



THE **STANDARD BEARER**

*A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine*

It is an unholy irony
that most people
do believe that everything
is somehow worked out
ahead of time
by someone or something;
they simply will not believe
that the God
of the Christian faith
is the One who has done this.

See "Taking Heed to the Doctrine," p. 270

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Editorially speaking ...

Is this issue of the *Standard Bearer* the least read of all?

It appears in the dead of summer, and summer in North America is the time of vacation, recreation, and travel. If people read at all, the books are light — and secular. Ludlum and the other popular authors time their annual bestselling blockbusters for the summer. (If a Reformed theologian published a volume of theology the size of these massive thrillers, what would be the reaction of Reformed people?)

It would be a shame, were this summer edition of the *SB* neglected.

For there are edifying articles in this "dead-of-summer" issue. From the many, I call attention to Elder E. Gritters' wise advice, how ruling elders can assist their teaching elder.

The articles are informative. An instance is Prof. R. Decker's account of the actions of the synods of the Christian Reformed Church and of the Reformed Church in America.

Some are provocative as well. Put yourself in the shoes of the young Christians in Singapore, as you read Rev. J. Kortering's "The Gospel in Southeast Asia." Or in the shoes of Rev. Kortering, or of Pastor Lau, or of the elders in the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore, who must counsel these young saints in their perplexing trials.

Besides, the summer is the Lord's, as well as the other seasons. And we the Lord's in the summer, called to keep up our spirituality. One way is good reading — the Bible first, but then also good books and magazines.

The August issue of the *SB*.

If you have never read it, by all means the book made appealing by Prof. H. Hanko's article, "John Bunyan: Author of *Pilgrim's Progress*."

Our book review section recommends three other recent books, including one for the children and young people.

Have a worthwhile summer.

—DJE

Changed From Glory to Glory

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

II Corinthians 3:18

We all....

In the old dispensation there was an occasion when Israel saw the glory of the Lord, but only as it shone on the face of Moses.

Moses was with God on the mount and asked to see God's face. He was eager to see the One who was speaking to him. But he was assured that this was impossible, for God is the Spirit of infinite perfections. The glory that radiates from His face is brighter than a million suns. No man can see God and live. Even now we cannot see God, nor shall we see Him in eternity, except in the face of Jesus Christ, who is the revelation of the Father.

Jehovah did allow Moses to stand in the shelter of a rock while He held His hand on him as He passed by. This servant of God was privileged to see the trail of glory where God had been. As a result, his face still shone with that glory even when he returned to the camp of Israel.

That light that shone from the face of Moses was so dazzling that the people could not, and many

would not, look at him. They begged him to cover his face in their presence, so that he stood with covered face before them, and only uncovered it when he was in the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle.

This revelation of God's great glory is the figure that the apostle Paul presents to us in this third chapter of II Corinthians.

At the same time the apostle emphasizes how much richer we are than Israel in the wilderness, or even than the entire church of the old dispensation.

For now we all with open face behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord!



Blessed church of the new dispensation!

The promises given to the fathers in the days of the shadows are fulfilled. The types that pointed to the coming of the Savior have been realized. Our Lord Jesus Christ has come, has paid the ransom for our sins, and merited for us the right to eternal life. He has gone through death and the grave, arose, and is exalted in glory to carry out His work of salvation before the throne. On the day of Pentecost Christ returned to us in the Spirit to dwell in the church, even in our hearts, and to abide with us forever. God is now not merely with us, but He makes His dwelling place in us.

Moreover, the Scriptures are now complete. We have the full revelation of the God of our salvation in His holy Word. To the church is

entrusted the official ministry of the Word, the expounding of the Scriptures, whereby Christ speaks through the Word and by His Spirit in the hearts of His people.

We all with open faces see the glory of the Lord! The veil of sin and death has been lifted from our faces. We are born again as new creatures in Christ Jesus. We all are filled with the power of the Spirit that was poured out on Pentecost. That includes all the elect — men, women, and children, bond and free. We need no one to teach us, since we know the Scriptures through the Spirit. We are enabled to devote ourselves with all that we have in love to God. And we are kings who reign with Christ over the powers of Satan, sin, and death, even now and forever. We can and will, we may and must live to the glory of our God.

When the Word is expounded we see Jesus, the revelation of the Father in the mirror of the Scriptures, by Christ's Spirit in our hearts.

O yes, we see more. We also see ourselves. And what we see of ourselves is by no means appealing. Our sins testify against us, condemning us. The guilt of our sins presses heavily on our souls. The finger of God pointing at us, accusing us, "Thou art the man!" We realize that we are bound in the bondage of sin and death, slaves to sin, incapable of any good and inclined to all evil, even prone to hate God and the neighbor. We hang our heads in shame and cry out, "O wretched man that I am!"

The wonder of grace is that on

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the mirror we see written: "The truth will make you free." In that same mirror we see Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God, who declares to us, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." In Him is all our salvation.

Jesus Christ, the wisdom and power of God.



It is with the eye of faith that we see Jesus on every page of the infallible Word of our God.

In the Old Testament we read the repeated promises of His coming. Immediately after the Fall in paradise God speaks of the Seed of the woman, who will crush the head of Satan. To Noah comes the promise that all creation will be included in the salvation brought by the promised Seed. Abraham is assured that God will establish His covenant with him and with his seed after him in their generations. This promise and all that follow can be summed up in the glorious promise, "I will be thy God and the God of thy seed after thee."

True Israel clung to the promise, and in the line of generations of believers the Christ was born. In the fullness of time God sent His Son. The New Testament speaks of the fulfillment of all God's promises in Christ Jesus, fully realized on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of Christ was poured out in the church. God reveals to us all the things that have been, that are, and that still must be realized through our exalted Lord in heaven.

Through the exposition of the Scriptures in the preaching of the Word we see Jesus, our Savior, our Lord. And in Him we see God as the God of our salvation.

By the power of the Word and by Christ's Spirit in our hearts we are transformed from glory to glory!



Amazing transformation!
Such as eye has not seen, ear has

not heard, and never entered into the heart of man.

For this transformation is spiritual, heavenly. We, who are by nature dead in trespasses and sin, are made alive in Christ Jesus. The life of the resurrected Lord is implanted in our hearts.

Our Lord gave us a picture of this spiritual awakening in the raising of His friend Lazarus. Although Lazarus had been dead already for four days, Jesus commanded with a powerful voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" The voice of Jesus penetrated into the depths of Lazarus' being and awakened him from his death. Only then did he hear the call, and he stirred, wiped away the napkin that covered his face, sat up, looked around, and actually walked out of the tomb.

This serves as a picture of our spiritual awakening. When the voice of Jesus penetrates into the depths of our souls we are awakened to a new, heavenly life, the resurrection life of our living Savior.

It is then, and only then, that we hear the voice of Jesus calling us out of the darkness and bondage of our sins into the marvelous light of His salvation. We are transformed into the image and likeness of Christ as sons and daughters of the living God. We are brought into true knowledge of God, to know Him as the only ever blessed and adorable God, our God and our Father. From mere babes in the truth we grow into the full manhood of grace and knowledge in Christ Jesus through the power of the preaching of the Word and the work of the Spirit of Christ in us.

We are righteous in Christ. The Spirit of the risen Lord assures us that although we have grossly transgressed all God's commandments and have kept none of them, nor are able to keep them, yet we are righteous in Christ, as if we never had any sin.

We are daily renewed, gradually but surely transformed into the likeness of Christ in meekness, godliness, and fear. We grow in grace

as we crucify the flesh and strive to live a new and godly life. We experience peace, the peace that passes all understanding. We learn contentment. We taste the beginning of the eternal joy, a joy unspeakable and full of glory. We are kept by the power of God unto the salvation that is prepared for us to be revealed in the last day.

We long in an ever-increasing measure to be with our Elder Brother, the Christ, in His glory. We realize, as the apostle Paul did, that to be with Christ is far better than anything this present life can offer. We know what it means when Scripture speaks of being "full of days," to have seen all God's promises realized, and to long to enter our eternal Home.

Changed from glory to glory by Christ's Spirit! And that in a real, mortal body, where sin still wars within us. We poor sinners never attain to more than a small beginning of the new obedience. We are saved by grace alone. We long for the day when we shall awaken to sin no more.



But that is only the beginning. We have the assurance, "Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." We shall see God in the face of Jesus Christ. And the glory that radiates from that face will fill us with a glory beyond description, that will radiate from us in an ever-increasing measure to the glory of the Father, world without end. That God may be all in all!

Moreover, we have the blessed promise that our Lord is coming again to change our mortal bodies into the likeness of His glorious body by that power whereby He can and will subdue all things unto Himself.

And all this to the praise of the glory of God's grace, world without end! □

Judging Ministers*

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

— I Corinthians 4:1-5

The theme from Holy Scripture that I bring on the occasion of your graduation from the Seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches may not at first captivate you young men who are graduating. The theme is the judging of ministers, mainly by others. Since by your successful examination before synod you have taken a huge step toward the ministry, the theme definitely applies to you. And you may well feel at this time that you have had quite enough of being judged.

You have been judged the last few days in the examination by synod.

You have been judged constantly the past four years by your

professors in your seminary training.

You have felt that you were being judged the past couple of years by the people when you brought the Word publicly in the congregations.

"Judging ministers?" you may groan, no doubt inaudibly; "must we hear about being evaluated and either found wanting or found approved, on our graduation night?"

"Give us a break!"

"Give us a break from the judgment of ministers!"

Fact is, there is no break for us ministers from being judged. Not only is there the constant threat of improper judgment of us and our work (what the apostle refers to in verse 3 as "man's judgment"), but also there is a *legitimate* judgment (what the apostle in verse 4 calls the Lord's judging).

There is no escape in the ministry from judgment.

The only question is whether we ministers will rightly respond to these judgments.

The improper, illegitimate, and destructive judgment, we must discount: "with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged ... of man's judgment" (v. 3).

The proper, necessary, and encouraging judgment, we ought always to keep in mind. Never may the minister allow the reality of this judgment to slip from his consciousness. Should one allow this to happen for any length of time, he runs the risk that this will prove fatal, I do not say to himself personally, but to his ministry.

Although my viewpoint on this occasion, like that of the apostle him-

self in the opening verses of I Corinthians 4, is that of the *minister* — that *he* is judged and how *he* must bear the judgment — the congregation is by no means ignored. It is the saints who are tempted to judge ministers wrongly; they were the ones guilty of this in Corinth. And it is to believers and their children that the apostle's admonition comes at the end: "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come."

What I have to say, therefore, is of importance to all.

The Judged

Those who are not to be judged by men but who are judged by the Lord are ministers of the Word, those believing males who are called by God through the church to the special office of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. Those who are to be accounted as stewards of the mysteries are the ordained ministers. The steward who must be found faithful is the preacher. The one for whom it is a small thing that he should be judged by his fellow believers is Paul in his position as apostle and preacher, as it is the apostle and preacher who is judged by the Lord. The members of the church are to judge nothing before the time concerning their pastor and concerning all the other ministers in the denomination.

That the Holy Spirit refers in this matter of judging to ministers is plain. First, those referred to are described as "ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God"

* The address given at the graduation exercises of the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches on June 19, 1995 at Hull, Iowa.

(v. 1). Second, this is evident from both the preceding and the following context. In the preceding chapters, the apostle has faulted the Corinthian church for preferring one preacher over another — Paul, Cephas, Apollos, and Christ — and forming factions around their ecclesiastical champions. In the verse that immediately follows the instruction about judging, Paul states, “And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos” — preachers both.

What a high estimation, then, the church must have of her ministers, because of their office!

Ministers are to be accounted as “servants of Christ” (such is the word translated “ministers” in verse 1) and “stewards of the mysteries of God.” Theirs is a *special* service belonging to a *special* office. Not all Christians hold this office and perform this service. The minister is privileged to dispense the mysteries of God, which are all the truths of Holy Scripture revealing the otherwise hidden gospel of God’s gracious salvation of elect sinners in His Son, Jesus Christ. The mysteries are treasures. By the faithful preaching of these mysteries — good stewardship for a minister! — the chosen church is saved and the gracious God is known and glorified.

This is a judgment of ministers that may, indeed must, be made by us all. There is a judging of ministers that is wrong, but there is also a judging that is right: Let everyone in the church so account of ministers as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. This is the authoritative judgment of ministers by Christ Himself in inspired Scripture. The Reformed faith makes this judgment its own in the form of installation of ministers:

What a glorious work the ministerial office is, since so great things are effected by it ... which is also the reason why the Lord will have such an office always to remain.

It is fitting that we be reminded

of this biblical evaluation of ministers on the occasion of the graduation of two candidates for the ministry from the Protestant Reformed Seminary. The churches have expended vast amounts of labor and money on behalf of their training, *because these churches account of ministers as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.*

You young men yourselves must be impressed with your awesome position and task when by a call Christ places you in office: servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. One would never dare to enter this office without a call. The exercise of this office requires qualifications, high qualifications, qualifications both natural and spiritual. No unqualified man would be entrusted with the secrets of the civil state as an ambassador. Much less may an incompetent be entrusted with the secrets of God as a herald.

The Bible and the Reformed faith have a high view of the ministry. This high view, however, implies neither that the minister is an exalted lord in the church, nor that he may do pretty much as he pleases. As to his position, he is only a servant, nothing more. Christ is the honored, authoritative Lord. “*Dominie*” was a particularly unfortunate title for the minister in the Dutch Reformed tradition.

As to the minister’s work in the church, it is merely stewardship: handling God’s priceless mysteries.

The Faithfulness of the Judged

The all-important thing about the minister’s labors, therefore, is faithfulness. “It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” Faithfulness in a minister is determined by the mysteries of God of which the minister is a steward. It is primarily sound preaching and teaching of the revealed Word of God in all its doctrines.

One aspect of this particular faithfulness is that ministers not be what the old Puritan Edward Dering

complained of as “so faint professors that they do little good in the church.” He lumped “faint professors” with “enemies of God’s gospel.” “Faint professors” are ministers who refuse to proclaim vital truths sharply and boldly and, with this, refuse to condemn false doctrines, wicked ways of life, and, I may add, pernicious movements with similar sharpness and vehemence.

Article 55 of our Reformed Church Order forbids every minister to be a “faint professor”:

To ward off false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings, the ministers and elders shall use the means of teaching, of refutation, or warning, and of admonition, as well in the ministry of the Word as in Christian teaching and family-visiting.

On this article, the Reformed theologian Joh. Jansen has written in explanation:

With each text, the truth must be purely preached, error must be refuted, heresies must be warned against, and there must be admonition to faithfulness.

“With each text”!

No Protestant Reformed preacher, indeed, no Reformed preacher, may be a “faint professor.”

If you graduates show yourselves “faint professors,” you will be unfaithful to all your seminary instruction, unfaithful to the churches (who have not expended the labor and money that have gone into your training in order to receive “faint professors”), and unfaithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faithfulness in the ministry consists, secondly, of diligence in preaching and teaching: hard work and long hours. A lazy minister is an unfaithful steward.

Third, as a steward, the minister ignores, and even sacrifices, his own interests, whether ease and pleasure, money and possessions, or

name and standing, for the sake of the interests of the great God whose mysteries are his heavy responsibility and the interests of the honorable Lord Jesus Christ whose devoted servant he is. This too is faithfulness.

Also, as the apostle indicates when he speaks of a coming judgment of the counsels of ministers' hearts, the faithful minister is the man who carries out his stewardship in love for God in Christ *in his heart*. A mere professional clergyman, no matter how capable, is derelict.

This faithfulness will be judged.

Any minister or candidate who reads the opening verses of I Corinthians 4 to say that ministers are "off-the-hook" of judgment is mistaken. (Such exegesis would raise doubt whether the man is competent to handle the mysteries of God at all.) "It is required in stewards that a man" (note well the individualizing singular: "a man," that is, "each minister individually") — "that a man be found faithful." The word that jumps out at the minister with the force of a summons to judgment is the word "found": "that a man be *found* faithful." Faithfulness in a minister will be established by thor-

ough investigation and will be shown by solemn verdict. Every minister of Christ will be found faithful *by a judge in court*.

There is, and will be, judgment of every minister regarding his ministry. One's ministry must be justified, just as one's person is justified.

The question is: by whom?

And then, because the viewpoint is the minister's: to whose judging is the minister to subject his ministry? □

(to be concluded)

— DJE

All Around Us

Prof. Robert Decker

The CRC Synod 1995: Significant decisions

On at least four important issues the Christian Reformed Church's Synod of 1995 took significant decisions. These issues are: women in office, admitting of children to the Lord's Supper, continuing relations with the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN), and the second worship service on the Lord's Day. Not only were the decisions taken significant, they were in all four instances wrong.

Concerning women in office the synod was presented a majority report and a minority report by its advisory committee. The minority report retained the 1994 decision, but with altered grounds. It said, "the *most evident* teaching of Scripture prohibits women from holding the offices." The decision of 1994 said, "the *clear* teaching of Scripture prohibits women from holding the offices."

The synod chose to consider only the majority report, which according to its introduction was in-

tended to be a "compromise ... offered in the hope that it will be positively received by a sizable majority of synod, thus providing a solution to our current dilemma." The report began with a clear recommendation that synod recognize that on the women's issue "there are two different perspectives and convictions, both of which honor the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God." The grounds for this recommendation are numerous overtures and synodical decisions that have adduced good biblical grounds for both positions, as well as the admonition of Romans 14 to be tolerant on non-confessional issues. "There are these two interpretations in the church, and we must leave room for both," said Rev. John VanScheper after reading the recommendation.

By a vote of 112 to 66 the synod adopted this recommendation, which included the following points: 1) A classis may declare the word "male" in Article 3a of the Church Order of the CRC inoperative, and authorize its churches to ordain and install women in the offices of elder, minister, and evangelist. 2) Such a classis may not delegate women to synod or appoint a woman as a synodical deputy. 3) A classis that decides the word "male" remains op-

erative shall permit its churches to take exception to this decision as it applies to the role of elder, as long as this role is restricted to the local church. 4) If qualified women apply for ministerial candidacy, the Board of Trustees of Calvin Theological Seminary and synod may not force trustees and delegates to vote for her against the dictates of their consciences. 5) The general secretary of the CRC will annually publish a list of classes that decide the word "male" is inoperative. 6) Synodical agencies shall not appoint women as ministers of the Word. 7) Synodical deputies shall not be asked to participate against the dictates of their consciences in any matter relating to ministers of the Word. 8) This arrangement will be in effect until the year 2000, at which time it will be reviewed. The synod concluded by urging people in the CRC to recognize that the issue of women in ecclesiastical office is not a matter of salvation and that even in our differences we remain sisters and brothers in Christ.

Banner editor, Rev. John Suk, comments, "The question that faces the CRC now is whether we can live with strong differences of opinion on women in office. The experience of the New Testament church sug-

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gests that we can. Take the church in Corinth, for example. Some Corinthian church members followed Peter, some Apollos, and some Paul. Its members debated whether Christians could eat meat sacrificed to idols. They disputed about the nature of the Resurrection. Just like we do, they argued about the relative merits of being single or married. And for the Corinthians, as for us, the shape of the liturgy was a bone of contention. Even though they were one, the Corinthians were almost always at odds with each other. Yet just about the last words Paul wrote to this difficult, fractious church body were, 'Greet one another with a holy kiss' (I Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12).... In our culture a holy kiss might well be a hearty handshake. Or even a sanctified compromise" (the *Banner*, July 3, 1995, p. 30).

One wonders if Rev. Suk has ever read the Epistles to the Corinthians. The inspired apostle sharply admonished the Corinthians, not for having honest differences of opinion, but for the terrible sins of schism, incest, denial of the resurrection, and other sins and weaknesses. So sharp were the admonitions that the apostle was worried about how they would be received! The fruit of these admonitions was that the Holy Spirit worked in the Corinthians the godly sorrow of repentance so that these evils were removed from the Corinthian church (cf. II Cor. 7:1-10).

The fact is that the 1995 decisions on women in office contain a flat contradiction. There cannot be good scriptural grounds for both positions! One is biblical and right, and the other is unbiblical and wrong! Scripture does not clearly teach both positions. Scripture clearly prohibits women from holding church office. So in one sense the decisions are not a compromise. They are contradictory. In another sense they are a compromise. These decisions compromise the clear teaching of the Bible.

The synod also decided to ad-

mit children to the Lord's Table through a four-step process, ending with the child making "profession of faith in a simple and appropriate manner during a regular worship service." This too is wrong. A child born into the church, baptized in the name of the triune God, is not able to discern the Lord's body. He can do this only on arriving at years of discretion.

After intense debate, coming on the heels of a blunt speech by the GKN fraternal delegate Rev. Richard Vissinga, who made no bones about the GKN's stances on homosexuality and euthanasia, the synod came close to cutting off relations between the CRC and the GKN. The vote was 89 to 80 not to cut off relations. The synod further decided to pursue discussions with the GKN about the "issues and trends in the life and practice of the GKN that are of deep concern to the CRC."

"The Sunday-evening worship service in the CRC may be on its way out. But synod 1995 battled hard not to hasten its demise," reports the *Banner*. A Canadian congregation having difficulty with the second service overtured synod, asking that Articles 51 and 54 of the Church Order of the CRC "be changed to allow churches more flexibility with the second service and with catechism preaching." After lengthy debate, and returning the matter to its advisory committee for rewording, the synod decided to change Article 51 by adding the word "ordinarily." The Article now reads, "The congregation shall assemble for worship, ordinarily twice on the Lord's Day, to hear God's Word, to receive the sacraments, to engage in praise and prayer, and to present gifts of gratitude." The synod also decided to add a supplement to the Church Order "affirming the rich tradition of assembling for worship twice on the Lord's Day and encouraging existing congregations to continue and new congregations to embrace this tradition...."

It may be true that the synod battled hard not to hasten the de-

mise of the second service. It is certain, however, that this decision insures the eventual demise of the second service. If the CRC wanted to retain the second service, why not exhort the churches to insist on faithful attendance to the second worship service and exercise Christian discipline in Christ's love over those who neglect the means of grace?

Banner

The RCA says, "Not yet."

Classis North Grand Rapids of the Reformed Church in America overtured its General Synod "to effect full programmatic and organizational union with the Christian Reformed Church in North America by June 2000." The Classis offered three grounds for this overture: "1) The RCA and the CRC share a common tradition, a complementary history, and a collateral mission. 2) There are no present-day insurmountable barriers to complete merger. 3) The time has come and is perhaps long past when the will of God needs to be heeded to heal a rift that never should have happened." In an attachment to the third ground, the Classis notes that the five reasons given for the 1857 secession by four West Michigan congregations to begin what would become the CRC were the use of hymns, open communion for all but Roman Catholics, neglect of preaching from and instruction in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, neglect of home visitation by the elders, "and the opinion of some in the RCA that the 1834 secession from the RCA's mother denomination in the Netherlands was unnecessary." Said Classis North Grand Rapids, "None of the reasons stated above for secession are doctrinal in nature. All the above reasons have lost their cogency."

To this the General Synod said in effect, "not yet." The RCA General Synod voted instead to "encourage the agencies of the General Synod as well as the Commission on Christian Unity to maintain regular correspondence with the respective corresponding agencies with the

CRC and its Interchurch Relations Committee; and further, to explore avenues of reconciliation between the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church

in North America for additional programmatic cooperation."

Because the reasons for the 1857 secession no longer obtain, one won-

ders why the RCA hesitates to seek full union with the CRC. □

Christian Observer
Christian Renewal

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Jason Kortering

The Gospel in Southeast Asia

part 2

The public media here in Singapore have been enjoying a lively discussion on the relationship between morality and religion. It was prompted by a monograph written by two professors of the National University of Singapore in which they analyzed the responses of citizens in connection with the 1990 Census. People were asked questions about their religious practices. By comparing these answers with the ones of the census of 1980, the government learned what changes had taken place.

They learned that Christianity had made the greatest gains — 45,000 new adherents, making up 12.5% of the population, or a total of 285,000 Christians. Since 88% of these new followers of Christianity are Chinese, the government observed that Christianity is taking on the more educated and wealthy of society. Buddhism still has the largest following, 31%. The religion had a 5% increase. The followers of Islam and Hinduism remained the same, and the Taoists declined in numbers.

What sparked the public debate was that 14.3% of the population profess to have no religion. This was

the largest increase and raised the issue of whether a person needs religion to be a good citizen. Li Jin Cai wrote, "You don't need a religion to tell you to be moral. Beliefs come from knowing what is right and wrong. It doesn't have to be from God or what people tell you. It comes from the goodness of your heart from your common sense." Ten other people responded in much the same way. Jacob Yap said, "I believe in myself." Stephen Ho wrote a summary article, which was the last one allowed in the *Straits Times*. He said, "Even the various religious leaders interviewed have a common theme running thru all their statements. A person can still be a morally good person from a purely naturalistic humanistic point of view, without the aid of religion. Religion merely adds a spiritual dimension, helps give a clearer definition of morals, is a source of strength and helps give morality a sense of objectivity and consistency."

Underlying much of this public thinking on morality is the influence of Confucian philosophy. Senior Minister Lee Kwan Yew is the greatest public advocate and spokesman of this thinking. He is a respected statesman throughout the world and has the greatest influence upon the thinking of Singaporeans. My understanding is that he is not a practitioner of any religion, but consid-

ers himself a free thinker. His favorite term is "Asian values," which are often played against "Western values." The subtlety of the use of such terms is great, and we Christians in Singapore must remain alert and realize that there is no greater moral superiority in either East or West. Fallen man is thoroughly depraved in sin, and apart from the God of Jesus Christ is lost in his sins forever. The sins of the West cry to God for judgment as well as the sins of the East. There is only one refuge and that is beneath the cross of Jesus.

Eastern religions tend to be legalistic and form a certain outward concept of the good life. People like to convince themselves that they are good and have a good society, yet inwardly they are beset with decay and unrest. If we have to generalize East and West regarding morality, which is always dangerous, the West lets it all hang out. All the rot is publicized, and everyone can gawk at it as long as he likes. The East covers up all the rot and wants everyone to think they are the best.

Young Christian converts are taken out of this kind of life and brought to faith in Jesus Christ. Many carry with them the hurt and scars of past experiences. Some of them have to deal with additional hardships the moment they let their Christian profession be known.

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These difficulties are not of the measure that a Christian suffers in a Muslim country. It is more subtle and can wear one down in the long run.

Kim Choo (not her real name) is a Christian sister who learned in her adulthood that her mother is not her mother. Rather, the person whom she calls "mother" is the third person who had something to do with raising her. She learned that a friend of her biological mother visited soon after her birth. This friend admired the baby, but the mother said, "So ugly, so chubby. You want her?" She said it jokingly, but the visitor took her seriously, and upon leaving asked if she could take the baby girl along. In order for the mother to save face, she couldn't go back on her word. She handed her the newborn. The woman took care of the baby for only a few years, and in turn gave it to another woman without even telling the original mother. These were the days before adoption laws were in place, and times were tough. After the young woman learned about her true mother, she felt resentment for this abandonment. Besides that, she did not receive as good an education as her siblings. The love of Christ ministers to this need.

Bee Lan (fictional name) comes from a home in which the father is a drunkard. Repeatedly the father would come home at 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. and terrorize the family. There were times he would take the kitchen cleaver and hold it at their throats and threaten them if they didn't do what he wanted. Bee Lan had learned piano, and more than once at 2 a.m. she had to get out of bed to play Chinese favorites for her father's drunken buddies. The very day her mother gave birth in the hospital to her brother, her father came home with another woman. To this day her mother "puts up with this man." Face saving is more important than accountability. So the charade of a reasonable marriage and home life continues while inwardly all this hurt and terror build up.

Another sister, Mui Cheng (also not her real name), lives at home with her family while her brother is spoiled, lazy, and spends his funds on gambling. As is true with gambling throughout the world, her brother always loses more than he wins. When that happens, he borrows money from the "loan sharks," illegal money lenders who charge high interest. They are among the most cruel and fearsome people in Singapore. The family does not call the police. Again, they must preserve some sort of face. Rather, they try to appease the loan sharks by pooling their personal funds to pay these debts. The parents will do anything, even borrowing money from other family members. If they do not pay, the loan sharks will harass the family. They threaten members of the family, sometimes coming in the middle of the night and making a ruckus at the door, or even setting fire to the door. The family is literally held hostage to these loan sharks. Yet no one does anything to the son who is gambling. He is "protected." The sister lives in such a home situation, and has contributed her own funds as well. What should she do? Remember, in Singapore you don't just move out to be on your own. Housing is not available to you. If you leave, you have to live in with another family.

Not all families are of this character. Not all non-Christian families are this bad. There are those who "have the works of the law written in their hearts." They have an outward form of decency. Yet even in these homes, problems arise.

Problems arise when young people first become Christians. It is very threatening when children of those who practice traditional Chinese religion become Christians. It is a major upset in the family. The parents feel threatened and often strike out in anger. If we feel sorrow when our children may leave the church through marriage, try to imagine what these Chinese parents feel when they are afraid that after they die, their children will not feed

them, pray to them, nurture their spirits. What terrible children! How can they act this way to parents who raised them and met all their needs? The young Christians, more than likely, have to pass through a time of persecution. They must submit, but in many ways not obey. For God's sake they must bear the suffering, but still honor father and mother. The key is to take a stand in all areas where compromise is forbidden. They cannot eat the family meal which is offered to idols. They cannot burn joss sticks. They cannot worship ancestors. But they can be supportive children, polite and respectful to parents. They try doubly hard to spend time with parents and show their love. In the end, the most wonderful testimony of non-Christian parents is that their children became better children when they became Christians. This is the most effective means to gain them for Christ.

Secondly, problems arise when the Christian marries, and out of tradition or need must live in with the parents in the parental home. I have five couples in my pre-marriage class. Three of them plan to live with parents when they marry. All of the parents are non-Christian. We were just discussing this past Sunday how much money they must pay their parents when they live with them. Some parents are very insistent that upon marriage they have two incomes so they can pay more than when they were single. Paying parents is deeply rooted in tradition. Respect and appreciation is shown by children giving parents money whether they need it or not. Privacy is not much available in such a home, so the newlyweds have to begin their life of "cleaving" under the watchful eye of an austere father, and the young bride often makes do with a domineering mother-in-law. If they stay long enough for children to be born, a whole new set of problems arise. Almost all Christians complain of the interference by non-Christian grand-parents in the discipline of the children. Different val-

ues clash directly in this area. You can't just leave your children by Grandma. Grandma may try to influence them in the worship of ancestors and the burning of joss sticks.

Difficulties sometimes arise when young Christians have to deal with the superstitions of most of the locals. Superstition includes the practice of geomancy. Everything comes under forces of Ying and Yang, or whatever name they use. Things must be situated in just a right way for the forces to be advantageous. Large companies are formed which advise clients on the positioning of a building on the land, where to face it, how the furniture must be arranged inside, which lights must be left on 24 hours a day, and even where a bag of rice must be set. Couples tell us of the times when parents enter into the house of their children and immediately begin to rearrange the furniture because it is not auspicious. One of the church members works for an architectural firm and receives in-

structions from geomancers repeatedly for certain details.

Besides this kind of superstition is the spiritism of the temple mediums. It is not that members of the church struggle with the temptation to visit mediums, but rather their family does and it affects them that way. One sister's father died in unbelief. She witnessed to him repeatedly, but he would have nothing to do with Christianity, the reason being that he lost the sight in his right eye. His left eye was becoming dim, so he went to the temple medium for advice. The medium spoke harshly to him and berated him for neglecting his ancestor's graves and not feeding their spirits. He cursed him and said he would go blind unless he changed his ways. The man trembled, and he asked his daughter, how did the spirit know that I was neglectful. He immediately burnt joss sticks and put out food for the spirits of his family and would hear nothing about Christi-

anity lest he make the spirit angry and go blind in his left eye. This causes pain in the hearts of young Christians.

There are times when the young Christians struggle with the extent of the knowledge of these spirits. Some have claimed to hear their dead father's voice when the mother consulted a medium. Other times the medium tells them to rearrange the furniture in the house and evil will end. They do it and the evil ends. How must such circumstances be explained?

Though we could continue with many stories and tell of other situations, yet we trust this will help you understand a little better what young Christians face. This is not to sound a note of defeat, for it is exactly the gospel which is God's power of salvation and transforms lives in just such situations. Yes, there are times of strength and weakness, but God is faithful. We praise His wonderful Name. □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

A Question of Language

Inasmuch as different languages are spoken in the churches, the necessary translations shall be made in the ecclesiastical assemblies, and in the publication of recommendations, instructions, and decisions.

Church Order, Article 52.

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The original article

Article 52 is the last article in the section of the *Church Order* that deals with the ecclesiastical assemblies. It concerns the matter of language — the language used at the assemblies, in the official minutes of the assemblies, and the translation of the minutes.

The original article did not deal with the language question itself. This was covered in the original Article 51. Early in the days of the Reformed churches in the Lowlands there was the difference between the churches in the north which spoke

Dutch and the churches in the south which spoke French or Walloon. Article 51, in recognition of this fact, required separate ecclesiastical assemblies on all levels except at the synodical level. Article 52 recognized the possibility that in some areas there would be churches of both languages, and hence made provision for combined consistory meetings in these areas.

Nevertheless it is advisable that in the cities where the aforesaid Walloon churches are found some ministers and elders of both sides

should gather every month in order to promote good unity and correspondence with one another and as much as possible to support one another with advice according to need.

The original Article 52 was concerned that the difference in language not become the occasion for the churches in the Lowlands to drift apart. The language barrier must be surmounted and the unity of the Reformed churches in the Lowlands preserved.

Further revision

In time Article 52 became unnecessary. No longer were there two languages being spoken in the Reformed churches of the Lowlands. For the most part the Dutch language had become the language of the churches. Hence, the 1905 revision of the *Church Order* by the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands removed all reference to the French-speaking (Walloon) churches. Article 52 was altered so that it dealt with synodical regulation of the mission work that was being carried on in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia).

Our present article is the result of the revision of the *Church Order* by the Christian Reformed Church in 1914. At that time both English and Dutch were being spoken in the churches. The CRC had been established by Dutch Reformed Christians. Large numbers of Dutch immigrants had crossed the Atlantic and made their way into the fledgling denomination. Although gradually the use of the English language became more widespread, in 1914 much of the official work of the church was still carried on in the Dutch.

In our early history, the Protestant Reformed Churches too were bilingual. Both English and Dutch were used by the members of the churches officially. Consistory minutes and even the minutes of the combined consistories and early classis were in the Dutch. There were Dutch worship services. Many

of the articles in the earlier volumes of the *Standard Bearer* were in Dutch. Pamphlets were published in the Dutch language.

Gradually, however, the churches were Americanized so that the English language was used exclusively. The generations born, raised, and educated in the United States soon lost the ability to speak and to understand the Dutch language. There are few members of the Protestant Reformed Churches today who are fluent in both English and Dutch.

Further revision still?

This raises the question whether Article 52 should be removed from our *Church Order*. Since the article is outdated, what practical value does it serve in the *Church Order*? Not only is it not the case now that different languages are spoken in the churches, but it is highly unlikely that this situation will ever prevail in the churches again. Would it not be best then to remove Article 52?

Although no great harm to the *Church Order* as a whole would be done by dropping Article 52, the article does serve a good purpose. The presence of the article in our *Church Order* underscores at least two important principles dear to Reformed Christians.

The first of these principles is *the unity of the church*. We love the church, and since we love the church the unity of the church is precious to us. As much as a husband who loves his wife is concerned for unity in his marriage, so concerned are we for unity in the household of God. The *Church Order* itself has as one of its outstanding purposes the promotion and preservation of the churches' unity.

Article 52 serves to underscore this interest in the unity of the church. Bound together by one doctrine, exhibiting one form of church government, and practicing one form of worship the Reformed churches stand in fundamental unity. Nothing incidental — not even something as significant as language

— must interfere with that unity. There must be no barrier, not even a language barrier, that gets in the way of the expression of the unity of the church of Jesus Christ.

It is also an important principle behind Article 52 that the work of the church must be *understandable*.

This was an important principle advanced by the Reformation. The worship of the church, the liturgy of the church, and the preaching of the church are to be in a language understood by the people. This principle applies as well to the decisions of the assemblies of the church. Not only all of the officebearers of the church, but the common members of the church as well must have free access to the decisions of the assemblies. Nothing is to be done in a corner or in secret, but in the open and subject to the scrutiny of the church as a whole.

A look ahead

Having treated Article 52, we are ready to begin consideration of the third major division of the *Church Order*, "Of Doctrine, Sacraments, and Other Ceremonies."

It may be well to begin by giving a brief outline of the contents of this section, Article 53-70 of the *Church Order*.

1. Articles 53-55 deal with doctrine, the signing of the "Formula of Subscription" by officebearers committing them to the doctrines of the Reformed faith as expressed in the creeds and calling them to ward off false doctrines.

2. Articles 56-60 deal with the sacrament of baptism.

3. Articles 61-64 deal with the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

4. Articles 65-70 deal with various other "ceremonies."

- a. Funeral services.
- b. Special days of prayer.
- c. Christian holidays.
- d. Heidelberg Catechism preaching.
- e. Singing in the worship services.
- f. Marriage. □

Beauty

In the Scriptures, beauty is inseparably related to God and His salvation. The Scriptures speak of the natural ugliness of sinful man and of the beauty of salvation in Jesus Christ, while warning against false beauty in the working out of that salvation. The Hebrew word means bright, fair, comely, and glorious. The word in the Greek has the basic meaning of hour; then, belonging to the right hour, timely; and finally, flourishing and beautiful.

The Lord our God is a beautiful God! The desire of the saints is "to behold the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4) and to have the beauty of the Lord upon them (Ps. 90:17). The beauty of the Lord is especially His holiness according to which He is without any sin and perfectly dedicated unto Himself. He is to be worshiped in the beauty of holiness (Ps. 29:2). God is graceful, charming, glorious. He is the God of truth, and truth is beauty. Because God dwelled in Jerusalem, the city of God was "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth" (Ps. 48:2). "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined" (Ps. 50:2). Because they proclaim the wonderful salvation of God, the feet of gospel preachers are beautiful upon the mountains (Is. 52:7).

When the gospel of Jesus Christ comes to men throughout the world, it finds them without any soundness, but covered with "wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores; they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (Is. 1:6). In salvation, God gives His people beauty for ashes (Is. 61:3), clothes them with beautiful garments (Is. 52:1), and beautifies the meek with salvation (Ps. 149:4). By the Word and Spirit, undone, ugly sinners are recreated after the image of God with the beauty, loveliness, and glory of God Himself. Thus they are made fit to dwell with Him in the new Jerusalem.

Although the outstanding Old Testament types of Christ, Moses, and David were beautiful children, this could not be said of Christ Himself. Very strikingly, the One whom God sent to beautify the church with salvation was not beautiful! "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Is. 53:2). It would be an understatement to say that Jesus was plain in appearance, for "His visage was so marred more than any man" (Is. 52:14); He was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Is. 53:3); there was nothing physically attractive about the Son of God in our flesh. Undoubtedly God had a purpose with this. Men must not be drawn to the

Christ for the wrong reasons: the stature of a Saul (I Sam. 9:2), the unblemished beauty of an Absalom (II Sam. 14:25), or the suave charisma of a modern-day religious leader. We must hear and believe on His words which are always gracious (Luke 4:22), for the words which He speaks, "they are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63).

There is a lot of emphasis on physical beauty today, the beauty of a Delilah, a Bathsheba, or an Esther. Young men must be warned not to lust after this beauty in their hearts, nor to be taken with their eyelids (Prov. 6:25). Godly wives are reminded that "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:30). The multi-billion dollar industries of fashion, cosmetics, beauty parlors, and body-toning salons, with the vain beauty they encourage, are a far cry from the beauty that is more than skin deep, that endures unto endless ages, and that is pleasing to God.

Ezekiel speaks of all that God has done for His people in making them exceedingly beautiful and prosperous as a kingdom. "Thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty; for it was perfect through my comeliness, saith the Lord God." But Judah trusted in her own beauty, of which she had none, and God pronounced woe upon her (Ezek. 16:14, 15, 23). Jesus sounded a warning against outward show and hypocrisy in religion when He told the scribes and Pharisees that they were beautiful on the outside, but within full of dead men's bones (Matt. 23:27). Whited sepulchers reveal this in showy giving, prayers, and church attendance.

Although the Bible does not condemn all outward adorning such as the plaiting of the hair, wearing of gold, and putting on of apparel, it does condemn the notion that such things comprise true adorning (I Pet. 3:3). As men and women of God, we are interested in being truly manly and beautiful. True beauty for the woman is to have the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. The stalwart man is the man of knowledge and prayer (I Pet. 3:4, 7). When God beautifies the meek with salvation, He begins that work in the heart, which He alone sees. From the heart that inner beauty radiates through all our lives so that with Jesus we "increase in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). When we die, we shall awaken immediately with the likeness of our glorified Lord, the beauty of the Lord God shall be upon us, and we shall be satisfied. And when Christ returns, He will make the entire creation beautiful with the glory of God. □

The Sovereign God of Predestination

"Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it."

Isaiah 46:10, 11

"Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself...: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

Ephesians 1:8, 9, 11

"We believe that the same God, after he had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that he rules and governs them according to his holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without his appointment: nevertheless, God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed."

Belgic Confession, Art. 13

"God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain

whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."

Westminster Confession,
Chap. III, Art. 1

Introduction

The doctrine of God ("Theology" proper) not only embraces God's Being and Nature, that is, who and what He is; it also embraces His works, that is, what He does. As the eternally living God, He is the God who is constantly active, ever working, always doing what He pleases. Jesus referred to this when he said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (Jn. 5:17). And as those who understand that knowing God is the highest science and the greatest blessing in life, we ought to be interested in knowing (and knowing more!) of His actions and works.

The works of God are many and manifold. When we speak of God's works we usually think, first of all, of His works of creation, providence, and salvation. But we must remember that God also has works that He performs *within* Himself. When Rev. Thomas Miersma wrote on the subject of the Trinity under this rubric, he treated part of these "internal" works of God. When God the Father begets the Son eternally, He is working within Himself; when the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, God is active within Himself. These are works of God which *stay* within His own Being and life.

They are real and wonderful, yet unseen to us.

But there are other "internal" works of God which become "external," that is, they become revealed outside of His own Being and life in time and history. These include God's eternal act of predestinating (foreordaining, decreeing) all things. Scripture teaches that the works of God in time and history are all done according to His sovereign counsel and purpose worked out perfectly in eternity (cf. the above two texts). God was at work before the creation of the world drawing up a master plan for the creation and government of the universe and for the salvation of His church and people. It is this work of God which we treat in this article. We plan to limit ourselves this time to God's *general* predestination of all things. In two future articles we will treat God's *predestination* of men and angels, namely, election and reprobation.

The God "Wonderful in Counsel" (Is. 28:29)

When the Word of God teaches us the truth that God eternally decreed all things that ever take place in time and history, it teaches us in the first place, that this predestination proceeds from the sovereign *mind* and *will* of God (cf. Dan. 4:35; Rom. 11:34). Before He made all things and began to work in time, our eternal Lord consciously and carefully *thought* about what He would do, and freely and deliberately *willed* what He would do. God's decrees are so many thoughts

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and desires which arose out of His own perfect mind and will. This thinking and willing was done in perfect sovereignty, that is, in total freedom and in total self-sufficiency. No one else taught Him or told Him what to do; He was not guided or compelled by any one or any thing outside of Himself; He determined all things in and of Himself (cf. Is. 40: 13, 14; Rom. 11:34, 35).

In the second place, this fact reveals at the same time that God's decrees are not arbitrary and purposeless. Because they were thought out and willed, God's decrees are a perfectly ordered and well-arranged *plan* of all things that take place in time. Because they have their origin in God's perfect mind and will, they are not so many haphazard, unrelated determinations of things and events, but a perfect unity forming a marvelous plan, relating to one another with meaning and intention, so that they reveal and effect God's sovereign *purpose* with all things. The Scriptures teach this plan and purpose of God's predestination where it uses the words "counsel" and "purpose" (cf. Is. 46:10; Jer. 4:28; Acts 2:23). It is important to the sovereignty of God and comforting to the believer that all things which take place have meaning and purpose according to God's eternal predestination. It is this which enables believers to say with regard to all that befalls them, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

In the third place, God's decrees are not His reluctant determinations regarding time and history. His counsel is not a plan with which He is unhappy and dissatisfied. God's decrees are His *good pleasure*. This is another key word used in Scripture in connection with God's predestination (cf. Ps. 115:3; Is. 46:10; Matt. 11:26; Eph. 1:5). He does what He pleases and acts according to His good pleasure, not only in the sense that He freely does what He wills, but also in the sense that He *delights*

in what He has planned because all His decrees are *good* and *wise*. This is the case not only with what we call good providences, but also with what we call evils, disasters, and tragedies. God takes pleasure in *all* that He has determined to do in this world. And if He does, so must we. As His decrees are worked out in our lives, we must always confess, "The Lord is good in all He does." Like Jesus, we ought to respond, "I thank thee, O Father...; for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matt. 11:25, 26).

From these three points then, we may see the absolute sovereignty of our decreeing God. His predestination reveals that He is *God*. Herman Hoeksema summarizes this well in his *Reformed Dogmatics* (Reformed Free Publishing Assn., 1966) where he writes:

It is especially this eternal counsel of God that presents the Lord God as the absolutely blessed and self-sufficient Lord of heaven and earth.... He is the living God, distinct from all idols. For this counsel of God may not be compared with a dead plan, such as an architect makes of a house or any other edifice. For in the case of such a plan, the realization of the plan is always better and more glorious than the original conception; but the counsel of the Lord is His eternal good pleasure, according to which He willed and conceived all things that are ever realized or occur in time. In that counsel He has eternally all things with Himself, and rejoices perfectly in all the works of His hands.... He is God, and there is no one beside Him, the eternally Self-sufficient and most blessed Lord of all (pp. 154-55).

Opposition to this truth

The truth that God foreordains absolutely all things that take place in this life is one which consistently meets with stiff and even fierce opposition. Whether it be people in the unbelieving world or people who profess Christianity, men cannot stand the thought that God would determine all things ahead of time.

To them, this is sheer fatalism and leads to a stoic (cold, uncaring) attitude toward life's happenings. To them, it is repulsive that God would predestine sin and evils; it is in conflict with what a God of love would do. To them, this is too limiting of man and of his will and activity; it does not give him enough power and control in his life and in the world. Especially to the Arminian, the idea that God has determined all things, including man's salvation, is repugnant, since it refutes his view of the freedom of fallen man's will. Arminians are some of the greatest enemies of absolute predestination, even though it is the plain teaching of the Bible.

Yet it is an unholy irony that most people do believe that everything is somehow worked out ahead of time by someone or something; they simply will not believe that the God of the Christian faith is the One who has done this. Most believe that all things are fixed by chance or fate or evolutionary process or some higher power. They will trust many other gods for the control of their lives, but they will not give this power to the only true God, nor will they trust Him with their lives. This is why the gospel of the Reformed faith must be brought to unbelievers, the gospel of a sovereign God in whose hands are all things because He has ordained all things. This alone gives one a proper perspective on life, and comfort and hope in this world.

As for those who profess Christianity but reject this truth, they ought to know the only other options available to them. If they do not believe that all things come by God's determination and appointment, then they must put something or someone else in His place. Do they want the devil in that place? Blind, impersonal fate? Cold, arbitrary luck? Or do they want the option of a totally chaotic world, in which all creatures and all events have absolutely no reason or purpose for existing and happening?!

The Word of God gives us no

other option than the truth that God is the sovereign Power in the world, that He is the only One in control, and that all things come to pass as He has ordained from all eternity. The Scriptures are abundantly clear to all who will read them and yield to them, that God is the predestinating God, whose eternal plan covers all things. In fact, it is precisely as the predestinating God that He is revealed to be *God*, the sovereign Lord. Popular Reformed speaker

and author R.C. Sproul points this out in his book *Chosen by God* (Tyndale, 1986):

... The idea that God foreordains whatever comes to pass is ... simply a tenet of theism — a necessary tenet of theism.... To say that God foreordains all that comes to pass is simply to say that God is sovereign over his entire creation.... If there is any part of creation outside of God's sovereignty, then God is simply not sovereign. If God is

not sovereign, then God is not God (p. 26).

A denial of this truth, then, is in effect a denial of God Himself. That makes this doctrine extremely serious; indeed, it makes it a matter of life or death. Who is *your* God, the God of predestination, or some vain idol? May we be led by grace through faith to confess with the psalmist, "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3). □

Ministering to the Saints

Mr. Edwin Gritters

The Elder: "To Aid and Assist"

In our two previous articles we reviewed the history of the office of elder, as well as the necessary qualifications for those filling — or aspiring to fill — this very important office in the church of Christ. At this time I wish to take a very practical look at the work of the elder in the ruling and oversight of the church. I wish to state at the outset that when one attempts to be "practical," his thoughts will of necessity reflect his own ideas and methodologies. Since every elder's approach to his work will be somewhat different from that of other elders, one officebearer cannot (and may not) tell another how to do his work — nor is that our intent here.

Since the pastor (teaching elder) is also one of the *ruling* elders (and probably the *busiest* one), I would like to place emphasis this time on how the elders can be more effective

as *assistants* to our pastors. Our Form of Ordination of Elders, citing Paul's instruction in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12, concludes by saying, "Thus we see that these sorts of ministers (ruling elders, E.G.) are added to the others who preach the gospel, to aid and assist them, as in the Old Testament the common Levites were to the priests in the service of the tabernacle, in those things which they could not perform alone...."

Probably the most common form of what we might call "pastoral assistance" is in the area of teaching, because that is something that happens with little or no choice on the part of the elders. When the pastor is away for classical appointments, sickness, vacation, or any other reason, the burden of teaching and "preaching" (i.e., reading sermons on the Lord's Day) falls on the elders. Although one of the qualifications for the elder is that he be "apt to teach" (I Tim. 3:2), who of us would deny the feelings of insecurity and inferiority and the usual "butterflies" that overwhelm us

when we are confronted with these tasks, especially for the first time! While a few may enter the office of elder with some background and experience in teaching, most do not. Nevertheless, every elder will be called upon regularly to conduct services and teach catechism.

Are you properly prepared to do this? If not, how can you become more capable and comfortable in these tasks? If you are a "new" elder, a good place to begin is with a visit to your church's catechism classes. (You are not supposed to let that wait until the church visitors come anyhow, you know!) Note your pastor's style and methods. How does he make the lesson interesting? How does he keep the children's attention? How does he maintain good order in the classroom?

The next step is to study your lesson well so that you will go into the classroom with a good knowledge of what you are going to teach. But, you say, "I have a terrible job even trying to figure out what to talk about for 45 minutes! I am not an

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accomplished storyteller like my pastor. The children will probably be put to sleep by my monologue. So why should I try?" As an alternative, can you think of something to talk about for 15 minutes? Then convert your whole "speech" into a series of questions and let the children do the work. You will be surprised. They will come up with answers and ideas for discussion that you did not even think of.

As a further aid, I find the written work to be very helpful as a "study guide" for teaching catechism, especially in the upper classes. I see nothing wrong with going over the written work in the class. Some of the questions are quite difficult, often requiring help from the parents; and comparing answers in class can stimulate interesting discussions. Whatever you do, do not try to "wing it." The instruction of our covenant children deserves better than that. The Lord demands better than that. If you would be an effective teacher — and enjoy doing it — you must do your homework. That means diligent study and fervent prayer! Earnest prayer prepares the soil of the mind to assimilate what you have studied, and it brings forth fruit in the classroom.

As a related subject, what do you think about elders teaching some catechism classes full time? Some of our larger congregations already do this. A distinct advantage here, of course, is that the pastor can spend more time on preparation for his primary calling — preaching the Word on the Lord's Day. And it certainly gives the elder a chance to develop a rapport with the young people at an early age. I believe our elders would do well to get to know the young people on a first-name basis. We should not come across as a first-time acquaintance if we are to be effective, loving counselors. I emphasize *loving*, because the elders' work must be rooted in a *love* of God, a *love* of His Word, and a sincere *love* of the saints over whom he has been made an overseer.

Another aspect of the elders' work that comes into play during a prolonged vacancy or absence of a pastor is reading sermons on the Lord's Day. This can be no small task, especially in our churches in outlying areas which have little access to neighboring ministers, seminary professors, candidates, or retired ministers. Diligent preparation by the one who reads will make for easier listening — just as we enjoy hearing a minister who gives evidence of much study and brings God's Word on the Lord's day in a vibrant, enthusiastic manner. Read the sermon numerous times, so you know its contents almost by memory, not stumbling over words or phrases. If you are not well prepared, you will be talking to your necktie as you race through the sermon in record time! Not very edifying, to say the least! Read portions of the sermon aloud, and ask your spouse for suggestions for improvement. Better yet, make a recording to see how you sound. (You say you can't stand the sound of your own voice? Good point! Maybe your audience can't either!) The Word of God demands your best. With earnest preparation and a proper attitude, this task also can be enjoyable to you and profitable to your listeners.

Before we leave the subject of reading sermons and teaching catechism, let me pose one more thought for your consideration. We said in an earlier article that, inasmuch as God bestows differing gifts on the officebearers, the church is ruled by a "plurality" of elders, so that one elder's strengths may *complement* those of another. I know of elders who have no problem in getting on the pulpit to read a sermon, but who cringe at the thought of teaching a catechism class! Others are just the opposite. My question is whether it is necessary to do everything "by the number"? (Joe, I taught catechism last week, it's your turn this week.) Need we be ashamed that God gives differing gifts and abilities? Possibly some

elders could do a majority of family and sick visitations, while others do the bulk of catechism instruction. (I readily admit that the "ideal" would be that each elder become proficient in *every* aspect of his work.)

Before we close this series of articles on the office of elder, let us return to what I touched on earlier. What are the most positive things we can do as elders to relieve or share some of the spiritual and mental stress that our pastors surely experience in shepherding a flock in an increasingly apostatizing world? While we may willingly participate in the physical aspects of the work we discussed above, I believe we have a tendency to think that the spiritual condition of the congregation is what we hired the *minister* to worry about! Not so! I probably err, however, in asking what we can do to assist the pastor in *his* work. *His* work? Other than preaching on the Lord's Day, the pastor's work is the work of *all* the elders. And such work is best accomplished when there is a close working relationship between the pastor and the individual elders. Some "potential" spiritual problems among the membership can most appropriately be discussed on a "one-on-one" basis to determine if the perceived problem could best be approached at the pastoral level before being addressed by the full consistory. The pastor should be able to use the elder as a "sounding board." This can hardly occur if the only time you see one another is in the formal consistory setting. This past week, a local city observed "take-a-cop-to-lunch" week. How about taking your pastor out for a cup of coffee now and then? He needs to know that you too are aware of specific problems that are of concern to him. Conversely, things may have come to your attention that the pastor may not be aware of.

It is fitting also that the elders, as overseers of the preaching, make suggestions for sermon *content*, to address faults of the congregation or of certain members that you and

he may agree are best treated initially, and in a broader manner, from the pulpit. Certainly the faithful, all-encompassing preaching of the Word from Sabbath to Sabbath is the life-blood of the saints and the greatest deterrent to spiritual decay. The preaching of the gospel and Christian discipline are the keys by which the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers and closed to unbelievers (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 31). In a recent sermon on Lord's Day 31, Pastor A. den Hartog emphasized, "The church is the house of God. That church must be kept holy! The main purpose of discipline is to maintain the holiness of the church of Jesus Christ." Accordingly, in the council room, elders should take the initiative in addressing issues requir-

ing pastoral attention, or, in more serious cases, involvement by the consistory.

Much of the work that takes place in the council or consistory meetings also takes preparation! Elders must study and help resolve doctrinal issues, matters of church order, items coming to Classis or Synod, and disciplinary actions — to name a few. Through a close working relationship with the pastor, the elders may also defend the minister from unjustified attacks or criticism from within the church or from without.

In conclusion, may we repeat once more: the work of the elder requires devotion, determination, continual study, earnest prayer, and an ardent love for God's Word. May

all this be manifested in a love for the saints, which in turn is rooted in Him whose love came to expression in giving His only begotten Son!

And may the congregation in turn take heed to the Lord's command to give "double honor" to those who rule well, for that is their calling to those through whom Christ rules His church.

We pray that the efforts of the faithful, loving elder may experience the approval and blessing of the King of the church. Maybe this is expressed in the words of a familiar hymn:

Thus, led by His Spirit
To fountains of love,
Thou soon shall be fitted
For service above!
What a blessed reward! ☐

A Cloud Of Witnesses

Prof. Herman Hanko

John Bunyan: Author of *Pilgrim's Progress*

Introduction

God has raised men in the history of the church who, though not orthodox in all their views, nevertheless have fashioned the thinking of subsequent generations. Such a man was John Bunyan, teacher of the doctrines of grace but a Baptist in his covenant theology. His influence is due to the one book for which he is known by millions: *Pilgrim's Progress*. Children and adults in succeeding generations who have

read this fascinating allegory of the Christian life have come to appreciate and cherish it; people of God who have not read it do well to do so.

A brief description of the times in which John Bunyan lived is essential to understand his life.

After the Reformation in England, a struggle arose between those who were satisfied with the episcopacy of Anglicanism on the one hand, and, on the other, those who desired a more profound reformation than Anglicans wanted. After all, Anglicanism retained many Roman Catholic elements, especially in liturgy and church polity.

Those who desired more complete reformation, after the order of Calvin's reformation in Geneva,

fought long and bitterly for their views. Becoming known as Puritans, they finally gained civil power in England after the royalist forces of Charles I were defeated by the Parliamentary forces under Oliver Cromwell. Their power lasted, however, only about as long as Cromwell himself, and shortly after Cromwell's death, the monarchy was restored in the person of Charles II. Charles, a friend of Roman Catholics, did all in his power to restore that which was lost under Cromwell. The Puritans were defeated in their efforts.

The difficulty was that the Puritans themselves were divided. Some Puritans, while fighting for their position, were content to remain in the Anglican Church and seek renewal

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from within. They never succeeded, but continue in that church until today. They have become known as the evangelical wing of the Anglican Church. Others were convinced that the only way to purge Anglicanism was through instituting their reforms in their own parishes. For this they paid the price of ejection from the Anglican Church, and many suffered greatly.

This latter group did not, on the whole, favor a Reformed system of church government any more than Anglicanism did; they opted instead for a congregational and independent form of church government which made each congregation self-governing without any federative unity. These are the beginnings of Congregationalism and the Baptist movement.¹ Their influence is still felt today in the British Isles, which are filled with such independent Baptist congregations.

Into this political and ecclesiastical situation John Bunyan was born, and in it he was raised and did his work.

Bunyan's early life

John Bunyan was born in 1628 in the village of Elston near the town of Bedford. His father was a tinker² and the class to which he belonged was, while not the most humble in England, still far from the nobility.

Tinkers in England were usually Bohemian gypsies who were thought to be remnants of old Israel or ancient Egypt. Aware of this, Bunyan attempted, though unsuccessfully, to determine whether these Bohemian gypsies were his ancestors.

Because one of England's virtues was that education was available to all, Bunyan's father enrolled him in the Bedford Grammar School. But the school was so morally bad that his father, fearing for his son, took him out. That was the end of his education, and whatever he learned from that point on was through his own efforts.

John Bunyan worked hard after leaving school, but he also played hard. He became known for his dis-

solute and profligate life. Especially his wild and blasphemous language made him a byword among the local folk.

Wearying of the discipline of the home, he ran away and joined the Parliamentary Army.³ He saw no action, distinguished himself in no way, and soon returned home as wild and wicked as ever.

After resuming his former labors and even spending a time in bell-ringing in the local parish church, he married a meek and poor, though exceptionally pious, young girl. She managed to curb his wild nature and to persuade him to engage in reading to advance his meager education.

While the godly influences of his wife can only be surmised, the local minister, Mr. Gifford, was instrumental in Bunyan's conversion. The year was 1653.

Mr. Gifford had come to the ministry in a rather strange way. He had been a royalist officer, an escaped prisoner, a gifted physician in Bedford, a licentious man, but finally a converted man of God who became pastor of the congregation in Bedford. This congregation was part of the Cromwellian State Church during the days of the Cromwell Republic.

Bunyan came under the influence of Mr. Gifford and was instructed by him in the faith. In keeping with general practices among the dissenters, Bunyan received no formal education for the ministry, but assumed this position after Mr. Gifford died. The congregation was Baptist.

Bunyan possessed a retentive, fierce, impatient, and energetic mind. While Bunyan was living in his sins, that mind led him to the head of the wicked young men in the area. Under the power of divine grace, it became useful in a long and noble service in the gospel.

Bunyan's ministry

Through hard work and patient study Bunyan became a powerful and beloved preacher whose congre-

gation grew rapidly.

Tragedy came into his life at this point. His wife died, leaving him with four children, one of whom was a blind daughter. This little daughter, gentle, loving, thoughtful, and kind, became her father's special delight.

Bunyan soon married again, and his second wife was a faithful wife, a help to him in his ministry, and a mother to his children. It seems, however, as if he never had any children with her.

When Charles II came to the throne he put forth every effort to silence dissent and to conform all England to the Prayer Book. Dissenters were forbidden to preach, and John Bunyan was soon thrown into the prison in Bedford for disobeying the command of the king.

Twelve and a half long years he spent in the prison, in spite of many efforts to secure his release and in spite of many attempts on the part of his wife to persuade the courts to show mercy.

Nevertheless, although imprisonment and separation from his family were dreadful, Bunyan's suffering was never as bad as was the suffering of others in far more horrible prisons.⁴ His wife was cared for, if

¹ This statement is not quite correct. Baptist churches were established in England long before the ejection. But many of these independent congregations moved in the direction of the Baptist churches.

² A mender of kettles and pots.

³ That he joined the army is certain. Over the question of which army he joined, there is some dispute. Some biographers insist that he joined the Royalist troops. At any rate, this was in the days when the armies of Charles I and Oliver Cromwell were engaged in bloody civil war.

⁴ Anyone who has read Charles Dickens knows the dreadful state of England's prison system and the suffering of those in it.

meagerly, by his congregation; the jailer was a kind man who did not, as some, vent his brutality on his prisoners; and in the later years Bunyan was even permitted to leave prison to see his wife and children, to preach in his congregation, to visit his parishioners, and even to travel to London — although the jailer was severely censured for the latter extravagance. He was not deprived of his books, paper, and pen, and it was during these years in prison that Bunyan wrote a number of books, including the classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. His blind daughter came to visit him nearly every day.

Finally, after twelve and a half years, and when Charles II relented a bit, Bunyan was released. He put his affairs in order, and resumed his labors in the congregation. It was under his leadership that his congregation organized and became the first legal congregation of dissenters in England.

His fame as a preacher grew, and the small chapel had to be repeatedly enlarged. Branch meetings were held in the surrounding villages, and the first preaching circuits were established. Bunyan became a kind of "bishop" of the churches and was even sometimes affectionately called "Bishop Bunyan."⁵

His influence spread, and even in London, when he preached, he attracted throngs of people. The story is told that Dr. Owen was one of his frequent hearers in London. When that erudite and highly educated divine was sneeringly asked

by Charles II how he could go to hear a tinker preach, Owen responded: "I would give all my learning to be able to preach as well as the tinker."

His ministry was not long. During a time when he was very ill, Bunyan departed on a long trip through stormy and wet weather to engage in pastoral work. From this he never recovered, and he died in the home of a friend. The year was 1688. He was 60 years old. His wife outlived him by four years.

The Pilgrim's Progress

Bunyan's views accurately reflect the theology of Puritans in those days. He was strong on doctrine and even satirized the Anglican Church in Mr. Worldly Wiseman, who wanted to reduce Christianity to mere ethics. He held firmly to the doctrines of grace, but emphasized particularly the Lutheran viewpoint of justification by faith alone.

But especially in the view of conversion, he reflected Puritan views, and without a solid doctrine of the covenant he had no room for the conversion of the elect in infancy in the line of the covenant and in the daily conversion to which a child of God is called. In his spiritual biography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), he spoke of conversion as involving conviction of sin, attempts to appease God with legal righteousness, subsequent despair, a long and drawn-out period of temptation and struggle, and finally peace in the way of faith in

Christ. Such a conversion, though indeed the means God uses to bring some to salvation, has become the norm for genuine conversion even in many Reformed circles, but in those circles where there is no biblical doctrine of the covenant.

Bunyan wrote over 50 books, the best-known of which are *The Holy War* and *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. But *The Pilgrim's Progress* will to the end of time be associated in the minds of many saints with John Bunyan. It has gone through over 50 editions, and every Christmas season seems to bring a new one these days. It has been translated into many foreign languages, including all the languages and dialects of continental Europe. It was, in past years, almost always found on the shelf of godly homes, even though the only other book was the Bible.

Even Huckleberry Finn gives a concise description of it: "Interesting, but tough." But who among us, who has read it, can ever forget Mr. Valiant-for-Truth and Mr. Worldly-Wiseman? And who, having traveled with Pilgrim, can erase from his mind the Slough of Despond and House Beautiful? It will live yet many generations, if the Lord tarry, as the pilgrim's guide on our way to the Celestial City. □

⁵ These independent congregations had no rule of elders, and it is not strange that a man of Bunyan's influence would occupy an influential place in the churches.

Book Reviews

Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism (1750-1858), by Iain H. Murray. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994. 455 pp. \$27.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.]

Added to the list of important books which Iain Murray has written is this current volume on revival.

Murray's thesis is that the revivals of the 17th century, which began in New England at the time of Jonathan Edwards and were common on the Eastern Seaboard of America during the visits of George Whitefield, were genuine outpourings of the Spirit of God. They were, however, followed by revivals sparked by the labors of Charles Finney which were not works of the Spirit at all, but

caricatures of true revivals. The former, according to the title, were revivals; the latter was revivalism; the former, the making of American Evangelicalism; the latter, the marring of it.

This is an important book from many viewpoints. Although Murray speaks of 17th century revivals as indeed being the work of the Holy Spirit, he is not averse to criticism

of the revivals in some respects. He is critical of the excesses and emotionalism which characterized the revivals, and even admits that these excesses led to departures and schisms in the church, and opened the door to cults which did harm to the Presbyterian Church: "... an almost total desolation in the Presbyterian church in Kentucky and part of Tennessee" (p. 172). He also speaks of the fact that under Methodism's influence, revivals gave impetus to Arminianism (p. 182) and its altar call — which Murray clearly detests. While Murray approves of the ecumenical character of revivals (i.e., that they were to be found in Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist Churches, which often cooperated in the work) he also recognizes that this very ecumenicity led to doctrinal decline (p. 360).

But the real enemy of true revival was the revivalism of Charles Finney and New School Presbyterians. Of them Murray is sharply critical, and he blames them for destroying true revivals and giving revivals a bad name. In fact, Murray finds today's revivals to be more revivalism than the work of the Holy Spirit. Rightly, Murray's critique of Finney and the New School is chiefly doctrinal. And this doctrinal critique opens the way for many interesting and helpful discussions in the book of the issues surrounding Calvinism, Hyper-Calvinism, Arminianism, and Antinomianism. It is of more than passing interest that even in those days the orthodox in the Presbyterian Church, who often opposed revivals, were called Hyper-Calvinists.

But the extensive treatment of this subject sharply underscores what in my judgment are the basic arguments against even revivals, not to speak of revivalism.

In the first place, although Murray makes an effort to define what he means by revival, he nevertheless does not clearly distinguish between revival and normal ways in which the Spirit works, e.g., at the time of Pentecost not only, but also in times of reformation in the

church of Christ (including the Reformation of the 16th century) when spirituality is very high among the faithful in the battle of faith.

A more serious aspect of revivals was their ecumenical character. While Murray deplores the influence of Methodism in revivalism, e.g., he speaks without criticism of the fact that Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists fully cooperated in the revivals of the 18th century (see pp. 68, 69, e.g.). This ecumenicity was manifested in a disregard for doctrine; obviously this had to be true, for how could such different groups cooperate in revivals unless doctrinal differences were overlooked. Yet, with some ambiguity and contradiction, Murray is quite frank in condemning revivalism for doctrinal departure, while approving of the disregard for doctrinal distinctives in the revivals of which Murray approves.

It is in connection with this tension in Murray's book that he seems to say that some doctrines of Calvinism, such as predestination and limited atonement, are not important for evangelism (p. 363).

The book highlights what are other serious errors in revivals. Revival doctrine is based on a wrong view of conversion — surely within the covenant, but perhaps outside covenant lines as well. For example, Murray approves of the idea that conviction of sin is not the work of the Holy Spirit. Some, busy in revivals, wanted those under conviction of sin to come forward as an aid to a decision for Christ when they were distressed, but Murray registers his disagreement with this idea of coming forward on the grounds that conviction of sin is not evidence of regeneration (pp. 213ff.).

Revivals show a disregard for the doctrine of the covenant and the place of children in the covenant. The Reformed and biblical doctrine of the covenant insists that children "as well as adults are included in the covenant and church of God" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 74).

The doctrine of revivals misun-

derstands the work of the Holy Spirit in teaching that revivals result in mass conversions, spectacular evidences of the Spirit's work, and special outpourings of power through unusual ways in which the Spirit works. Scripture teaches that the work of the Spirit is unlike earthquakes, fire, and powerful winds, but is like a still small voice that works quietly, unnoticed, unaccompanied by fanfare, but powerful and irresistible for all that.

Murray talks about revival as it affected Princeton and even mentions Charles Hodge's criticism of the excesses. But there is more in Hodge than Murray reveals. Murray should have referred to Hodge's "The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the USA" and told his readers of the scathing indictment of revivals which Hodge offers.

It is striking that David Wells in his book, *No Place for Truth*, quotes Sidney Mead with approval when Mead says: "The ascendancy of pietism that accompanied the Second Great Awakening had the effect of undercutting the place of theology.... The passion for truth was replaced by the passion for souls, and ... during the 19th century and well into the 20th, religion prospered while theology went slowly bankrupt" (p. 110). This was indeed the fruit of the disregard for doctrine which characterized revivals at their best. ■

Dispelling the Tyranny, by Piet Prins. Tr. Paulina M. Rustenburg Bootsma. Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada: Inheritance Publications, 1994. 152 pp. \$9.95 (Can), \$8.50 (US) (paper). [Reviewed by the Editor.]

This is the eagerly awaited sequel to *When the Morning Came* (reviewed in the April 15, 1990 *Standard Bearer*). It continues the story of young Martin Meulenberg in the Netherlands during the terrible persecution of the Reformed by the Roman Catholic Church and Spain in the late 1500s.

Forced by the persecution to flee to Emden, Germany, Martin joins the army of Count Lodewyk, brother of William of Orange, in order to fight the invading army of the cruel Duke of Alva and to drive the tyrants from the Netherlands. After many adventures, including being captured when spying out the City of Groningen, Martin shares in the defeat of the army of Count Lodewyk by Alva at Jemmingen:

... the little group diminished fast from the furious attacks of Alva's many troops. Martin defended himself with his short pike. Sultan fought right beside him attacking a Spaniard at the throat when he came too close to Martin. Mr. Meulenberg also tried to ward off any danger from his son, but got hit in his left arm by a lance (p. 143).

Although defeated in this battle, the Dutch patriots and Reformed Christians do not lose courage:

... Mr. Meulenberg detected a holy zeal in the Count's eyes.... "Maybe it will be a long contest, and maybe we will be required to sacrifice our lives for it. But we must never give up. If God wills, the tyranny shall be dispelled from the Netherlands. The Lord shall not forsake His oppressed Church" (p. 145).

The book ends with Martin obtaining permission from his parents to enlist for service with one of the ships of the "Sea Beggars," the famed Dutch fleet that played so important a role in the struggle of the

Netherlands for freedom. The next volume, then, in this "Struggle for Freedom" series will have Martin on the high seas with the "Beggars." Inheritance Publications must not wait so long to bring out volume 3.

This is the kind of fiction that Reformed children and young people should read, and will enjoy reading. Our Christian schools should have this series in their library.

Many Christian book stores carry the book, including the Reformed Book Outlet, 3505 Kelly St., Hudsonville, MI 49426 (telephone: 616-669-6730). Canadians can order from Inheritance Publications, Box 154, Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada T0G 1R0. In the United States, this and other Inheritance publications can be ordered from Inheritance Publications, Box 366, Pella, IA 50219. The toll-free number in both the United States and Canada is 1-800-563-3594. ■

Grace and Glory: Sermons Preached in the Chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary, by Geerhardus Vos. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994. pp. xii-296. \$15.95. (cloth). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949), best known for his *Biblical Theology*, emigrated to the United States in 1881. After intensive theological training Vos declined an invitation to teach Old Testament Theology at the Free University of Amsterdam. Instead he taught at Calvin Theological Seminary (Systematic and Ex-

egetical Theology) from 1888-1893. From 1894 until he retired in 1932 Vos taught at Princeton Theological Seminary. He was ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1894. His wife, Catherine, is the author of the well-known and loved *Child's Story Bible*.

Grace and Glory is a collection of sermons preached by Dr. Vos in the chapel of Princeton Seminary. Vos, as these sermons indicate, was a keen exegete of the Scriptures. His insights are profound. The sermon titled "Rabboni!", based on John 20:16 (the appearance of the risen Christ to Mary Magdalene), is itself worth the price of the book.

Ministers, Christian School teachers, Bible study leaders, and lay members of the church will find a veritable spiritual feast in this book. It is not easy going, but if one takes the time to read it through at his own pace, he will be edified.

The late John Murray described Vos in these terms, "Dr. Vos is, in my judgment, the most penetrating exegete it has been my privilege to know, and, I believe, the most incisive exegete that has appeared in the English-speaking world in this century." Those of us who were privileged to know Herman Hoeksema and hear his preaching and teaching would no doubt disagree with Murray. Nevertheless, Geerhardus Vos was a gifted, erudite theologian and certainly ranks among the best preachers in the Reformed tradition. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Mission Activities

This past month many of you had the opportunity to welcome into your churches and fellowship Rev. Ron Hanko, our churches' mission-

ary to the saints of the Covenant Reformed Fellowship in Northern Ireland, his wife and children, along with several members of the CRF who also traveled with the Hankos from Northern Ireland.

The Hanko family spent the first week of their much anticipated five-week furlough with the family on the east coast of the U.S. While

there, Rev. Hanko also gave a slide presentation of the field and work in Northern Ireland. This presentation was done as part of the evangelism outreach of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ.

On July 5th, the Hankos arrived in west Michigan and moved into the vacant parsonage of the Byron Center, MI PRC. For the next two

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

weeks Rev. Hanko expected to be busy with the promotion of the work in Ireland. He had meetings with both the Mission Committee of our churches and the Council of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, the calling church for the Northern Ireland field. Besides these meetings, Rev. Hanko was also scheduled to give slide programs similar to his presentation at Covenant PRC, first in Hudsonville on July 7, and the following week in South Holland, IL; Pella, IA; and Doon, IA.

No doubt one of the highest high points of this furlough was the anticipated confession of faith of Sarah and Ryan Hanko. They were to make this confession shortly after arriving in Michigan before Hudsonville's Council. Their public confession was to take place, the Lord willing, on July 23, with their grandfather, Prof. H. Hanko, conducting the service.

The following Lord's Day, Rev. Hanko was also scheduled to lead Hudsonville's congregation in an additional and longed-for communion service, the first communion the Hankos have taken part in since leaving for Northern Ireland some two and a half years ago.

On July 31, after spending a week with the family on the shores of Lake Michigan, Rev. Hanko, Nancy, and the younger children were scheduled to return to Northern Ireland while the older teenagers stayed behind to enjoy this year's Young People's Convention.

On July 5 Rev. and Mrs. R. Moore were able to travel to the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada to present a slide program on the work of our Foreign Mission Committee in Ghana, Africa.

Evangelism Activities

Once again this year the congregation of the Byron Center, MI PRC, through their Evangelism Committee, hosted a special Sunday service in which a special effort was made to invite and encourage the community of Byron Center to worship with them.

This year's service, held on June 11, developed the theme of spiritual warfare as it is described in Ephesians 6:10-13. Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the First PRC in Holland, MI, was the guest pastor that evening.

Congregational Activities

On Sunday morning, June 18, Rev. M. Joostens was installed as the fifth pastor of the Lynden PRC in Lynden, WA. Rev. R. Moore conducted the service. That evening Rev. Joostens preached his first sermon as Lynden's pastor, basing it on I Corinthians 2:1-5. It was entitled, "My Preaching Among You." The congregation had scheduled a welcome program for the following Friday.

Some old news, reported now before it gets any older: A group from the Netherlands Reformed Church has agreed to purchase the old church building of the Hull, IA PRC.

On June 4, the Choral Society of the Grandville, MI PRC presented their Spring Concert.

Minister Activities

Rev. J. Mahtani, his wife, and his son Titus were able to spend about three weeks in Singapore in June. Rev. Mahtani had been invited to preach a couple of times in our sister churches in the ERCS and also to show slides of the work of the Lord in Houston.

We extend our congratulations to Rev. and Mrs. R. Cammenga of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI who were blessed with the birth of a son, Jared Matthew, born June 10.

Rev. J. Slopsema, of Hope PRC in Walker, MI, has accepted the call that he received from First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI.

The Consistory of the Byron Center, MI PRC formed a trio of Seminarian Doug Kuiper, Rev. Mitch Dick, and Rev. Audred Spriensma. A congregational meeting was scheduled for July 17.

Rev. Houck, pastor at the Peace PRC in Lynwood, IL, declined the

call he had received from the Edgerton, MN PRC.

Denominational Activities

On July 6, the Grace PRC of Standale, MI was brought into existence with an organizational service at the Hope PRC in Walker, MI. She was organized with 23 families and nine individuals. Of this group of 107 members, 55 are communicant members and 52 are baptized members. Rev. Peter Breen, emeritus minister in our churches, preached the organizational sermon that night based on I Thessalonians 2:13, entitled, "Preaching as a Means of Grace." Rev. J. Slopsema of Hope Church conducted the actual organizational meeting. For the time being, Grace's services will continue to be held at the Grand Valley Orthodox Christian Reformed Church on the corner of Eighth Ave. and Lake Michigan Dr., at 1:00 and 7:00 P.M.

Food for Thought

"You who have so many infirmities, should patiently bear with the infirmities of others."

— C.H. Spurgeon □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NOTICEII

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 13, 1995 at the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, MI. Material for this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk no later than August 14, 1995.

Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk

NOTICEIII

Annual RFPA Meeting will be held on Sept. 28, 1995, 8 P.M., in Hope Church.

NOTICEIII

The Protestant Reformed Churches are in need of \$25,000 with which to finish the financing of the \$440,000 seminary addition (just recently completed). The Theological School Committee has been authorized by the Synod to offer private notes at competitive rates and terms. If interested please call Mr. John Buiter at (616) 453-8402 or Mr. Henry Boer at (616) 669-9433.

THE STANDARD BEARER

P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI 49468-0603

SECOND CLASS
Postage Paid at
Grandville, Michigan

Conference on Reformed Church Government September 21 & 22, 1995

Thursday, September 21
8:00 P.M.

*The Biblical Basis of
Reformed Church Government*
address by
Prof. Robert D. Decker
Theological School of the
Protestant Reformed Churches

Friday, September 22
10:00 A.M.

The Autonomy of the Local Church
address by
Prof. Herman C. Hanko
Theological School of the
Protestant Reformed Churches

1:30 P.M.

*The Hodge-Thornwell Debate Over
Church Polity in the 1800s*
address by
Dr. Morton H. Smith
Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

8:00 P.M.

The Authority of the Major Assemblies
address by
Prof. David J. Engelsma
Theological School of the
Protestant Reformed Churches

The Conference also includes time for questions, discussion, and fellowship. Meals and lodging are available. For further information and registration contact, by September 1, 1995:

Theological School
of the Protestant Reformed Churches
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
(616) 531-1490
8 A.M. to 4 P.M. EDST

NOTICE!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet at the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland, IL, on Wednesday, September 20, 1995, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. (Consistories should note the late date, which immediately precedes the September 21, 22 Seminary Conference on "Reformed Church Government" to be held in Grand Rapids.) All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the Stated Clerk thirty days before Classis convenes. Delegates who need lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the Clerk of South Holland's consistory, using the forms provided for this purpose.

Rev. Steven Key,
Stated Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids expresses its heartfelt sympathy to its fellow officebearers, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Dykstra, Jr. in the death of his father, and Mr. and Mrs. Willem Hofman, in the passing of her brother,

MR. FRANK DYKSTA, SR.

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

Robert Pastoor, Vice-President
R. VanPutten, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Randolph Protestant Reformed Church express Christian sympathy to Kathryn and Timothy Tamminga in the death of their father and grandfather,

PETER TAMMINGA.

May they be comforted in His Word and be sustained by God's grace. "The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace" (Psalm 29:11).

Rev. Steven Key, President
Berwyn Huizenga, Clerk

ATTENTION PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS

Protestant Reformed Special Education has available scholarship money for anyone who desires to pursue a career in Special Education. For further information, please contact Dave Rau at (616) 453-4344 or Jerry VanderKolk at (616) 688-3533.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 21, 1995, the Lord willing, our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents,

MR. and MRS. WILBUR BRUINSMA,
will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. There is no greater blessing for covenant children than to have parents who love, instruct, and admonish them in the fear of God's name. We are grateful that God has given such parents to us, and has spared them for us these many years. They truly have been an example of faithful perseverance in the truth to their children and grandchildren. May God bless and keep them in the time He yet gives them together.

"The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:5, 6).

✿ John and Judy Kalsbeek

Joel and Jordana Mulder (Kylie, Collin),
Jason, Gwennan, Erika, Daniel, Kristen,
Trevor, Alexander, Kenton, and Ethan.

✿ Lewis and Donna Bruinsma
Lisa, Steven, Dale, Leanne,

Renae, Gina, Craig, and Paul.

✿ Rev. Wilbur and Mary Bruinsma
Brad, Heather, Mandy,

Megan, and Lydia.

✿ Keith and Wanda Bruinsma
Brian, Greg, Sheila, Janelle,

Calvin, and Micah.

Lansing, IL

NOTICE!!!

Seminary Convocation will be held on Wednesday, August 30, at 8 P.M., in South-west PR Church. Prof. Engelsma will give the address.