



# *THE* **STANDARD BEARER**

***A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine***

Religion must not be something that is added to our life, but it must be the heart of our life. Religion must not be something that is added to our education; but it must be the heart of our education, the precepts of the Lord must be the basis from which our entire education must proceed.

See "Christian Education," p. 483

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Editorially speaking ...

With the October 1, 1995 issue, the annual subscription rate of the *Standard Bearer* will increase \$5. The cost to subscribers in the United States will now be \$17. The cost to foreign subscribers will be \$20.

The reason for the rate increase (the first since 1988), decided by the Board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association, is that for the past eight months monthly expenses have exceeded income by some \$725. This is due to a 75% increase in printing costs since 1989, a 50% increase in mailing costs since 1989, and our recent introduction of color and higher-grade paper.

\$17 for 21 issues of a magazine of this kind is reasonable. The price of a subscription to the *SB* compares favorably — in most instances, very favorably — with that of other religious periodicals. The reason why we can offer the *SB* at such a cheap price is the generous support of the magazine by Protestant Reformed churches through regular collections and by individuals both within and outside the PRC. Gifts and church collections make up more than half of the annual budget of the *SB*. We continue to need, and ask for, this support.

Rates for bound volumes and announcements remain the same.

The number of subscriptions continues to rise, standing now at more than 2,500. We are grateful.

We desire to see continued and greater increase in subscriptions. The reason is not only to keep the cost of subscription as low as possible, but also — and especially — to have the sound, solid witness of the *SB* to the Reformed faith and life reach more people. The Board is working at this. But our readers can help. Show the magazine, aggressively, to relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Recommend it as a faithful witness to the truth in our apostatizing age. Purchase gift-subscriptions for others.

As I write, I have on my desk a letter from an ardent supporter of the *SB* in Moorestown, New Jersey ordering six gift subscriptions to the magazine for relatives and friends, with an accompanying check. This is not the first time he has done this. Thus our witness spreads.

Thanks, Al. □

— DJE



# Christian Education

*"And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."*

Deuteronomy 6:7

That the education of children is one of the most important subjects that can possibly demand our consideration is a truth that is clearly realized, not only by the Christian, but still more so by the people of the world. Especially is this true of our own age. Witness the many books that are published on the subject, the many magazines that see the light and that are devoted particularly to educational problems, the large sums of money that are spent, the laws that are enacted, the edifices that are raised — all in the interest of education. On the importance of education in general, therefore, we are entirely agreed.

But there is more. I may safely limit this statement. For I am entirely safe in saying that we also agree that our children ought to have a Christian education. There is no

one that would deny this, apart now from the question as to the character this Christian education ought to assume. For as Christians we all agree that we are not satisfied to know that our children receive an education of the world and for this world, but we confess that we are pilgrims, that we are travelers to another city, and that, somehow, the education of our children must be related to that other city that is in heaven. I repeat, therefore, that as Christian parents we cannot be indifferent with regard to the religious instruction of our children. Religious instruction they certainly must have, and they must be brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord, our covenant God in Christ Jesus.

Once more I will limit this statement, and maintain that as Reformed Christians we will also insist that our children must receive a religious education of a very marked type. That we agree on this is evident from the confession we repeat every time we offer our children for baptism. We promise to bring them up "in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein to the utmost of our power." This is very significant. For this doctrine is the Reformed doctrine. And one of the characteristic features of the Reformed faith is that it confesses that all things exist for the glory of God, that even our salvation is not the ultimate end of all things, but that it is a means to an end. It is, for the Christian of the Reformed type, not sufficient to

know that his sins and the sins of his children have been washed away in the blood of Christ Jesus, and that now he and they are marching heavenward. On the contrary, his covenant God did save him, in order that with His children he might be to the praise of His glory, here in the church militant and in the midst of the world, and presently in the glory of heavenly perfection. He must fight the good fight. He must walk in the precepts of his covenant God. He must reveal himself as a child of light in every sphere of life.

Now, this conviction has a definite influence upon one's conception of the task of education. Were it different, it might be an irrelevant matter as to what sort of education the child might receive to help him through this world, as long as he is saved. But entirely different it becomes if also the salvation of your child is in your view only the means to the highest aim: the glorification of the Most High. Then you will aim in your education at the perfect man of God, knowing the will of his God for every sphere of life and for every step he takes upon the path of life, and you will take care that in his life he is well equipped with a clear and concise knowledge of all the precepts of the Most High. And since for the Reformed Christian the subject of the education of his children is so highly important we thought it very appropriate to devote our discussion to this topic this morning and in connection with the

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*This sermon on Christian education by the Rev. Herman Hoeksema was preached in September, 1916, when Hoeksema was still a minister in the Christian Reformed Church. It was published in the September 1, 1927 issue of the Standard Bearer (Vol. 3, pp. 532-536). The sermon is fitting for the beginning of the school year.*



words of Deuteronomy 6:7 to speak to you on:

### *The Lord's Command Regarding the Instruction of our Children*

#### In respect to the material of that instruction

I think we will all agree if we define education, in the sense in which we are dealing with that subject this morning, as the impartation to the child of knowledge regarding his material and spiritual relation to the world. With this all education has to do. We bring children into the world. And when these children come to consciousness, that world is strange to them if they are not informed about their relation to the same. But to the Christian this is not enough. No, there is not only a world, but there is also a God. And the child must also learn to see his true relation to that God. In short, principally the education of the child must give him an answer to the question: Who am I? Who am I in relation to the world in which I live? Who am I in relation to my God? And thus education becomes the transmitting of such knowledge from generation to generation. But when our text says, "Thou shalt teach them unto thy children," it uses in the original a word for teaching that places the nature of education in a very peculiar light. The word really means, in the first place, "to sharpen," and is used, for instance, to denote the sharpening of a sword. From this basic idea it further derives the meaning "to sharpen the tongue," and further to use pointed speech, to express oneself definitely and concisely, and in this sense it is finally used to denote the idea of teaching. To teach, according to this idea, is to sharpen in. *Inscherpen*, the Dutch would say. Education according to this conception must not be vague or indefinite, but sharp and concise. So definitely was this idea of conciseness conceived of as essential to education that, in the view of Scripture, to teach meant actually the same thing as to express some-

thing clearly and sharply to the understanding of the child.

The question, then, is, what must be taught according to the words of our text? What is the material of this instruction? Our text tells us: "Teach *them* unto thy children." In the words immediately preceding our text the man of God says to the people: "And *these words* which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart." In our text he refers, therefore, once more to *these words*, and he enjoins the children of his people that they shall also teach them to their children, to the seed of the covenant. Nor is it difficult to find out what is really meant by "these words." They simply refer to the law of the covenant God, as has been delivered unto Israel before, and as is now repeated by the man of God summarily, as they are about to enter the promised land, and as he is about to leave them. All the precepts of Jehovah the parent must teach definitely and concisely to his children. And these precepts are again expressed in principle in the fifth verse of our chapter, where the prophet says to his people: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." In brief, Scripture here, as well as throughout, knows of but one kind of actual religion. It is the religion of obedience. And again the Word of God knows of but one kind of obedience. It is the obedience from love. Obedience and love are for that very reason often used interchangeably in Scripture, seeing that they signify the very same thing, and the one without the other is inconceivable.

For this reason, it is to the obedience of God's covenant people that the man of God refers in this text. The natural man does not know the love of God, for his mind is enmity against God and he walks in darkness. But God's people, the people the man of God is here addressing, have been saved and redeemed by the power of His grace. They are once more His covenant people.

God cleansed them and forgave all their iniquities. God delivered them and formed them to be a people unto Himself. He spread abroad in their hearts a new love, the love of God in Christ Jesus. In that love they must obey the Lord their God and keep His precepts. This obedience must be an obedience from the love of their whole heart, with all their mind and soul and strength. For, mark you, Scripture knows of no division of our life, one part for the exercise of this obedience in covenant love, and another part entirely separated from that love. The Christian possesses but one life. And that whole life must be consecrated to the Lord his God, who redeemed and delivered him. In other words, all the time and everywhere, in the midst of the world or in the church, in the home or in society, he must reveal himself from the principle of the new life he received from his covenant God by grace. Thus we promise and confess it in our Baptism Form so beautifully and truly, when it says that our part of the covenant is that we love the Lord our God with all our mind and heart and soul and strength, and walk in new obedience before Him. To know, therefore, and to keep the precepts of the Lord our God and to acknowledge no other precepts than His, that is our covenant religion.

But if this is true, then it is also clear that we must teach these precepts and none other to our children. For the Lord established His covenant with us and our children in the line of generations. With us and our seed the God of our salvation raises His blessed covenant. We and our children are His covenant people. And, therefore, very logically, the man of God comes to this injunction: "And thou shalt teach them unto thy children." In all our life, at home or at large, in the church or in the world, we have to do with the precepts of our God and we acknowledge but one Lord. These precepts are the rule of our thinking and willing, of the life of the soul and of the body, our guide accord-



ing to which we desire by the grace of God to walk in every sphere of life. But then, it is evident that also these precepts must constitute the subject material of all our education, and that it is quite impossible to conceive of any sphere or branch of instruction from which these precepts of our God may or can be excluded. If, therefore, you ask: What, according to Scripture, must be the material in which our covenant children are instructed? we answer without hesitation: The precepts of the Lord our covenant God with relation to every sphere of life.

### In regard to the time for that instruction

That such is actually the conception of the words of our text is evident. Let us ask the question: How much time must be devoted to this instruction in the law of the Lord? A few hours, say, every day? Or must this instruction in the precepts of Jehovah perhaps be limited to the Sabbath day? Shall we transfer the burden of this injunction to the preaching in the church and to the Sunday School? And is it sufficient if, in addition to all this, the children receive an hour's instruction in the precepts of the Lord in catechism during the week? Listen. The text says: "Thou shalt talk of them (these precepts) when thou sittest in thine house and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou risest up and when thou liest down." Now, this is expressing the thing figuratively, but very concisely and unambiguously. It simply tells us that we must instruct our children in the precepts of the Lord all the time and everywhere, in the home and outside of the home, and that there is no education that has nothing to do with the law of the Lord. That is simply all. Always, in the home and out of the home, from morning till evening, Israel must instruct his seed in these precepts of Jehovah. There was nothing else for the young covenant child to learn

outside of that law of God. Nothing else might the parent-teacher have in his mind but to instruct the child in that law. And, therefore, it is perfectly clear that our text deems the instruction in that law all-sufficient. That does not mean that the young Israelite might learn nothing but the law of the ten commandments, learn nothing but how to sing the songs of the fathers, how to celebrate the solemn feasts, and how to bring his sacrifices and tithes. No, the Jew of old did not know of such a narrow conception of religion and of the law of God. But it meant that the Israelite, always and everywhere, had to live according to the will of God, and for every sphere of life he had to teach his children those same precepts.

Notice, in the second place, that all this time the parent is held responsible for the training of his children. Moses does not at all address the congregation of the people of God in general, but emphatically he speaks in the singular. He addresses the individual parent. Thou shalt teach them unto thy children. Thou shalt talk of them, etc. Education is, therefore, the duty of the parent and of no one else. This stands to reason. In the first place, there is no one that has more right, more God-given right to the child than the parent. Education determines to a large extent what the child shall be in the future, how he shall think and act. And surely there is no one that has more right to determine this than the parent. But especially is this so with covenant parents. They are believers, and they are the ones that are held responsible, and that express the promise before God and His congregation time and again that they shall see to it that the children are educated according to the doctrine of the covenant. They, therefore, have the duty to educate their children, and no one else has that obligation as they have. The parent, according to the words of our text, must edu-

cate his children always and everywhere, in the home and outside, from morning till evening, in the commands of the Most High.

It is, therefore, not true at all that the parent can educate his children at home in the precepts of the Lord, and that he can excuse himself for the rest and say that he can do no more, that he has fulfilled his duty and lived up to his promise. No, that does not at all finish his task. The parent must also educate his children outside of the home. In the catechism and in the school, on the street and in every other place, it is the parent whose duty it is to educate his children. He may perhaps perform that duty through someone else, that is, his servant, but that does not make any difference. Not the teacher, private or public, has any duty regarding your children. The duty to educate them is yours, and it can only become the duty of the teacher by your employing him.

From this follows in the second place that you are responsible for all that your child is taught. It is not thus, that you are responsible for what the child learns directly in the home, and someone else for what he learns in the school, and again someone else for what he learns in the catechism and in the Sunday School. You are responsible always and everywhere. Not as if these other persons that teach your children have no responsibility. Surely they do. But their responsibility is entirely different from yours. You are responsible for all that your child is taught, responsible before God. Of course, we realize that this was far easier in the time of Moses and the children of Israel than in our modern times. Life was so much more simple. The parent was not so busy from morning till night that he could find no time personally to instruct his children in the precepts of God. And life was not so complicated, not so exacting, the child did not have to learn so much, all things were more simple than they are today. And for that reason the education in the home was either the only or

*... there is no education that has nothing to do with the law of the Lord.*



the main education the child received. The parent could realize directly his responsibility for the instruction of his children. But this is entirely different today. The parent, at least the father, is not at home from the time he rises up till the time that he lies down, the mother is too busy or at least often makes herself too busy if she is not, and time for direct instruction by the parent is actually insufficient. Besides, if the parent did have just as much time as the Israelite of old, he would not be able to instruct his children in all the necessary branches of education. And the result is that we have now the school, the catechism, the Sunday School, where one person systematically instructs many of our children at the same time.

Especially in the school the child receives the lion-share of his education. The school it is that trains the child, that practically shapes him, and the words of the teacher have more authority for him than any other. And the result is that we begin to feel and to act more and more as if we were not responsible for that part of the education of our children. That is a mistake. All these institutions are merely extensions of the home, the teacher is merely the servant of the parent, and even as the boss always remains responsible for the job his servants perform, so the parent is absolutely responsible for the education of his children by the teacher. The parent, also now, must instruct his children in the precepts of the Most High, always and everywhere, for those precepts control our entire life. And if the teacher the parent employs cannot reasonably be expected to do this, it is the parent that is and remains responsible for that instruction. Thus it is with the entire system in which the child lives. From morning till night the parent is responsible. The literature the child reads, the places he visits, the friends he associates with, the recreation he enjoys, in a word, the entire sphere of his life, must be dominated by the law of the Lord, and the parent is responsible that in

that sphere the child is trained and very definitely instructed in the commands of the Lord.

Let us apply this for a moment. How does our instruction compare to what is required by this injunction? How is it in our homes? Are we obedient in this respect? Are we talking about the precepts of the Lord when we rise up and when we lie down, so that our children hear them? No, that does not mean that we do as a certain doctor, not long ago, told us that his father always did, namely say to his boy but: "Johnnie, Johnnie, think of that never-ending eternity!" from morning till night. No, that is sickly. Surely, it is good also that we early impress our children with the truth that time is short, and that eternity is coming; but the fear of eternity must not become the principle of their religion, for that is absolutely wrong. No, but do we speak of the precepts of the Lord in a good and healthy way, so that our children learn from us definitely how they must walk in the way of the covenant? Do we ever talk with them about their baptism? Ever speak to them about the joy of the assurance that they are covenant children, but also of the heavy responsibility that rests upon them because of that covenant, to walk in the way of the covenant? In a word, do your children receive the impression in your homes that the precepts of the Lord are dominating there? Or are material things predominating, perhaps the one thing that receives attention? Do you, when you are with your children, perhaps leave them alone and read the newspaper? Or talk about parties and picnics and outings and automobile rides, and nice dresses, or about the homely face of the new neighbor-lady, about the new hats you saw in church, and the faults of brother so and so? In a word: what is the sphere in which your children live in the home? What is the literature you allow them to read? Is also that

literature based upon and permeated by the precepts of the Lord? Where are your children when they are not at home? Who are their friends? Is this entire sphere such, nay, I will not say that they gradually drift away from Christianity in general, but yet such that they become alienated from their own church circle? Remember, it is you that are responsible as parent, from morning till night, responsible that your children are instructed and brought up in the precepts of the Most High.

And how is it when you walk by the way? In other words, how is the education of your children outside of your home life? Do they come to catechism regularly? And when they come are they well prepared? Are you cooperating with us also in this respect? Especially in respect to our young people, and still more especially in respect to our young men, I would urge you: See to it that they are educated in the precepts of the Most High. To some

of you directly, I would come and remind you of the fact that Catechism again starts. Some of you, alas, already are old enough to assume your own responsibilities and still you have not confessed your God as your personal Lord. Remember, we expect you in the class. Do not withdraw yourselves from the influences of the precepts of God. And, finally, parents, how is the education of your children in the school? Oh, I

hear many of you say, as you have also told me when we visited you in your homes, the education in our public schools is good enough! According to what standard do you call it so, my brother and sister? According to the standard of the Word of God? God tells us that in the home, and without, the children must be instructed in the precepts of the Lord. And that no one but you is responsible for this education. That this education in the commands of the Lord must not be

*Do your children receive the impression in your homes that the precepts of the Lord are dominating there?*



vague, but must be pointed and definite. I ask you this morning to go to your God and honestly tell Him that you are living up to this respect, and that your child is educated, not once in a while, but from morning till evening, and everywhere, in the precepts of the Lord. No, we need not talk about our public schools. But this you know as well as I do, that they receive no covenant education in those schools. Your children must have a covenant education and nothing less. For this is the injunction in the words of our text, that in the home and without, from morning till evening, the children must be brought up in the precepts of the Lord for every sphere of life.

#### **In regard to the basis of that instruction**

But, I hear someone remark, this command was given to Israel of old and not to the people of the New Testament. Many laws and commands are given in the Old Testament that are obsolete, that are not at all applicable to the days of the new dispensation, and this is one of them. We frankly admit that the first statement is true. There are, indeed, many laws given in the Old Testament that have no direct value, no binding force for our day. But it is not true that commands like the one we have discussed this morning also belong to that category. This temporal and passing character of the Old Testament is true only of those precepts that applied to the particular dispensation of Israel, in their religious and civic life. There were laws regarding their religious life, laws regarding sacrifices and feasts, that have passed away with the coming of Christ, that have lost their binding force when the Lamb of God was sacrificed on Golgotha and the veil rent in twain. There were also laws that applied to the particular civic life of the theocracy of Israel, and also they have lost their particular force with the passing away of Israel as a nation. But this is not true of those laws that dealt with general subjects, that gave pre-

cepts in regard to life in general. The education of our children is not something that applied to Israel alone, but it is general in its character. And, what is more, the basis of this command is not found in something that is applicable to Israel alone, but it holds as well for the people of God of all ages.

In the first place, we find that this command is based upon and brought into direct connection with the covenant relationship of the people of God. God has established a covenant with Israel as a nation. Thus the man of God has told them in the chapter preceding ours. In that covenant, God had promised to bless them and to give them Canaan for an everlasting possession. But He also had His demands. The people had received blessings from their covenant God. He had delivered them from the house of bondage, and He would give them the land of the promise. But there was also another side. The people were in duty bound to walk in the way of the covenant and to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their mind, and with all their strength. And from this same covenant obligation follows also their duty to educate their children, always, in the fear of the Lord, so that also they may know His precepts, understand their covenant relation, and learn to walk in the way of that covenant that God has established with them.

In the second place, the general character of this covenant education is based upon a general principle also. It might be remarked, as we have heard it so often, that the instruction in the law of the Lord is sufficient if it is given in the home and in the catechism, in the home and in the church, but that the school education has nothing to do with it. And again, upon the basis of Scripture, this must be denied. The principle of such a statement is wrong. God told His people of old that they should educate their children from morning till night and everywhere in the precepts of the Lord. And

why? Because in the immediate context we read that the Lord our God is one Lord. He is Lord, Lord over all. Lord over every sphere of life. His precepts cannot be excluded from any sphere. Therefore, Israel had to educate his children only in His precepts. Not in one part of life the precepts of the Lord, and in another part these precepts excluded; but in all life these precepts are to be acknowledged. And thus also with our preparation for that life. Not the precepts of the Lord in one part of the education and another part nothing to do with this law of God. But all our education must be permeated with the precepts of the Lord. This holds true today as well as in the time of Israel — because the Lord our God is one Lord.

Also we are a covenant people. Every time when we come with our babes before God and His congregation, for baptism, we confess that we have an eternal covenant of grace with God. We confess that in that covenant God gives to us and to our children all the blessings of salvation. We confess that also our children are really in that covenant of grace, that they are partakers of grace, that they are sanctified in Christ, that they are members of His body, that they are children of God, heirs of the kingdom and of the covenant. And every time we confess that it is our side of the covenant to walk in new obedience from true love of that covenant God who has so richly blessed us. And every time you, therefore, promise that you will to the utmost of your power teach your children the way of the covenant, and that you will help and cause them to be instructed therein. You see, that same basis still exists, the basis of the covenant, for we are a covenant people. And upon that same basis we come to you with the same Word of God and say: Ye shall teach them unto your children and talk of them in your home and outside of your home and everywhere. And since conditions are such that undoubtedly you will have to entrust a large part of your children's



education to others, there we again come to you and say: Send them there where you know that they receive a covenant education, an education in the precepts of the Lord. Send them to our catechism classes regularly and do not neglect it, send them also to our Christian schools, where you know that they receive the education they must have.

And finally, also today, the Lord our God is one Lord. Also today He is Lord over all — Lord not only in the church, but Lord also in the state, Lord also in social life, Lord in our home life, Lord in the life of our education. For that very reason, also today His precepts are valid for every sphere of that life. But if this is so, then it is also clear that the child must learn to see and honor those precepts, for all those

spheres, and that those precepts must form the very basis of his education. Religion must not be something that is added to our life, but it must be the heart of our life. Religion must not be something that is added to our education; but it must be the heart of our education, the precepts of the Lord must be the basis from which our entire education must proceed.

And, therefore, we come once more to you upon the basis that the Lord our God is the one and only Lord over all. We come to you as your pastor, anxious about your spiritual welfare, anxious that also your children shall be educated in the fear of the Lord; and we enjoin you to be faithful in the home, and to talk of the precepts of the Lord to the children God has given unto you,

from morning till night, definitely and sharply, to be faithful in regard to the catechism classes that are presently to begin again for the coming season, faithful in regard to the education the child receives in the school, and to send them to that school of which you are certain that they will receive a covenant education. Then we have hope also for the future. For then we have the promises of God for His faithful covenant people, that He will continue to bless us and our children, as His people, and we shall walk before Him in childlike obedience, subjects of His kingdom, in the home, in the church, in society, and in the great land in which God has given us a place, acknowledging His one and only Lordship. □

## Editorial

# Judging Ministers\* (2)

*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 address given at the graduation exercises of the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches on June 19, 1995 at Hull, Iowa. The first installment appeared in the August, 1995 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

Every minister of the Word will be judged as to his faithfulness in the ministry. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 4:2 that it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful — found faithful by a judge in court.

The question is: by whom is the minister judged?

There is a judging of ministers that is improper and that may safely be ignored. This is mere human judgment, or "man's judgment," as it is called in verse 3. This is the evaluation of a man's ministry by members of the church according to their own carnal standards.



Usually this is a critical judgment.

"Our minister is not a good minister because his preaching is too doctrinal and deep." Or, "because in his work with the children and youth all he does is teach the Bible." Or, "because in his preaching and writing he is critical of other churches, theologians, and teachings." Or, "because he is not eloquent in speaking." Or, "because the congregation does not grow."

The human evaluation that is improper may, however, be affirmative, glowingly affirmative. "Our minister is a good minister because he is practical, not doctrinal." Or, "because he never applies the doctrine to the real needs of the congregation in a painful and possibly divisive way." Or, "because he is always positive, never negative." Or, "because he is mainly negative." Or, "because he is tolerant and open to novel ideas in doctrine, worship, and conduct." Or, "because he is such a nice personality." Or, "because he is a dynamic speaker." Or, "because he is successful."

This judging invariably ranks ministers: this one is good and that one is not as good, or even bad.

This judging forms factions around the ecclesiastical heroes: "I am of Paul; I am of Cephas; I am of Apollos."

We ministers may, indeed must, discount such judgment. "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of man's judgment."

Ministers may not conclude from this that they are above all judging by the church and her members. Human judgment is one thing; judgment by humans is quite another.

There is a lawful, necessary judgment of ministers by the church and her members. The consistory judges a man when it recommends him for entrance into seminary. The Theological School Committee judges a man when it accepts him into seminary. The faculty of the seminary judges a man when it recommends him for examination by syn-

od. Synod judges a man when it declares him a candidate for the ministry in the churches. The consistory constantly judges whether its minister is faithfully carrying out his office and edifying the congregation, especially by his preaching. Every member judges his minister every Sabbath, that he brought the gospel.

We must take this responsibility seriously. The church must judge her ministers as to competency, doctrine, and life. We ministers must submit to this judgment. We must be open to it. We must pay attention to it.

But this is divine judgment through the church and through the office of believer. The standards are Scripture, the creeds, and the church order. Although given by men and women, it is not "man's judgment."

#### Self-evaluation

Yet another human judgment that is improper is the minister's own evaluation of his ministry. This is not to say that we ministers should not be constantly examining our ministry. Rigorous examination of our own official work and of the personal life inextricably bound up with the work is demanded. The apostle implies as much when, having said, "yea, I judge not mine own self," he adds, "For I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified." "By myself" is actually "against myself," as Calvin explains: "though he (Paul) is not conscious to himself of anything wrong."

The apostle could say that he was not aware of any unfaithfulness regarding his ministry, implying that he had examined his ministry. So must it be for every minister.

But there is the danger that the minister himself judges himself as a minister according to faulty standards, whether positively or negatively, and makes his self-evaluation the decisive judgment. "I am a good

minister, because I am more popular than others." Or, "I am a poor minister, because in my sermons and other work I never manage to meet the high standards I set for myself."

#### Liberated!

From all human judgment, the minister is freed, gloriously freed. Now he may live and work in the conviction and with the attitude, "What people say about me as a minister, whether the world or critics in other denominations or members of my own congregation and denomination, is 'a very small thing' to me."

What a liberating, empowering, invigorating thing is this freedom from human judgment, *for the work of the gospel-ministry!* How crippling it is to labor with the fear, "What will the people say about this sermon? how will these people react to me if I give this warning? will this article make me popular? what will be the success of this act of discipline in the congregation?"

How dangerous is reliance on one's own judgment of his ministry! Either the minister is easily satisfied with his performance, when he should not be, or, as his own worst critic, he falls into discouragement because he fails to meet his own carnal and proud expectations.

Man is not the judge of our ministry, to justify or condemn. Of course not! Man lacks the ability to judge. Who knows the hidden things of darkness in a minister's life, what an unfaithful minister may do, or fail to do, when he is out of the public eye? Who knows the counsels of the heart of a minister?

Man also lacks the authority to judge ministers. The minister is not, finally, the servant of men, not even of the congregation that called him, but the servant of Christ. He is not the steward of his own theology and ecclesiastical realm, but the steward of the mysteries of God.

*The minister  
is not,  
finally,  
the servant  
of men,  
not even of the  
congregation  
that called him,  
but the servant  
of Christ.*



The minister belongs to Jesus Christ the Lord.

### Jesus Christ, Judge of Ministers

Judging ministers is the Lord's business. "He that judgeth me is the Lord" (v. 4). The risen Christ is our judge, dear graduates and esteemed colleagues in the ministry.

He is *the* Lord: appointed to be judge of all (Acts 17:31).

He is *our* Lord — Lord of us ministers. He bought us with His blood, with all the saints. He called us to function in His office among His people on behalf of His covenant and kingdom.

The Lord Jesus Christ judges His ministers.

He judges us now. The apostle uses the present tense: "He that judgeth me is the Lord." The Lord judges our sermons and other instruction; our preparation for sermons, including prayer; our edification, protection, and gathering of His church; our personal lives, that are to adorn the doctrine; the counsels of our hearts.

The faithful minister is conscious of this judging by the Lord. It is a judgment "*in foro conscientiae*." What an encouraging testimony is this judgment by the Lord at the end of a Sabbath, especially in the face of

criticism from men: "You have been faithful to My Word and, therefore, to Me. Well done, faithful steward of the mysteries."

An unfaithful minister is also convicted by the Lord's judgment. What a misery for a minister! "You are unsound in doctrine." "You seek yourself." "You are lazy." "You scatter My sheep."

All of us know something of this lordly rebuke. It brings us to repentance and moves us to greater faithfulness.

### A Future, Final Judgment

The Lord will conduct a public judgment of ministers as a special phase of the final judgment: "the Lord (will) come (and) 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" (v. 5).

The standard will be faithfulness.

The judge, however, will be gracious; for none, not even Paul, is a sinless steward of the mysteries.

The outcome will be praise for us all from God. This, then, is our reward: praise from the living, triune God by His mouth, Jesus the Christ.

There will also be censure.

Some ministers — heretics, hirelings, and hypocrites — will be exposed and damned. Other ministers, though saved themselves, will suffer the burning of their ministerial works as hay and stubble — no happy prospect (I Cor. 3:12-15).

But all genuine, faithful ministers will alike have praise. There will be no ranking and comparison, no loading of one with all the praise while withholding it entirely from the other. "Well done," God will say to Paul, to Apollos, to Calvin, to Hoeksema, to Ophoff ... and to us.

Since the Lord is the judge of ministers, the saints should withhold judgment for the time being. They should simply receive their ministers now as servants of Christ.

Since the Lord is the judge of ministers, we ministers must labor eschatologically: "until the Lord come." What an incentive to faithfulness! Let us keep this in view: one day, before all, we will be *found* faithful. We will hear the Word of Judge Christ Jesus, "Well done, good and faithful servant; I approve your ministry, and your work abides in the everlasting kingdom."

Can a man desire more?

Could anything stir up zeal more? □

— DJE

## Letters

### Deacons and the State

I would like some clarification of the article written by Mr. Gordon Schipper, "The office of deacon: Its function" (*Standard Bearer*, April 15, 1995). My understanding of the end of the article is that we as Christians should not ask for social benefits from the government, but that as a church we should support anyone that lives in poverty in the communion of saints. I don't know how it is in the USA but here in Australia we have a very socialistic government,

and no one has to live in poverty. I will enclose the latest booklet of the social security for your perusal, and it will give you some idea of what is happening in Australia. It seems to me that we as Christians are so easy to use those benefits, and the tasks in God's church as deacon are made so much easier.

My questions are as follows: May we use social benefit, can we expect God's blessing upon it? Or, is the church responsible, and is she not doing her duty?

I do believe that, because it is so easy to get benefits here in Australia, the people of God are also los-

ing their responsibility of caring for their family, and caring for the household of God, and working with sweat on their brow to support their family.

Perhaps you can write an article about this issue, as it is quite complex matter.

N. Kleyn  
Tasmania

Response:

Mr. Schipper answers these questions in the rubric, "Ministering to the Saints," in this issue.

— Ed.



# Inheritance

We understand an inheritance to be something that is precious and valuable. An inheritance is a precious possession that a person has no right to of himself; it is something freely and graciously bestowed upon an individual. An inheritance is a legal matter; it has its basis and protection in law. And before one can enter into the possession and enjoyment of his inheritance, the death of the testator must occur. The Hebrew word for inheritance (and related words) means to distribute, to give as a possession, to cause to inherit. Most of the Old Testament occurrences of these words are found in context with the words "land" and "by lot." The Greek for inheritance is a compound word, the parts of which mean: a pebble or polished bit of wood used in casting lots, and to distribute, apportion or assign.

The land of Canaan was given to the children of Israel as an inheritance. "This is the land which ye shall inherit by lot" (Num. 34:13). After the land was surveyed for each of the twelve tribes, the lines were drawn for each individual family within each tribe, and lots were cast to determine each one's inheritance. The salvation of each elect Israelite was inseparably connected to the exact piece of ground that the Lord gave him. Thus, the Israelite could look over his possession and sing, "Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; Yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Ps. 16:5, 6). This explains the godly concern of the daughters of Zelophahad, who died without a son (Num. 27:11), and the refusal of Naboth to sell his vineyard to King Ahab. Their salvation could be enjoyed, not in the land of Canaan generally, but on the precise piece of ground God gave to them. So our salvation also is not to receive heavenly glory in some vague way, but to receive a definite, God-ordained place in heaven, a place prepared for us, a place for which we are being prepared and that will fit us.

That which we inherit is described in Scripture with wondrous beauty and endless variation. We will inherit the throne of glory, the earth, the nations, the Gentiles, life everlasting, the kingdom prepared for us, the kingdom of God, the promises, a blessing, even all things. But the richest expression of inheritance is that we will inherit *God*! Not only did the Levites do so (Num 18:20), but He is the portion of *our* inheritance (Ps. 16:5); we partake of the divine nature (II Pet. 1:4); the treasures and pleasures that are at His right hand are ours to enjoy now and forever. That God is our inheritance means that we know Him as He really is, know His amazing virtues as they are displayed in Jesus Christ, and knowing Him enjoy Him as the God of gracious salvation.

In a very striking way, Scripture turns this around

and reveals to us that we are also *God's* inheritance. Moses prays that God will not destroy His people and His inheritance which He has redeemed (Deut. 9:26). David sings, "Save thy people, bless thine inheritance" (Ps. 28:9). We are a people chosen for His inheritance (Ps. 33:12). Thus we can understand why the Lord takes pleasure in His people (Ps. 149:14), views them as His peculiar treasure (Ps. 149:4), and counts them His jewels (Mal. 3:17). Since we have no value or beauty in ourselves, this can only be understood in Christ. In Christ we are given beauty for ashes, in Christ the image of God is restored to us, in Christ is God always well pleased. Through the work of Jesus Christ *for* us, *in* us, and *through* us, God inherits and possesses a people unto His praise! Give thanks unto the Father who "hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12)!

We inherit God and a place in His kingdom only because we belong to Christ through eternal election. All of God's promises are spoken first of all to Jesus Christ. "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (Ps. 2:8). Christ is the seed out of Jacob, the inheritor of God's mountain (Is. 65:9). By inheritance, the Son hath obtained a more excellent name than the angels (Heb. 1:4). Because we have received the Spirit of adoption, we are children. And if we are children, then are we heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:15-17). All that Christ has been promised, and all that Christ receives, is ours because we are members of His body, one plant with Him. And we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, "Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:14).

In the opening paragraph, we stated that there are certain things we understand about an inheritance on the earthly level. Bad things can happen to an earthly inheritance. A person may change his will; lawyers' fees may greatly reduce it; taxes may eat into it; inflation may render it all but worthless. This heavenly inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and never fades away (I Pet. 1:4). It is reserved in heaven for us by the God and Father of Jesus Christ. Will we actually receive the precious inheritance? Not only is the inheritance reserved for us by God, but we are kept by the power of God through faith for that inheritance (I Pet. 1:5)! The inheritance and the inheritors will come together. Of that we may be sure! □

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



## ■ REPENT AND RESCIND

That is the message the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) received from the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Negative reaction to the CRC synod's decision to permit women to serve in office by permitting classes to declare parts of the Church Order "inoperative" has been strong and immediate. Fraternal delegates to the CRC synod from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland expressed strong reservations about the decision in their fraternal addresses to the CRC synod.

But the strongest reaction to date has come from the PCA, whose Interchurch Relations Committee has previously been quite supportive of the CRC in ecumenical matters. Acting upon the unanimous recommendation of its committee of commissioners for interchurch relations the PCA General Assembly voted at its June 22 session to send a communication to the CRC stating that, "We are grieved and distressed over the action of the 1995 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church to permit women to hold the offices of minister and elder."

The PCA is more than grieved however; if the CRC does not change its position, it faces possible expulsion from the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council, the interdenominational fellowship of conservative Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in the United States and Canada. "The action of the Christian Reformed Church is in contradiction to the clear teaching of Scripture and the historic presbyterian and reformed confessions of faith," wrote the PCA. "Furthermore we have instructed our Interchurch Relations Committee to use all due process to remove the Christian Reformed Church from membership in NAPARC, if the

Christian Reformed Church does not repent of and rescind the action at Synod." A separate motion instructs the Interchurch Relations Committee to monitor "the acts and pronouncements of the CRC Synod" and makes clear that the repentance and rescinding described in the communication is expected at Synod 1996. One sentence was added to the communication by a motion from the floor of the General Assembly. Rev. Mark Dalbey, who had served as the PCA's fraternal delegate to the CRC synod, moved that the PCA General Assembly inform the CRC that "we commend the sizeable number in your midst who are working hard to see the CRC remain faithful to Scripture on this issue and pray for God to use this group to prevail at the 1996 Synod."

In the minutes of the session, the General Assembly took the unusual step of noting that its decisions on the CRC were adopted unanimously.

A longtime defender of the CRC, Rev. K. Eric Perrin, chairman of the PCA's Interchurch Relations Committee, says, "It appears to us that this is not merely a step to open offices to women, that it is a disturbing precedent and all sorts of things could transpire. The barn door is open, the cows are out, and the Christian Reformed Church will never be able to get them back in."

The PCA action indicates that the CRC has lost one of its most important supporters and raises the real possibility that the CRC will be effectively driven out of the conservative Reformed church world. Most of the theologically conservative Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in the United States and Canada are members of NAPARC, and the CRC is currently the largest member. According to NAPARC stated clerk, Rev. Donald Duff, the process for termination of NAPARC membership is identical to the ad-

mission process: two-thirds of those voting at a Council meeting may propose that a denomination's membership be terminated, a decision which takes effect if at least two-thirds of the synods or general assemblies of the member denominations also vote to expel the denomination.

Current NAPARC member denominations are the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Christian Reformed Church, Korean American Presbyterian Church, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church in America, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America. Our own Protestant Reformed Churches have been sending observers to the annual meetings of NAPARC. Our Synod instructed our Committee for Contact with Other Churches to do so again in the coming year.

Given the conservative stance of the member denominations of NAPARC it is likely that this council will terminate the CRC's membership if the CRC does not "repent and rescind" its action regarding women in office.

Given the fact that the CRC refused to break sister-church relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and given the fact that some of her leaders (*Banner* editor, Jon Suk, in a guest editorial in the *Church Herald* said, "It's time for re-union") are "courting" the Reformed Church in America, it's likely that the CRC is not going to "repent and rescind."

We of the Protestant Reformed Churches are also grieved and distressed over the mother church's decision to permit women to serve in the office of minister and elder. We pray fervently that the CRC will "repent and rescind" that action. In the unlikely event that the CRC heeds the admonition of the PCA, we of the Protestant Reformed Churches would like to see the CRC



"repent and rescind" its synodical decisions of 1924 regarding common grace and those decisions approving of classical action to suspend and depose the consistories of First Kalamazoo, Eastern Avenue in Grand Rapids, and Hope in Grand Rapids. We of the PRC have been grieved and distressed over those actions for over seventy years.

*United Reformed News Service*

## ■ ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ALSO DISTURBED BY CRC

At its sixty-second General Assembly (convened May 30, 1995), the OPC unanimously adopted a communication to the CRC that "affirmed our convictions against the ordination of women to the office of elder or minister, and that declared homosexual orientation as well as action to be sin."

*New Horizons*

## ■ RCUS SYNOD

The Reformed Church in the United States (formerly known as Eureka Classis) at its 249th synod took significant action on several matters. The 1994 synod of this very old denomination had approved, by more than the necessary two-thirds majority, the *Belgic Confession* and *Canons of Dort* as creeds for the denomination in addition to the *Heidelberg Catechism* which for many years was the only creed of the RCUS. When the 1995 synod met, it was apparent that two-thirds of the classes had indeed approved these creeds. By this action the Reformed Church (US) "once again holds to the three very creeds it first adopted in 1748 with the first Coetus constitution."

The synod continued its sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) by receiving two dele-

gates from that denomination and by making further plans for continued cooperation in the foreign mission work conducted by the two churches in Zaire, Africa. The synod also continued its close relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by receiving its delegate, Rev. Robert Needham, and by continuing ecumenical discussions between the two denomination's Inter-church Relations Committees. The focus of these talks was somewhat changed by the RCUS synod to that of discussing differences "which need to be resolved in order to move toward closer unity."

About a month after the synod adjourned the Lord took to himself one of the RCUS's leading ministers. The Rev. Peter Grossman, editor of the *Reformed Herald* and pastor of Emmanuel Reformed Church of Sutton, Nebraska, died suddenly of cardiac problems on July 12. □

*Taking Heed to the Doctrine*

*Rev. Bernard Woudenberg*

# The Covenant Promise

*And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.*

Genesis 17:7

We have noted in the past that the Liberated churches appear to be committed to quite a different kind of logic than are we. It has always been our position — and, we believe,

the position of the Christian church historically and biblically — that logical consistency in the interpretation of the Scriptures and of the doctrines elicited from them must be maintained; for, if one teaching contradicts another, both cannot be correct, and our minds will not be able to grasp the true biblical depth of either. But the Liberated reject this and even seem offended by it, apparently having accepted the rather modern notion that to require consistency is to be rationalistic and scholastic, as though rationality and scholarship are bad things. It is not that the Liberated are completely indifferent to logical thought — for, after all, without it meaningful com-

munication can hardly take place — it is just that they do not want it to be insisted upon. They want to be able to maintain divergent teachings whose harmony cannot be resolved. And the result is that they and we end up with some strikingly different understandings as to the real meaning of certain basic Reformed doctrines on which creedally we ought to be agreed. Particularly is this so with the doctrine of the covenant and its promise.

There can be little question but that the seminal source of the doctrine of the covenant is to be found in that promise which was given to Abraham in Genesis 17:7: "And I will establish my covenant between

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me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." In this is contained the whole truth of the covenant and the essential reality of the gospel of grace.

1. It begins with the very nature of what it is that constitutes a promise, particularly when it is a promise of God. When God makes a promise, we would maintain, that promise is a statement of what is going to happen, that which He fully intends and without question will bring to be, much as it is set forth in Hebrews 6:13-15: "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." For Abraham that was all that was needed. The fact that it was the Lord who promised was sufficient for him, as Galatians 3:6 says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness."

2. Neither is there any question as to what it was that God was promising here; it was, "to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." It was all that anyone could ever desire, for what can be more wonderful than to know that the eternal God of heaven and earth is committing himself to be one's God — his Savior, his Lord, and his Friend? It was by every measure the equivalent of what Jesus so beautifully speaks at the beginning of his great High Priestly prayer, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). This was God's promise which without question or equivocation would certainly come to pass, the end of all things.

3. The real question is, however, to whom was this promise addressed, or, in effect, who is the promised "seed"? The answer to this is quite different from what we might expect, except that it is given

directly by the Scriptures: "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). When all is said and done, and the whole history of this world has been examined, there is but one human person who is worthy of inheriting God's promise, of entering into covenant with him, and that is His own Son, Jesus Christ, come into our flesh. Of everyone else it must be said that they have, "sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). He alone is worthy to inherit the world, given to Him by the hand of God.

It is very difficult to overestimate the importance of this in the overall context of biblical truth, touching as it does the heart of the New Testament focus on Christ. Essentially it is the same as when He is called in Romans 8:29 "the firstborn among many brethren," and in Colossians 1:15-18 "the firstborn of every creature," and, "the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." [See also Hebrews 12:23.] Clearly these passages are not speaking in terms of time, for in time there were many births before His. The Scriptures are speaking here of the mind and purpose of God. To Him Jesus is always the One through whom and unto whom all other things were made (see Eph. 1:10). He is first in God's mind, even as in time He is the only one ever to enter that covenant by His own desert. To Christ belongs *preeminence* in will and value of the eternally Triune.

(Perhaps we should note as well, if only in passing, that, if there is a conditional element to be found in the covenant of grace, it must be here; and the only one ever able to fulfill it is also this same Jesus, God's only Begotten Son. Everyone else has failed, and always will — which is after all the lesson of the law [Rom. 3:20].)

4. But still, the question is, if this be so, what of that seed which is promised to be in number "as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore" (Gen.

22:17)? And what about Abraham himself, was not the promise for him? Here again, when we look, the Scriptures speak. In both Romans and Galatians we are told that when "Abraham believed God," it means that he believed in the coming of Christ. That is why it was "counted unto him for righteousness." Abraham saw (John 8:56) and believed this promised *seed* to be the answer to his sin and need. Abraham could not enter the covenant by his own works or worth; but through faith in Christ he did. And so do all of those who follow as his spiritual children in this same faith, as Galatians 3:7,27,29 says, "they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.... For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.... And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

5. That is what is designated by the covenant sign, whether circumcision in the Old Testament or baptism in the New. The symbolic *cutting away of the filth of the flesh* or the *external washing with water*, each in its own way and time, points to the cleansing needed to enter into covenant communion with God, which only faith in Christ can supply. No one can do it of himself, for the Holy Spirit is the "author of faith," as Ephesians 2:8 explains: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." It is the gift given only those who are chosen by God and given to Jesus Christ, as Acts 13:48 expresses it, "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." It is the elect of God alone who can ever be partakers in the promise of covenant grace.

Now all of this is little more than basic Reformed doctrine, a simple expression of the gospel; and I would assume that most informed members of the Liberated churches would agree with it — except, that is, for that last part, the inference that the promise is only for the elect. It is not so much that they reject the



doctrine of election, or that in the end it is only the elect that are saved; they simply do not think that this should be brought into consideration along with the doctrine of the covenant, and that for a reason particularly their own. As we have pointed out in recent articles, they are very determined that the covenant must be for each and every baptized child, and not just for the elect. Instead of election, it is conditionality which should be brought in, or else human responsibility will not be sufficiently understood. Little do they seem to realize, however, that in doing so a wholly different twist is placed on nearly everything we have just said:

1. If every baptized child must receive the promise, then the promise of God is not as certain as the Scriptures make it appear. It all hinges on demands and warnings, which is to say, on conditions which many fail to meet, with the result that they are lost in the end. God's promise has no certain fulfillment in them.

2. And, if the promise is for every baptized child, some of whom go lost, then the content of the promise, "to be a God unto thee, and unto thy seed after thee," is not as rich as it says. There are some who receive the promise, and yet never come to know God as He said that they would. They may have the right to it — as the Liberated are inclined to claim (even to the point that, if a child dies in infancy, the parents may be assured that child is in glory because of this); they may be told that God is willing to save them; but, having no place for repentance and faith, they never know God in that living fellowship He seemed to be speaking of. The reality of the covenant is less than it might seem to be.

3. And again — most importantly — if the covenant is for all, gone is the *preeminence* of Christ, the *first-born from the dead*, the only true *seed* and only heir to the promise given by God. In the end Christ is not the first and only seed, the means by

which all others must enter in, for when everything is said and done there are others in the covenant who failed to meet the conditions and never come to them. He may be the greatest, He may be the one who helps some to perform the demands of God (while others are left in their sin); but the only *seed*, He is not, for some are counted as seed who never belong to him. He is not the only one.

4. If indeed all who are baptized, including those who fall away, are part of that great multitude whose number is "as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore," it can only mean that the covenant of grace is not an end in itself. There are those who belong to it of whom Jesus will say in the end, "Depart from me, I never knew you" (Matt. 7:23). The covenant is not an eternal reality, it is not that "the tabernacle of God is with men" (Rev. 21:3), but only a temporary means to an end. Here in time it may serve to urge men to Christ, after which it will finally be done. The covenant and its promise are in effect mere rhetorical devices used to urge men to fulfill the conditions necessary for salvation;

and when finally this purpose has been served, it will be no more.

5. And so the sign of baptism, as that of circumcision before it, if it speaks the promises of God externally to some to whom God never intended to impart the Holy Spirit internally (Matt. 3:11), it is not something sure; it expresses God's willingness to save some whom He finally chooses to leave in their sin. Once again a contradiction is left between what God says and what He does.

This we sensed from the start. With good intent, we thought, the Liberated, with their conditional covenant, were losing the true depths of what God had wrought. We wanted badly to discuss this with them on the basis of the confessions and the Word of God. They were resolved, however, that, if we differed with them, we must be in agreement with their enemies; and the only question was whether we would accept their view to be propagated within our churches. When it became apparent that we would not, the knitting of the sock was stopped; nor is there any indication it will soon be started again. □

#### Fill Me, Lord

Fill me, Lord, I'm just an earthen vessel,  
But I am willing to be used of Thee;  
Fill me with Thy precious Holy Spirit  
So that Thy love may be revealed in me.

Fill me, Lord, for then I shall be useful,  
From all that hinders, Savior, set me free;  
Take away my pride and self-assurance  
And let me lean entirely on Thee.

Fill me, Lord, with Thine Almighty power,  
Enable me to do Thy Holy Will;  
For then my life will truly be a blessing  
As I draw ever closer to Thee still.

Fill me, Lord, I'm just an earthen vessel,  
But I am willing to be used of Thee;  
Fill me with Thy precious Holy Spirit  
So that Thy love may be revealed in me.

Annetta Jansen  
Dorr, Michigan



# The Gospel in Southeast Asia

## part 3

When we first arrived in Singapore, it became evident to me rather quickly that I could not just open my file of sermons which were preached over the past thirty some years and use them here. Interestingly, I find the same thing now in reverse: when we visit in the States on holiday, it is not easy to use sermons written for Singapore to preach there. Though for the most part things are the same, it is in the application of the message that things are quite different. I well recall attending a public lecture which was given by a Westerner in Singapore on the subject of Christian education. It was advertised as one to give guidance to parents in the Singapore context. It took only a few minutes of listening to know that the speaker really did not know much about Singapore and that the lecture was prepared from the perspective of Western society. And when it came to making any applications, he admitted he didn't know how it "fit" in Singapore. He drew principles out of the Word of God correctly, but he was handicapped in making that Word of God speak to the people in their own context.

This change falls under the buzzword "cross-cultural ministry." Much has been written about this over the years, some of it glamorized far too much, some of it written in such a muddled fashion that

one hardly knows what it is about, some of it worthwhile and to the point. This article is not about the theory or understanding of a cross-cultural ministry. Rather we want to demonstrate, though briefly and inadequately, how it is done in our setting in Singapore. Purposely, we limited our focus for this series of messages on Southeast Asia to Singapore. It is quite different when applied to Myanmar, where the culture, of course, has its own unique features.

Since there is a diversity of culture throughout the world, it is the task of the person bringing the gospel to take that into consideration when he prepares his message. By culture we use John Stott's description given in *Down to Earth*: "Culture may be likened to a tapestry, intricate and often very beautiful, which is woven by a given society to express its corporate identity." Though God in His infinite wisdom formed and scattered the nations (cultures) at Babel, it is also His glorious purpose to unite these nations once again in true harmony and peace through the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Christ the middle wall of partition that separated Jews and Gentiles was taken away (Eph. 1:13-15). By the work of His Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel, all the nations, each with its own cultural diversity, are united by a true faith and look forward to the international host of saints in glory (Rev. 7:9).

To accomplish this, the gospel must be brought to them. That fact

alone is a wonder of grace. Yes, it is a wonder from the point of view of gospel outreach. The church must be motivated to do this work and an open door must be granted in order to do it. But this is especially true from the point of view of effective communications. In a certain sense there are three cultures involved, the culture prevailing in Bible times, the culture of the people who hear the gospel, and also the culture of the person who brings the Word.

It is the calling of those who bring the gospel not to transport culture, but to transport gospel. Part of the beauty of the diversity of the church is seen in the culture of God's people. It is the task of every missionary to take special care not to rape the culture of the people under the pretense of gospel. To accomplish this, the Bible must be viewed as a sieve through which the culture of the people must be passed. That which conflicts with the Word of God must be abandoned; that which conforms is allowed and practiced; that which is neither condemned nor advocated becomes a matter of Christian liberty. It is biblically correct for people to wear clothes, but what styles they wear are dictated by culture. What about cremation — is that biblically forbidden ... or culturally permitted? In Singapore the majority of people are cremated after death; the Muslims forbid it; many Christians arrange for it. I am sure we would all agree that the old Hindu custom of the widow committing suicide by jumping onto

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the funeral pyre when the body of her husband was being cremated is not right. The Chinese observe Qing Ming when they worship their ancestors where the ashes are stored or at the graves of those who have been buried. Christians only participate in cleaning up the graves of their ancestors, much like Westerners do for Memorial Day.

This bears on the way in which the gospel must be brought to people of different cultures. Two areas of concern come to the foreground here. First, should the gospel itself be adjusted so that when it is proclaimed it takes on the local color of the people? This is generally called "contextualization." Second, consideration must be given to the way in which the gospel is applied to the people — that is, effort must be put forward to get the message across so that it speaks to the people in their own life's setting.

Contextualization might include things like these. If we would speak on the passage of the Bible where we are told that Jesus died outside Jerusalem, we could bring into the sermon a detailed reference to the tradition of the Chinese emperors who from 2,205 B.C. (almost 1500 years before Confucius) went yearly to sacrifice to the Sheng Ti, the Heavenly Ruler. This would impress old timers in two ways, it would indicate that Chinese emperors understood the idea of offering without the gate (they went to the border, outside China), and also it would connect that past activity with Jesus' death. Even Confucius called this a riddle (*Mysteries Confucius Couldn't Solve*, by Nelson and Broadberry). Or as another example, if we were to preach on the doctrine of justification by faith, we could point out to the listener that even the language of Mandarin has the idea of atonement built into it. Mandarin is picture language, it has layers of calligraphy. The first layer projects the image of a hand and a lance (sword).

The second layer pictures me plus a sheep. So the word translated righteousness comes from a word which means kill a sheep for me — a rather interesting description of Christ and atonement for our righteousness before God. This, by the way, is used as an argument that years ago, when the Chinese language was formed, those who composed it must have been Christians.

Use of that kind of approach has its limits not only, but dangers as well. I well remember the presence of an older Indian who appeared unexpectedly for evening worship. He sat through the message and afterward argued vociferously that his guru was the same as Jesus Christ. Hinduism advocates openness to all religions — which explains why it is the root of the New Age religion. If we take as our starting point a local "god," and then argue from their understanding of this god to the true God, it never works. Remember, when Paul referred to an "unknown God" in Acts 17:23, he did not draw a comparison between their idol god and Jehovah. This god was unknown. If you try to begin the gospel on the level of their perception of religion, they will continue to take that perception into their understanding of the gospel. For this reason, many Chinese converts, especially young Christians, cannot understand how their God will afflict them or send them hardships, for the Chinese god never does evil for good, it always rewards good with good and punishes bad people. Many young Christians face their first real test of Christian fidelity in this area.

Far better it is to forget trying to build bridges to heaven by way of local culture and rather focus on understanding clearly what the message of the gospel is and how to relate it to their own experiences. J.H. Bavinck, in *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, suggests we call it the point of attack rather than the point of contact. That will eliminate

the temptation to make too much of dynamic equivalency, finding similarities between local culture and the Bible.

This means that the missionary in a foreign culture has to be a careful expounder of the Word. We see this importance as we write to our Indian brothers and as we have the privilege to teach our friends from Myanmar and Singapore. All our time is spent in the Scriptures. They must learn the language of the Bible just as much as any Western pastor. To their best ability they must know the history of the Bible, the message of the Word of God, and exposit carefully the Word itself. There are plenty of biblical examples that no matter where Paul preached he always preached Christ crucified and risen, and thereby the power of God unto salvation. The call of the gospel is what is most significant. Whether the listener may be a nominal Christian from Myanmar, a backslider from the ERCS, a Chinese Taoist, an Indian Hindu, or a Muslim, all must hear the one Word of God: Repent from your sins, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, embrace the true God of heaven and earth and serve Him.

This Word of God must be made relevant to their daily lives. Just as Paul could make reference to the poets (Acts 17:28) or to God the Creator (Acts 14:15), so we can make reference to their local customs. I recall Pastor Lau doing that effectively in a pamphlet he prepared for distribution on Chinese New Year. The custom is for Chinese families to hang over their door a bright red and gold sash (auspicious colors for good luck). He used that as a point of contact how the Christians have a banner over them which is love (Song of Solomon 2:4). From there he directed the reader to the cross. Comparison can be made between the gods of the heathen and the true God of the Bible, in order to show why the Christian God is the only God. The same is true when we deal with evil spirits. The Bible recognizes the presence of such spirits,

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and on that level has much to say to the local Chinese. The wonderful thing is that, even though evil spirits are around us all the time, Christ has overcome them, and once we are Christians we cannot be possessed of evil spirits, though we must constantly contend with them.

The more we are able to live in the life of the people, the more we are able to make the Word of God meaningful for them. Indeed, we cannot make the application of the Word in every instance. This is the Holy Spirit's domain. Thank God, He does His own applying. What I mean is that every Scripture message which speaks about certain godly behavior must be applied to the hearer. The more the messenger understands the life of the people and

lives among them in their own culture, the more he is able to bring that Word to their level of understanding and also to their special needs. Readers in the States may not need to know how to cope with ungodly parents and siblings. Singaporeans certainly do. Temptations for riches and the drive for excellency and reward is universal, but when it is the life-style of a kiasu Singaporean who lives in a culture saturated with Confucian thinking, it takes on special meaning and must be carefully discerned and applied. Christian Westerners who are tempted to use their liberty in excess have a different set of life-challenges than a Singaporean who lives under an authority which dictates most of his life-style.

This only indicates that for effective cross-cultural missions the missionary must live close to the people. It is good that we do not drive a car, live in a condo in the ex-pat area of Orchard Road, or wine and dine in Western restaurants. If we did, we would miss all the local color and just might cause some fellow saint to stumble. At the same time we are able to learn how the people live and relate to them and bring messages which speak in such a way that they know that we understand their frustrations and problems of life.

We are thankful to God that He continues to add to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). The cross is still God's power unto salvation (I Cor. 1:18). □

*In His Fear*

*Rev. Arie denHartog*

# A Special Sermon for the Young Women of the Church (1)

I recently had the opportunity to preach a special sermon to the young women in our church in connection with the wonderful occasion of the confession of faith of three of our covenant young women. In several places the letters of the inspired apostles of our Lord specifically address various classes of church members. This is rather striking. The

vast majority of the exhortations of the Word of God apply to every member of the church. We have a common calling as saints of God no matter who we are and what our station in life might be. In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither bond nor free. We are justified and saved by the same grace of God and righteousness of Christ Jesus. We have one faith, one Lord, one baptism, one God and Father who is above us all, through us all, and in us all. We are called to strive together to testify of the glory of God and the greatness of His salvation.

We are called to strive together to confess the truth of God and to live the Christian life.

This does not mean however that we are all the same and in every respect have the same calling in life. This notion is a heresy common in some churches today. The Lord made us different and gave us a different calling. This is a wonderful thing. We are not ashamed of the fact that the Lord gave a different place in the church, for example, to men than He did to women. Therefore the Lord deemed it necessary also to speak specifically to various classes of members accord-

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ing to their nature and because of their unique calling in the church.

There are several passages of Scripture that specifically address young women in the church. We have read some of these this morning (I Tim. 2:9, 10; Tit. 2:4, 5; I Pet. 3:1-4). It is true that in all these passages the reference is especially to married young women in the church. The Bible highly regards marriage and the role of women in marriage. But these passages certainly also apply to unmarried young women. Many, though not all young women, will in the Lord's providence marry some day. The best preparation for marriage, for some day serving the Lord as a godly wife and mother, is to consider carefully what God's Word has to say to you in your youth already and by putting His Word into practice already now, with grace in your hearts.

The words spoken by the apostles of the Lord in the passages that we read are some of the most often criticized and even hated teachings of God's Word in our modern age. The holy apostles of our Lord have been called male chauvinists, women-haters, and all sorts of other evil things. The less "daring" have stated that when the apostles wrote the passages which we read they were only giving their own opinion or they were only stating something true in the culture and time in which they lived, and that today in the age of the liberated woman these words no longer apply. We know however, do we not, beloved Christian young women, that God's Word is unchangeable. It applies in every age. The teaching given in the passages we read is rooted in God's creation ordinance. It is based on the unchangeable, perfect, and holy law of God. It is the good Word of God for your salvation also in 1995 in our modern age.

There are three more observations I want to make by way of introduction. In the passage in I Timothy 2 the apostle Paul is addressing the general subject of how we

must behave ourselves in the church of the living God which is the pillar and ground of the truth. So we have in this passage a very specific treatment of the question of our behavior in church, our calling as members of the church. Secondly, the Word of God here speaks to women professing godliness. That is what you do when you make confession of faith and what you must continue to do for the rest of your life. Thirdly, in Titus 2 the apostle of the Lord is giving instruction on those things "that become sound doctrine." Later in this chapter he speaks of adorning the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. There is and must be a relationship between the doctrine we confess and the life that we live. The life of godliness of the child of God must "adorn" the doctrine he or she confesses.

Let us consider some of the beautiful virtues the passages under our consideration speak of, virtues that God especially wants to see in Christian young women professing godliness. I Timothy 2 speaks of shamefacedness and of sobriety and of good works. Titus 2 speaks of being sober. (It is interesting that Paul mentions the virtue sobriety in connection with his admonition to each class of members of the church he specifically addresses.) Titus 2 also speaks of love, discretion, chastity, goodness, and obedience. I Peter 3 speaks of a chaste conversation (lifestyle), the fear of God, and the adorning of the hidden man of the heart which is a meek and quiet spirit before God.

The godly young woman must be sober. Sober does not mean that you have to go around with a long face all your life, that you may never laugh or smile. There is a proper enthusiasm of youth. This is a beautiful thing to see. We are glad there are young people with such enthusiasm in the church. This adds a beautiful dimension to the life of the

church. Young people are not yet burdened with the serious concerns and troubles of adult life that give older members of the church gray hair and leave permanent marks of anxiety on their faces. There is something beautiful about the joy and enthusiasm of youth, especially the joy of the Lord, the excitement, zeal, and joy of godly living which is the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the child of God.

Being sober is the opposite of being drunk. Certainly that is true according to the common usage of this term. However, the Word of God speaks of a spiritual sobriety. Spiritual sobriety is a certain serious spiritual attitude toward life. This is the opposite of being drunk with worldly passions and sinful lusts so that one loses his or her spiritual senses and does things that are evil and shameful in the sight of God.

Soberness involves a serious understanding of our calling in life and how the Lord wants us to live. It means that we understand that we have to be concerned about more in life than just the excitement and pleasure of today. The sober-minded have an understanding of the serious consequences of a life of sin and disobedience to the Lord. They understand that a life of worldly pleasure and sin will bring the judgment of the Lord upon one's life. They realize that the consequences of ungodly actions are very serious already in this life and certainly in the life to come. Such a life will end in misery and judgment. The love of the world is enmity against God. A worldly life will separate us from the favor and lovingkindness of our God which is more than life. Be not drunk, young women, with worldliness, with its temptations to sin, with its immoral pleasures and its total disregard for God and His Word.

There are many things that we need to be sober about. We really

*The sober-minded realize that the consequences of ungodly actions are very serious already in this life and certainly in the life to come.*



must be sober about the seriousness of all of our life that in the providence of the Lord still lies before us as young people. We need to be sober about the goal and purpose of our life which is to live for the glory of God and in obedience to His Word in holiness and fear. We need to be sober about the instruction and guidance that we receive from our parents, from our church, from godly friends, and from the more experienced mature saints of God in the church. We must not just disregard all of this and live a life of rebellion against our godly parents and the truth we have by God's grace been taught by the church. We must not foolishly imagine that we have grown so mature in life that we know better than anyone else and we need not listen to the good counsel and advice of people in the church whom God has placed on the path of our life to guide us and influence us in the right and good way. We need to be sober concerning the life partner we choose. How many young women, because of the foolishness of their youth, end up with a husband that later in life brings them grief and leads them astray from the Lord! We need to be sober to prepare ourselves for our life's occupation. We must not squander the days of our youth so that later we are not prepared for the calling God has for us in our life.

The word that is in the King James Bible translated as "discrete" (Tit. 2:5) really comes from the same root as the word sober. Discretion has to do also with the ability to judge wisely between that which is good and that which is evil. It is the spiritual ability to avoid the pitfalls of sin and the foolish and vain ways of the world.

Several times in the passages which we read, the word "chaste" appears. This word admonishes us regarding the proper use of our sexual nature. According to God's Word our sexual nature is a gift from God to be used for marriage. The Lord has made young women physically beautiful and attractive to the

opposite sex. The Lord has placed in the young woman a powerful feeling connected with her sexual nature. This feeling will motivate her to seek a life's partner of the opposite sex. This feeling however can easily come under the control of sin. In fact, by nature it is controlled by sin and we have to be very careful about it in our life.

God made a woman's nature sexually different from the nature of men. Therefore there is need of specific words of advice concerning this for godly young women. Men are by nature easily aroused by the display of a woman's body. The world tempts young women to use their bodies for display and for sexual enticement of men. That is exactly what the ungodly women of the world commonly do. This has the great potential, however, of leading you into great and terrible sin in your life which could have lifelong and very serious consequences. God's Word commands you to control your sexual nature by His grace and Spirit in your heart. God tells you that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit to be kept holy and pure. Your bodies are not to be used for uncleanness and sin. True beauty is to be holy, not to be sinfully attractive to men whose minds and hearts are full of adultery.

Our calling to be holy is broader than that of avoiding sexual sins in life, but this matter is a very important aspect of holiness before God. In this connection let me remind you of the soberness we just talked about and also of what we said, that many of these passages address the young unmarried women. For many of you, God wants you some day to be married. Think about being a chaste bride some day, for a godly young man that the Lord might lead into your life to become your marriage partner. Be careful to keep yourself holy, so that on your wedding day you might be able honestly to wear the beautiful white

wedding gown. Do not in your youth, by carelessness in regard to the use of sex, spoil the beauty of being a virgin and a chaste bride for a God-appointed husband. There is more to your life than today and the sinful pleasure of youth that lasts for only a very short time but can have sad consequences for later life. Honor the Word of God and keep yourself holy and pure in this important area of your life. This will bear a blessed fruit later in life, I assure you.

Another virtue that must characterize godly women is meekness. Meekness involves humility, godly humility. Not pride and self exaltation is pleasing to the Lord but humility. Meekness involves kindness and gentleness. These virtues are especially becoming to godly women. They describe the true beauty of God possessed by the God-fearing women. Meekness also is the spiritual grace of being able to suffer wrong without seeking revenge. This world in which we live is full of wrong. As Christians we must be prepared that we will sometimes in life have to suffer even grievous wrong and hurt from others around us. Sometimes even those who love us and are close friends do us wrong and cause deep hurt by doing this. The temptation in such circumstances is to seek revenge, to render evil for evil. But as a godly woman you must resist this temptation with all your might and follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. Leave vengeance up to the Lord. Be ready to suffer wrong and bear it patiently for the Lord's sake. There is true beauty in this.

... to be continued. □

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you might  
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gown.*



# State Aid and the Work of the Deacons

I am thankful to the brother who has responded to my article with several very good questions.\* The issues that he raises are all the more interesting because of his perspective of living in a country that has more social programs than does the US. I preface my response by noting that I do not think there is a simple "yes or no" answer to most of the brother's questions. The Christian must prayerfully consider the biblical principles that apply as he faces each situation.

We believe that the state is ordained of God for the praise and protection of those who do well, and to be a terror to those who do evil (Rom. 13). We also pray for those that are in authority, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (I Tim. 2:2). We pay the taxes to the state in order that the state may have the means to carry out its divine mandate. We therefore have a right to use many of the programs which our tax dollars support. The programs are not evil in themselves just because they are administered by the state. I think of such programs as the library system, the park system, and even health-care (to name only a few). Whether all of these programs are wise or cost-effective is another question.

The brother lives in a province of Australia, and he indicates that Australians have a "very socialistic government." I take this to mean

that the citizens pay a high percentage of their income to the state in taxes, and in return the government offers many benefits to its citizens. The brother sent a booklet which describes the comprehensive array of programs available to the citizens of Australia. Most of the benefits have to do with payments that families receive based on the number of children in the family and on parental income. While I question the wisdom and biblical character of this approach, I do not think it is principally any different from the situation in the US which allows for reductions in income tax for every dependent. Whether we pay less in, or receive something back in a check, is principally the same.

I do not want to leave the impression that I am in favor of the Christian taking advantage of every program offered by the state just because it is supported by his taxes. This is not the case. A classic example of a tax-supported program we do not support is public education. We believe that education is the duty of the parent, not the state. We do not want the state to educate our children according to humanistic principles. We therefore ordinarily do not use the public schools.

Brother Kleyn makes an interesting comment when he states that in Australia "no one has to live in poverty." He indicates that, as a result of this, the task of the deacons is made easy. This brings weighty matters to the foreground. Apparently there are enough social programs available so that a person never has to suffer lack to the point

that he cannot afford food and raiment. Because of this, the deacons would rarely (if ever?) need to provide financial assistance. This is not good for the church.

Historically, there has always been a tension between the church and the state over the privilege of caring for the poor. The church has had to guard jealously her calling to care for the Lord's poor. The temptation comes from within and without. It seems that the state (in varying degrees) is constantly seeking to encroach on the church's privilege to care for her poor. The devil uses this situation to his advantage. He would like nothing better than for members of the church to become financially dependent on the state. For a time, there may not be an overt evil evident, but eventually the church will face a real question of principle. At some point the state will insist on a condition that involves a violation of principle, for continuing financial support. The church, having grown accustomed to the support, will be tempted to forsake the principle because she cannot imagine taking on the financial burden previously handled by the state. The way of wisdom is to avoid the beginnings! The church must understand the great spiritual value in the office of deacon. Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction.

In addition to the scenario described above, another evil lurks.

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\* See "Letters" — Ed.



This has to do with the devil's attack on the office of Christ in the church. Brother Kleyn alludes to this when he indicates that because of an abundance of financial aid programs the work of the diaconate becomes "easy." I understand him to mean "easy" in the sense that deacons do not have much (if any) financial relief to distribute, and therefore also have an "easy" time in procuring "many good means for relief of the poor." In one sense, having no poor makes the work of the deacons "easy"; but, in another sense, having no poor makes the work impossible. Christ is present in His church through the offices. To have the deacons present in name only is to lose the office. Just as the office of prophet would be absent if the preacher were not preaching, and just as the office of king would be absent if the elders were not ruling, so also is the office of the merciful high priest absent if the deacons are not relieving physical needs. To the extent that the office is non-functional, to that same extent Christ is not present with us, and to that same extent we do not experience the blessings of salvation merited by Christ. This should not be taken to mean that there must be financial assistance rendered each and every month of the year, but it does mean that if an absence of need persists on a consistent and long-term basis, there is unavoidable spiritual damage that will ensue.

In this connection, I would note that the office of deacon is probably the most vulnerable aspect of the office of Christ for the devil to attack. It is the least visible of the special offices. The deacons have little direct contact in their official work with the majority of the members. As a result, the church can lose sight of the spiritual nature of the office, and focus primarily on the financial aspect of the office. The office is then thought to be a financial-aid organization rather than the office of our merciful High Priest, Jesus Christ. If this perception prevails, those who are in need may prefer

the financial aid of the state rather than the deacons. For the state may ask fewer questions. The state may give more money. And no one in the church will know of the situation. The possibility of embarrassment among fellow church members is thus eliminated. The reasons (all of them wrong) can be multiplied. What has been lost, however, is the blessing of Christ that comes through the office of deacon. The great benefit of the office of deacon for the poor is not the money, but the spiritual blessing of Christ! When the poor receive financial assistance accompanied with the Word and sanctified by prayer from the official representatives of Christ, they receive a priceless blessing from their Savior. The blessing is in the Word! The speaking of the Word by officebearers is the speaking of the Word by Christ Himself. What a glorious blessing!

Where does this leave us? We may properly use some of the programs that we support with our taxes, and yet there is a danger if these programs tend to make the office of deacon unnecessary. The decision will need to be a matter of sanctified judgment as the believer exercises the liberty that he has in Christ. I would avoid any legalistic approach to the issue. In general, my judgment would be that the Christian may take advantage of the programs that are provided as a basic level of service from the government to the majority of the citizens (provided that the program itself does not compromise biblical principles). This may take the form of payments based on the number of children in a family, income tax deductions based on the number of dependents, and even health-care. I would tend to avoid programs that are designed to address situations that would otherwise leave one in poverty. When God in His providence leads His people in a way of physical hardship, relief should not be sought from the state,

but from the office of mercy in the church. There is no end of situations to describe, but they would involve either a loss of income, or an increase in bills such that the Christian finds himself without the means to meet financial obligations.

Even in a state with a very socialistic government, I cannot imagine that Christians who support the church, missions, a seminary, Christian education, and myriads of other kingdom causes never find themselves in financial need. I believe that Christ will see to that (Matt. 26:11). When the circumstances in the life of some saints are such that they face the reality that they cannot meet their financial obligations, they must make a choice. They can go to the state and seek financial assistance from a program whose chief focus is elimination of poverty, or they can go to Christ and receive not only financial assistance, but also spiritual blessings. The deacons will bring the Word, and by this means Christ will comfort His people with the assurance that He will never leave or forsake them. They will be reminded that God in His perfect wisdom has ordained the present way of hardship to be the way of their salvation. They will experience in a direct way the blessedness of the communion of the saints, as God's people willingly provide the deacons with the means to relieve their suffering. (This assumes that they have sought help first from their immediate family.)

*To neglect the office of Christ in any of its manifestations is to neglect Christ.*

It is good to remember also that the office of Christ is essentially one. There are three aspects to the one office of Christ. To allow the office of deacon to wither from disuse must necessarily lead to a withering of the office in its other aspects as well. To neglect the office of Christ in any of its manifestations is to neglect Christ. The church has therefore been zealous to protect the office of deacon from the encroachment of the state. Church members who are



conscious of the true spiritual character of the office of deacon will support the office with their gifts and prayers. And, those in financial need will not hesitate to come to the diaconate, because they are confident

of the great spiritual benefit that they will enjoy. In thankful awareness of the spiritual riches we have in Christ, we give to the poor. Confident that the One who willingly suf-

fered the torments of hell to pay our spiritual debts will also help with material needs, the poor come to Christ as manifested in the office of deacon. □

## News from our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Minister Activities

On the evening of July 17th, the congregation of the Byron Center, MI PRC met and extended a call to Rev. M. Dick, presently serving our churches in the Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, Alberta, Canada.

After Rev. Houck's decline of a call from the Edgerton, MN PRC, the council there has formed another trio consisting of the Revs. Flikkema, Koole, and Moore. At a congregational meeting last month, they extended a call to Rev. K. Koole, who is serving our churches at Faith PRC in Jenison, MI.

The Hope PRC in Walker, MI also recently called a pastor. From a trio consisting of the Revs. Bruinsma, denHartog, and Dykstra, they extended a call to Rev. W. Bruinsma of the First PRC in Holland, MI.

The Council of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI planned a farewell program for their pastor, Rev. J. Slopsema, and his family on August 4. Rev. Slopsema was scheduled to preach his farewell sermon at hope on August 6.

We also want to include here a special note of thanks to our churches' emeritus ministers. While our congregation in Lynden, WA was without its own pastor, Rev. G. Lanting, of South Holland, IL filled their pulpit first on Thanksgiving, then Christmas, and finally around Easter — difficult times to be away from one's family, and an especially hard time to be without a pastor. We would be remiss if we did not also mention Rev. Breen here. It seems

that, for the better part of a year now, he has preached once a Sunday for what has now become our Grace PRC in Standale, MI. We as churches can be thankful that the Lord gives us these men and the rest of our emeriti ministers to help us through these times.

Staying with emeriti ministers, we are also able to report that Rev. Robert Harbach recently underwent surgery for a detached retina. And Rev. C. Hanko continues to recover from a recent fall and is able to get around again. His eye is gradually improving after recent surgery and he will be getting new glasses soon. This will also help improve his vision, which is still quite blurry.

### Evangelism Activities

Last Fall, the Evangelism Committee of the South Holland, IL PRC held a series of three meetings in Florence, Kentucky in an effort to spread their witness in this large metropolitan area (greater Cincinnati). Since then, there has been only one Sunday of preaching there, when Rev. Terpstra traveled there over the Memorial Day weekend at the end of May. Understandably, the core group has a desire for regular preaching. However, they are aware of our churches' shortage of men and have patiently waited for more consistent help. Since last Fall, South Holland has had several new contacts, and they feel that there are others in the area interested in our churches. With the approval of South Holland's Council, the Evangelism Committee is now trying to work out a plan to provide these people with more preaching.

Our PR churches in west Michigan were invited to a three-session,

two-day seminar at Graves Hall on the campus of Hope College in Holland, MI, sponsored by the Evangelism Committee of the First PRC of Holland. On July 28, Rev. Bruinsma, First's pastor, spoke on "Seeking a Godly Spouse." This was followed the next day with two speeches, one by Rev. B. Gritters, of the Hudsonville, MI PRC entitled, "Biblical Marriage," and the other by Rev. Bruinsma entitled, "The Covenant Family."

### Congregational Activities

Progress continues on the church building project of the Peace PRC in Lynwood, IL. In one of the last bulletins we received from Peace, we learned that the west and east upper walls are now roughed in. Most of the electrical and plumbing work has also been completed. The roof has been shingled, and brick is now being added to the outside of the building. We can assume that, this now being some two months later, still more has been completed.

Staying with church buildings, we can also let you know that the Building Committee of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI is busy seeking land for a church building. They report that presently they are looking at six different parcels.

Earlier this summer the congregation of our Pella, IA PRC approved several proposals to upgrade their parsonage. Proposals called for a complete painting of the exterior of their parsonage, including the garage. Plans also called for some repair work to be done on the parsonage roof and, finally, the congregation voted to replace the oven in the kitchen.

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



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This summer also saw the organization of a Women's Bible Study at the Hope PRC in Walker, MI. Plans called for a study of I Thessalonians, in Walker Community Park.

## Mission Activities

Rev. R. Moore spent two weeks

of vacation this summer in the First PRC in Edmonton and the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada. While there he was able to show his slides of Ghana and also preach once in each congregation.

## Food for Thought

"The service of God requires a man, not a shadow; yea all of a man and more than a man, our spirits and God's Spirit also." □

— Richard Steels

*A Remedy for Wandering  
Thoughts in Worship, p. 44*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 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. All 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

### NOTICE!!!

The Fall Meeting of the Eastern Men's and Ladies' League will be held on Tuesday, September 26, at 8 P.M. in our Hudsonville Church. Our speaker, Rev. Ron VanOverloop, will speak on the subject "Is Revitalization of our Society Life Necessary?" A collection will be taken to aid the needy ministers with whom Rev. Kortering has contact in Eastern Asia. All Men's and Ladies' Society members, as well as any other adult Bible society members and young people who may be interested, are encouraged to attend.

### NOTICE!!

Grandville Protestant Reformed Church is offering private notes to help finance the new classroom addition to their church building. Competitive rates and terms are offered. Please call John G. VanBaren for details at (616) 896-7444 (evenings); or (616) 669-3028 (days).

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Evangelism Committee of Hudsonville PRC expresses its heartfelt sympathy to secretary Mrs. Bev Kuiper, in the passing of her father,

#### MR. FRANK DYKSTRA.

"Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord" (Psalm 31:24).

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thanks to our covenant God, we announce the 40th wedding anniversary of our dear parents,

**PETER and NELL FABER,**  
on August 26, 1995. May our heavenly Father bless and keep you always. With love from your children:

- ♦ Mitchell and Grace Kay Dick
- David, Elisabeth, Daniel
- ♦ Paula Faber
- ♦ Peter and Karen Faber

Grand Rapids, Michigan

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY REV. and MRS. GEORGE C. LUBBERS,

our beloved and faithful parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary, August 17. We are thankful to our covenant God for His loving and gracious condescension in giving them to each other, and to their family these many years. We confess with David, "The lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea, we have a goodly heritage" (Psalm 16:6).

- ♦ Agatha Lubbers
- ♦ Tom and Greta Newhof
- ♦ Case and Fran Lubbers
- ♦ Lamm and MaryBeth Lubbers
- 13 grandchildren
- 20 great grandchildren

Grand Rapids, Michigan

### NOTICE!!!

#### Annual Meeting of the RFPA

September 28, 1995, 8 P.M.

Hope Church (G.R.)

Speaker: **Rev. Ron Cammenga**

(Three new board members will be elected from a nomination consisting of Rod Brunsting, Vern Casmier, Leon Kamps, Sr., Jeff Kalsbeek, Rog King, and Bill Oomkes.)