Men's and Ladies' League Meeting held at the First PRC in Holland, MI. Prof. D. Engelsma spoke on the theme, "The Church in the World."

Mentioning Prof. Engelsma's name also reminds me that his eschatology class resumed meeting on September 21 at 7:45 P.M. at the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI and will thereafter meet on alternate Wednesdays, D.V.

Prof. H. Hanko is leading a Bible Study class at our Hope PRC in Walker, MI on Monday evenings at 8 P.M. The first topic of study this fall was prayer. All were invited to attend, but a special invitation was extended to young confessing church members.

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

School Activities

Rev. W. Bruinsma spoke for this year's first P.T.A. meeting for the Hope PR Christian School in Walker, MI. He spoke on "Home Schooling."

On the evening of October 21, the Mothers' Circle of the Hope Christian School in Redlands, CA hosted a Fall Banquet. Their theme this year was to be in celebration of their school's 20th anniversary.

The Fund-Raisers of the Loveland, CO PR Christian School recently sponsored what I think was a rather unusual event. They sponsored a Western Night and Chile Cook-Off. One could not only enter the cook-off, but he could also enjoy a meal of cowboy food, consisting of a menu of barbecue briskets, potatoes, cowboy beans, corn bread, and peaches. All events were held in the field in front of the school, so participants were encouraged to bring their lawn chairs, dress up in their western duds if they wished, and enjoy an evening of cowboy food, music, and fun.

Young People's Activities

The Federation Board of our churches' Young People's Societies recently sponsored a travelogue by well-known Christian travelogue artist Don VanPolen, entitled "Songs of Faith from Around the World." Mr. VanPolen took the viewer to 12 countries and told the stories behind 15 well-known hymns. This event was held at Faith Church on September 28.

The Young People's Society of the First PRC in Edgerton, MN recently sponsored a hamburger and hotdog fry for their congregation at Edgerton City Park. Besides supper, everyone was encouraged to

come out for a time of fellowship, volleyball, and softball.

Congregational Activities

Although I lack details, I want to include here that on the evening of October 21, the congregation of Lynden, WA PRC met in their church for a farewell program for Rev. Haak, his wife, and their three daughters.

And, related to the Haaks' leaving of the Lynden congregation, there was a note of thanks from the Bethel PRC in Elk Grove Village, IL Building Committee, thanking their congregation for the effort put forward to refurbish their parsonage. The congregation was also reminded to reserve the dates of October 28 or 29 to help unload the furniture of the Haaks, who hoped, the Lord willing, to arrive in Bethel that weekend.

Minister Activities

Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the First PRC in Holland, MI has declined the call he was considering to serve as the next pastor of Byron Center, MI PRC, which was recently left vacant by Rev. Gritters' acceptance of the call to Hudsonville.

Food For Thought

"Woe be to the people where the pulpit gives no utterance to the deep things of God. They will grow lean from want of nourishment and sad from lack of comfort."

C.H. Spurgeon,
Sermons on Sovereignty □

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on January 11, 1995 at the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk by December 12, 1994.

Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk