

Be Ye Doers of the Word

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

James 1:22-25

The epistle of James calls those who profess to have faith to live their faith in all of their life. Our text shows where living one's faith begins: being doers of the word. The preceding verse provides an important key to knowing what makes one a doer of the word — to receive the engrafted word with meekness (v.

21). This points out that what interferes with our receiving the word is pride. Meekness, or humility, is a key to understanding what makes one a doer of the word, instead of a hearer only.

This inspired Scripture admonishes the readers to be doers as well as hearers of the “word.” This word is the speech of God. The readers of James' epistle were members of the visible church (“the twelve tribes scattered abroad,” v. 1) and were accustomed to listening to the Old Testament Scriptures explained to them. They heard the word of God.

Note that our text speaks of the word in two other ways. It is called the “law,” and it is presented as a mirror. When all the word of God is called “the law,” then the word is viewed as the means God uses to show that He is sovereign and must be obeyed. The word is the speech of God, who calls His human creatures to love Him with their all, and to show their love for Him by loving the neighbor He has put in their path. The word that is to be heard and done is a law.

Also the preaching of the word is described as being a “glass,” or mirror. This figure means that the word confronts hearers with the answer to the question, “Do you love God with your all and your neighbor as yourself?” As a mirror, this penetrating question reveals to us whether we do love God with our all or whether we are just saying that we love Him.

Our text says that, when the word of God is preached, there are two kinds of hearers. There is the forgetful hearer, and there is the hearer who does not forget. The forgetful hearer truly listens. He knows what the message is about and he is able to talk about it. When the text says that he is a forgetful hearer, it does not mean that he forgets what is said in the preaching. He can, in fact, remember sermons, and it is likely that he even conforms himself outwardly to its demands. But he forgets the one essential of the preaching of the gospel that would make him a doer.

The other hearer of the word hears the preaching as well. He hears, listening carefully and medi-

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: dykstra@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
Zealand
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49468-0603
PH: (616) 531-1490
(616) 538-1778
FAX: (616) 531-3033
(e-mail: doezema@prca.org)

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: cprfaudiostore@yahoo.co.uk)

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Website for RFFPA: www.rffa.org
Website for PRC: www.prca.org

tating. And he strives also to apply the word he hears to himself and to his daily walk. But what makes him a *doer*, in addition to his being a *hearer*, is that he does not forget something — something that is a most important element of the preaching.



What exactly is it that the one who is only a hearer *forgets* and that the one who is also a doer *remembers*? What is it that makes one a *doer* of the word, in addition to being a *hearer* of it?

Both the hearer and the doer are described as seeing their “natural face.” The preaching of the word serves as a “glass” or mirror in which is seen one’s natural face. This is, literally, “the face of one’s birth.” It is what all men are by nature, by virtue of their relationship to Adam. Every descendant of Adam has this ugly depravity or sinfulness, out of which all of his sinful thoughts, words, and deeds arise. Also the regenerated believer continues to have this “natural face.” That is why even the most holy has only a small beginning of the new obedience. He still has his “natural face.”

According to our text, both the hearer and the doer stand in front of the mirror of the preaching of Scripture and both clearly see their natural face.

The difference is that the hearer forgets. He forgets “straightway,” that is, quickly. It is implied that he wants to forget, that he deliberately forgets his own ugly depravity. He remembers many other things that he hears. He may have a great objective knowledge of the truth and of a holy walk. He may be able to define heresies. But when it comes to himself, he quickly forgets “what manner of man he was.” He sees his natural face for a short while, but he wants to forget quickly the ugly image he saw of himself. He deceives himself.

The hearer only, who quickly

forgets his natural face, will always be characterized by a lack of humility. When he talks about world issues or ecclesiastical church matters, when he talks about the sins of others (in the ungodly or in a fellow professing believer), his talk is always without real humility. He speaks as if he would never do such a terrible sin. Or when his sins are presented, he has all kinds of excuses and reasons. Always there is the absence of meekness. He hears the word. He knows a lot about the word. But always he is as one who quickly forgets his natural face. He deceives himself.

The hearer who is a doer of the word is described simply and only as one who “continueth” in the knowledge of his sinful nature. He is humble because he never forgets his sins and miseries. He always remembers how great they are. He may see sin and error in others, but he always sees it in himself (too and worse). He identifies himself as less than the least of all saints precisely because he knows himself so well. He sees himself as the chief of sinners exactly because he does not forget, but purposely strives to remember, that he is the sinner. To keep this knowledge he remains near the word, taking the picture of himself with him wherever he goes.

The hearer who is a doer of the word goes forward another step. Even while he deliberately remembers his natural face, he realizes that he is looking into the “perfect” law, that is, the law that is perfected, fulfilled, or completed. The same law that shows him his sinfulness (and sins) is recognized by him to be a law that is fulfilled for him by God’s Son, Jesus Christ. He knows that, as sinful as he is, he cannot make himself clean. So he is constantly pleading for mercy in the blood of Christ. And he finds in the same word that identifies himself as a sinner the good news of the Savior. Jesus came into the world to save sinners — even the chief of sinners. Not only are his

sins forgiven, but also the law is fulfilled for him as if he never did any wrong and as if he only kept the law perfectly himself.

The hearer who is a doer of the word takes one more step. The law that shows him his natural face and the good news of the Savior is identified as the “law of liberty.” The preaching of the gospel of the Word of God proclaims that in the crucified and risen Savior there is freedom from the guilt of sin, from the fear of death, from the bondage of despair, and from the bondage of having to sin. There is freedom to love God with his all, and his neighbor as himself. The gratitude of the real hearer, who is a doer of the word, is real and constant. He strives to do what God commands as an expression of his thanks to God for saving a wretch like him.



“This man shall be blessed in his deed.” He finds blessing in his hearing (*really* hearing) the Word (Jesus).

The first and constant blessed deed of the doer of the word is repentance. The doctrines of total depravity and of sovereign grace become a part of his everyday life in the way of his humbly repenting. He is not a perfect doer, but he is a constant confessor and a constant striver.

The doer also finds blessing in hearing that he is free from the bondage of sin and death. He is given to see in the mirror, behind himself, the likeness of Christ in all His righteousness. This makes him blessed or happy.

And the doer is blessed in his deeds of loving God and his neighbor out of the motive of gratitude. He is blessed because he “walks humbly with his God” (Micah 6:8). He constantly sees why he is to be humble. And he conducts himself humbly with his neighbor. The doer of the word not only walks humbly with his God, but he also “loves mercy” (Micah 6:8). Hav-

ing been the recipient of so much mercy, he strives to exercise mercy toward all others.

And, ultimately, the doer is

blessed in his ... hoping. Remembering, always, his natural face, he desires more and more the transformation that awaits him in glory. He longs for heaven, where he will

finally and forever be free of his natural face. Blessed indeed, and blessed *now*, is one who has such a hope. □

Editorials

With Gratitude to God

We express heartfelt thanks today to Prof. David J. Engelsma for his sixteen years of faithful labor as editor in chief of the *Standard Bearer*. When in 1988 he acceded to the request of the *SB* staff to replace Prof. Homer C. Hoeksema as editor, Rev. Engelsma was the minister of a large and busy congregation in South Holland, Illinois. The daunting task of editor became even more difficult than he envisioned it, as he received the appointment to the seminary in the same year. Consequently, in the first few years as editor, he was engaged also in preparing seminary courses and obtaining an advanced degree in theology.

We readers would know nothing of that heavy load — not, at least, from the quality of the editorials. Prof. Engelsma brought something of a new style to the editorials of the *SB*. I hesitate to say that they were better, because the *SB* has had outstanding editors from the beginning. There was, however, something compelling about them. His articles were deliberately Reformed, and even unashamedly Protestant Reformed. At the same time, they were crafted with the kind of painstaking care that drove home the point of the editorial. In his interview printed in this and a subsequent issue, Prof. Engelsma divulges the reasons for his deliberate care in writing. You can read that for yourself.

We readers benefited from the thorough research, the careful dis-

section of the issues, and the biblical and confessional guideposts that the editorials erected. Above all, we benefited from the bold and incisive leadership in the confusion of doctrinal controversy and in the face of moral perversion. There was never an uncertain sound.

The editorials were not only Reformed, they were pertinent, and they were consistently well written. That combination changed the manner in which I read the *Standard Bearer*. After 1988, when I received the *SB* in the mail, rather than immediately turning the magazine over to read the news, as was my wont, I turned eagerly to the editorials. I think I was not alone. The editorials were imaginative and bold. Who can forget the apt quotation of Lewis Carroll's Alice "Curiouser and curiouser!" — in the analysis of a printed report of uninformed, critical conjectures on the PRC (Feb. 15, 1995)? Or the biting, "There may even be some footnotes," in response to an alleged lack of scholarship in the *SB* editorials evidenced (supposedly) by a lack of footnotes. Or the sharp irony in the description of Protestant Reformed folk on the farm with their cows, chanting "TULIP" and letting the world pass them by, in reply to a strange description of the PRC as rural, isolationist, obsessed, and deformed for their continued rejection of common grace (Oct. 15, 1989).

Even the titles drew one in. How could you *not* turn first to "Pulling the Plug on the Flood," or,

"Jesus the Son of Nathan," or, "Jewish Dreams"?

The bold character of the editorials is illustrated in the refutation of *1994?* — the book that claimed to prove (by mathematical calculations on the data of the Bible) that Christ's return would occur in September of 1994. Having exposed the exegetical errors of the book, and having established the correct teaching of the Bible on the second coming of Christ, Engelsma drove his point home with a "genuine prophecy ... based on God's own Word." He confidently affirmed, "As a Reformed believer and minister of the Word ... (i)n the name of Jesus Christ, I declare with absolute certainty that Jesus will not come and the world will not end in 1994" (Jan. 1, 1993).

Such outspoken courage drew some harsh criticism, but the point was emphatically made. Besides, September of 1994 came and went, thus fulfilling Engelsma's scripturally grounded prophecy.

The editorials of the last sixteen years hit the mark. For that reason, they drew attention. Articles that exposed the errors of Christian Reconstructionism elicited from one of its well-known defenders the bold challenge, "Let's have a debate!" (May 15, 1999). But when Engelsma agreed to it, the challenger declined to participate (Sept. 1, 1999). His reasons rang hollow.

"The Sad Case of Bert Zandstra" (Nov. 1, 1997), got someone's attention. This riveting editorial

lamented the tolerance of divorce and remarriage by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”), as reported in their own paper, *De Reformatie*. Subsequently, the *SB* was dropped from their mailing list, and not another copy of *De Reformatie* could be obtained. Requests for a subscription were never answered.

When Dr. Richard Mouw treated the PRC with respect in his book promoting common grace (*He shines in All That’s Fair*), the twelve *SB* editorials in refutation dealt with Dr. Mouw in kind. Dr. Mouw noticed, and agreed to a PRC sponsored debate with Prof. Engelsma, to the profit of the well over 2,000 attendees.

The editorials instructed on the

Reformed faith. Space fails me to recount the editorials that gave a solid defense of Amillennialism, as well as a defense of God’s unconditional covenant of grace over against the conditional covenant; emphatic warnings against divorce and remarriage; and instruction on a variety of subjects including worship, the biblical position of women, the kingdom, and much more. A rereading of them yields rich spiritual benefits.

The letters printed reveal the profit from the tireless labors of Prof. Engelsma. One finds in them rebukes, criticism, appreciation, requests for more explanation, exhortation, and, yes, some praise too (when he would print those). Some unprinted ones threatened. None-

theless, never could the writers complain, “We don’t know where you stand.” Nor could they make the charge stick that the editorials were unreformed, i.e., contrary to the confessions. The truth was clearly expressed, and it was Reformed.

We thank God for the sixteen years that Prof. David J. Engelsma was editor in chief of the *Standard Bearer*. We thank God for the evident gifts given to him; for the diligent and hardworking character of the man; for his willingness to spend himself for the task.

But above all, we thank God for keeping you, Prof. Engelsma, a faithful herald of the truth. As editors, we will profit from your labors. As readers, we already have.

— RJD ■

Changes in the Standard Bearer

While easily the most significant change in the *Standard Bearer* is in the position of editor in chief, readers will see several other alterations for the eighty-second volume year which begins with this issue. The rubric on covenant education, “That They May Teach Them to Their Children,” will be discontinued, at least for the current volume. We thank Agatha Lubbers for her numerous contributions to this rubric over the last six years. In addition, Prof. Engelsma and Rev. Cammenga have asked for a year off from their respective rubrics, “Things That Must Shortly Come to Pass,” and, “Decency and Order.” We look forward to their return to the ranks of regular writers a year from now.

Although all the other rubrics will remain, that is not true of all the writers. Major changes are in store for “When Thou Sittest in Thine House.” Mary Beth Lubbers

and Connie Meyer will not be writing for this rubric. And Gary Lanning will no longer be writing for “All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee.” We express hearty appreciation to these retiring writers for their past contributions. We have profited from their articles.

The co-editors will discontinue their contributions to their previous rubrics, with the exception of Rev. Koole, who plans to write a few columns for “All Around Us.” For that column, the Revs. Mike DeVries and Rodney Kleyn have committed to assisting Rev. VanBaren in keeping us current on world events and the ecclesiastical scene. Several other individuals have solemnly consented to put pen to paper for a few guest articles, without being officially added to the staff of the *SB*.

The rubric “Grace Life” will take on the new title “Grace Life: for the Rising Generation.” This

rubric was always intended to be instruction for the covenant youth. The lengthened title more accurately reflects the aim of the rubric.

All the current staff of the *SB* — some twenty-eight strong — have the editors’ gratitude for their willingness to contribute. We see God’s goodness to us in many ways. Four of our emeriti ministers still write for their respective rubrics in the *SB*. Younger men, pastors and missionaries, make the effort, carving some time out of their full schedules to do research and to write. Teachers likewise continue to dedicate precious time to the cause. And a number of others, all busy with their individual life’s calling, join in the work out of love for the truth. We thank God for His grace to them. May He richly bless all the writers with the necessary wisdom and diligence to set forth the manifold truth of God in all its glory.

— RJD ■

An Interview with DJE

In the last few months, the newly appointed editors of the *SB* have made a determined effort to learn as much as possible from the retiring editor. We continue to lean on Prof. Engelsma as we grow into the job, and, it should be pointed out, he has been most gracious and cooperative. Recognizing that many of our discussions with him would be profitable for the broader reading audience, early on we determined to interview Prof. Engelsma with a view to publication in the *SB*. Profs. Gritters and Dykstra conducted the interview. It is long, and very little has been changed or removed from the transcripts. If some of the discussion seems more profitable for the new editors than for the reader, we ask for your pardon in advance. We believe it has value for all the supporters of the *SB*. Because of its length, it will be printed in two installments. Unfortunately, that means you will need to wait until November 1 for the second half, because the entire October 15 issue is devoted to the Reformation and the Doctrine of Man.

Prof. Dykstra: Why did you accept the position as editor in chief?

DJE: A delegation from the staff came to see me when I was still pastor in South Holland and expected to be pastor in South Holland. They convinced me that I was the man who should take over in view of Prof. Homer Hoeksema's retirement from the editorship.

I remember we had at least two meetings. The delegation came to see me in my study in South Holland and we had at least one other meeting about halfway between Grand Rapids and South Holland. It took some convincing, because I was pastor of a big, busy church. But in the end I was convinced that that was my duty.

Prof. Gritters: I remember giving you a call to encourage you to take it. I'm glad you did!

DJE: Other of my colleagues let me know that they thought that I should accept.

Prof. Gritters: How long were you pastor and editor at the same time? It was not that long after you accepted the appointment for editorship that you took the appointment here, right?

DJE: That is correct. If I have my time straight, the staff came to see me early in 1988, maybe even earlier than that because Homer Hoeksema had given some notice that he would not accept reappointment. So, as a matter of fact, as regards actually serving as editor, I had already been appointed to the seminary that summer of 1988 and preached my farewell in South Holland sometime in August or September of 1988. I took over as editor on October 1 of 1988 with the beginning of the volume year.

But I did not know that at the time I was asked to be the editor. And I was not at all planning on that. I recall that it took some doing to convince the consistory of South Holland that this was a workable scheme. South Holland in those days was around 140 families and over 600 members. There was a great deal of work. And I can understand their concerns. The consistory first took a decision to disapprove my taking on the editorship, which meant, of course, that I would decline it. But then the staff and other ministers of the denomination contacted the consistory of South Holland. And I recall that members of the congregation also expressed support for it to the consistory. All this helped convince the consistory, and they decided to allow it.

So, when I accepted the position of editor, I thought I would also be doing the work of a pastor. That was one of the factors that made me struggle with the request.

Prof. Dykstra: You must have had certain goals for the *Standard Bearer* when you took the position as editor of the *Standard Bearer*. You have been editor now for sixteen years. What goals do you believe have been filled?

DJE: The main goal I had was to carry on the tradition of the *Standard Bearer*, the purpose for which the *Standard Bearer* was begun back in 1924. I had no grandiose goals of expanding the witness or going off in new and strange directions. But I remember that I did carefully research in the old writings what the purpose and purposes of the *Standard Bearer* were from the beginning, which I also was aware of as a member of the churches and as a minister. I was determined with the help of the grace of God not to deviate from that purpose. Basically that purpose was, as I understand it, to maintain, defend, explain, and as much as possible promote the Reformed faith set down in the Reformed creeds as confessed by the Protestant Reformed Churches faithfully.

That, I would say, was my main purpose.

I remember also being apprehensive lest because of my own foolishness or because of the pressures of the work that I might write something that was unwise, something that would detract from the Reformed faith as we confess it and give wrong direction. That ties in with that purpose to maintain the witness of the *Standard Bearer* as it was originally intended.

All the way through my editorship I have been conscious of the fact that the *Standard Bearer* exists first for the instruction and direction of the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. But I have also never lost sight of the fact that it is a very important testimony by the Protestant Reformed Churches to the Reformed world

at large. I recognize, of course, that it is not an official paper of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Nevertheless, it functions as one of the voices, one of the important voices of the Protestant Reformed Churches to the Reformed world especially — although its witness extends also to churches and ministers and people who are not confessionally Reformed.

I have always had in mind in various ways to give a clear witness of the Reformed faith to Reformed churches and people outside of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Prof. Dykstra: It is my impression, looking at the *Standard Bearer* in the last sixteen years, that there was a shift from this point of view, that the *Standard Bearer* focused less on the Christian Reformed Church particularly and became more global. Was that a conscious decision?

DJE: I think that you have observed correctly. In fact, early on, it became clear to me that there wasn't any purpose, any use anymore, to criticize the Christian Reformed Church and call attention to their apostasy. From time to time, when there were developments in the Christian Reformed Church that were of particular interest to the Protestant Reformed Churches, I would address those. What comes to mind especially is the significant writing about the issues of 1924 in the *Calvin Theological Journal*. But, to my mind, it should have been evident to everybody that the Christian Reformed Church had once and for all rejected the warning and the witness by the Protestant Reformed Churches and were determined, almost headlong, to fall away from the Reformed faith and life.

Besides that, without any suggestion that this has been done, but recognizing that this is a danger that we could fall into, I never saw any use in criticizing the Christian Reformed Church for the sake of criticizing the Christian Reformed

Church. So, I thought I could spend my efforts more profitably in other ways than calling attention to the decline of the Christian Reformed Church.

Prof. Gritters: What goals do you think have not been attained?

DJE: I am well aware of the fact that I may not have set for myself and for the *Standard Bearer* goals that ought to have been set. That is the main reason why I decided that I should not accept reappointment as editor again. The main reason for my decision that I should step aside and let others take over is that I have long been convinced that a man can overstay his usefulness in any position. Ministers are especially prone to do this. I may have my strengths. I also certainly have my weaknesses. And I was convinced that other men, younger men, would be able to do things for the *Standard Bearer* and its witness that I may not be doing.

There may be other goals — in addition to, not replacing, the fundamental goal — that should be set and that other men can attain that I have not been attaining.

That really motivated me to step aside. I want the witness of the *Standard Bearer* in the churches and outside the churches to be as powerful and effective as it can possibly be. So, in the interests of that, I thought it is time after sixteen years that other men take over.

Prof. Gritters: What do you see as the purpose of the *Standard Bearer* in the broader church world?

DJE: It has been very important to me that the *Standard Bearer* make a witness concerning Reformed truth to people outside the Protestant Reformed Churches. This has been a deep concern of mine. I think, in the providence of God, openings have been given to the *Standard Bearer* in the past years to do that very thing also. It isn't only a magazine for Protestant Reformed

people. I don't know the exact figures, but close to a thousand subscriptions, out of the fewer than three thousand subscriptions that the *Standard Bearer* has, go outside the Protestant Reformed Churches. That is quite a percentage. And both from responses that have been published and from correspondence that was not published by request of the people who sent it, and also from telephone calls and other communications from many parts of the world, it was and still is very plain to me that the *Standard Bearer* is read widely. It is read by theologians and ministers and lay people outside the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The *Standard Bearer* is used even when there is no acknowledgment of the *Standard Bearer*. I think there still is today a kind of resentment of the magazine so that men (editors of magazines and other writers) who will refer to and cite just about any magazine under heaven, even when they are referring to something that has appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, find it difficult to mention the *Standard Bearer*. I have also observed, on more than one occasion, that when the *Standard Bearer* has broken a story or has written in a certain way about a certain topic, then within a few months similar articles will be written on the same topic in other magazines. Sometimes they paraphrased at length what was written in the *Standard Bearer* without ever mentioning it. I have proof for that. I am never going to use that evidence, but I have evidence for that. Now, at first, that is a little irksome. But we don't really care why or how people preach Christ as long as they preach Christ, to paraphrase what Paul says in Philippians. The fact is, people pay attention to the witness of the magazine. I think that is in connection with the recognition more and more worldwide, whether they appreciate the churches or do not appreciate the churches, the recognition that the Protestant Reformed Churches are

still standing for creedal, Reformed Christianity and are striving (imperfectly but nevertheless striving), and victoriously at the present time, to maintain an antithetical Christian life. One cannot but recognize that.

So, I would certainly encourage you men and the others who are taking over to keep that in mind. You are not only addressing Protestant Reformed Churches. But there are people who are listening and reading, and not just academically or theoretically either. Many of these men are struggling in their own churches. Tremendous things are going on. And they are uncertain about doctrines now and the way of Christian living. And when the Protestant Reformed Churches say something, and when the *Standard Bearer* writes something, that is helpful to them.

Prof. Gritters: There have been efforts in the past to expand the witness. What do you think of those? Are there any things that could be done to try to expand it further? I know that is really the RFPA's work. But do you have suggestions?

DJE: I think that is a worthy effort. Whatever ideas anybody can think of to expand the audience would be very important. I think the same thing is true of our books. The problem really is the limited market. How do we break out of the limited market that we have? We have tried different methods of getting the *Standard Bearer* to a wider audience — advertising in magazines such as *World*, creating a special issue of the *Standard Bearer* that can be used any time to reach any mailing list anywhere in the neighborhood — but I really don't have any concrete suggestions because all of the concrete suggestions that I have I have already given. But it is something still to work at.

You know, as regards magazines, it is the same thing as it is with regard to books. And fundamentally it is a matter of the will

of God. We are completely dependent upon the will of God in all these matters. But there is a saying in the realm of books that there is a fortune about books. That is, a good book may go out and it falls to the ground with hardly any reception of it at all, and another book, which may not really be so good, so well written, for some reason or other finds an enthusiastic reception. That is just the way it is. And in that regard there is even a fortune about books that a book can be written in a certain year and nothing happens with it, and a hundred years later somebody finds that old thing and it is a bombshell in the theological world.

We have to use the means at our disposal. The RFPA is doing that. But in the end, if it's God's time that the *Standard Bearer* should all of a sudden be hailed worldwide, that will happen. And until then, it won't happen.

Prof. Dykstra: You have discussed the relationship of the *Standard Bearer* to the broader church world. What role do you conceive the *Standard Bearer* having for the Protestant Reformed Churches specifically?

DJE: The function of the *Standard Bearer* within the Protestant Reformed Churches has in the past been enormous. It formed the thinking of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the early years when the members of the churches, although they had separated from the Christian Reformed Church, nevertheless had to be instructed in the theology of particular grace as regards the preaching, as regards the covenant, and also instructed in the truth of the covenant as it applies to all of doctrine and all of life. Then again in 1953, obviously, the role of the *Standard Bearer* within the Protestant Reformed Churches was enormous. It was used to instruct the people concerning the unconditionality of the covenant and then, also, to preserve what was left of the

churches after the split of 1953. So, in those obvious ways, the *Standard Bearer* has been a tremendous influence within the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Now, time changes. And in the very nature of the case, one magazine does not have the influence in the Protestant Reformed Churches that it once had. There are today so many other media and, whereas in the past maybe a majority of the members of the churches read hardly more than the *Standard Bearer*, now members of the churches are reading many other magazines and they have access to the Internet and there are all kinds of influences. Not all of those influences are helpful either, by the way. A very real danger exists that our people are reading religious but non-Reformed magazines and books, and listening to religious but non-Reformed tapes, and that can be detrimental to the Reformed character of our people. But the fact is that we are not living in the times in which they lived in the 1920s and the 1930s. So, I think the impact of the *Standard Bearer* upon our people, in the nature of the case, is not as powerful as once it was.

But I want to say, too, that, so far as I know, most of our people, the overwhelming majority of our people, subscribe to the *Standard Bearer* and get the *Standard Bearer*. I appreciate the help that our consistories give when they do raise this in the preaching or on family visitation. Also, as I hope many are doing, they give a complimentary subscription to the young people when they marry.

But still today the *Standard Bearer* is received, the *Standard Bearer* is read. And I think, for the most part, the people trust it and listen to it and learn from it, so that still today the *Standard Bearer* is influential to educate our people in the Reformed faith as confessed by the Protestant Reformed Churches. As long as the magazine gives a clear sound, there can be and has been and ought to be development,

but it ought to be development of the Reformed faith as God has given it to the Protestant Reformed Churches to know it. As long as the *Standard Bearer* gives this clear, certain sound, I have no doubt whatsoever that it will continue to be blessed to form the thinking of members of Protestant Reformed Churches. And that certainly is a very important purpose that it has.

Prof. Dykstra: Do you see the *Standard Bearer* having a role for the Protestant Reformed Churches as a denomination?

DJE: I think it does have a role for the denomination. And I think the role that it plays comes to the foreground at certain times — when there are decisions that have to be made by the denomination and where there even may be some questions on the part of ministers and elders who finally make the decisions at synod. The *Standard Bearer* can enter into that conversation ahead of time and lay out a well-reasoned course for the denomination.

But there is an area of sensitiv-

ity here, too. I think the *Standard Bearer*, whether this is good or bad, can be looked at as being high-handed if it simply lays down the law concerning certain issues. Obviously, once decisions are made synodically, the *Standard Bearer* can't very well criticize those decisions. Although, even there, there is freedom that the magazine has and is intended to have. That is really the main reason why it was set up not as a church paper but as a free paper, not subject to ecclesiastical control. I think that always ought to be at least in the back of the mind of the editors of the *Standard Bearer*, so that, especially when things may be going wrong in the denomination, regardless of the opinion of the majority of the ministers even, it ought to call attention to the drift and insist on returning to the right Reformed paths.

Prof. Dykstra: Your editorials have not, as a rule, directly addressed problems within the Protestant Reformed Churches. Obviously, the PRC are churches made up of members who are sinners, all of them. And the churches have particular weaknesses that characterize them. In your judgment,

when and in what manner ought the editor of the *Standard Bearer* address weakness in the Protestant Reformed Churches?

DJE: That is an interesting observation. I'd have to think about that analysis of the editorials in the past. That may be a reason why it's time for me to step aside and for others to take over. Certainly from time to time I have addressed matters that I thought were of particular importance to the Protestant Reformed Churches. And then, of course, there are different ways to address what an editor might consider to be weaknesses in the Protestant Reformed Churches. He can address them head-on, which might ruffle feathers. And he can also address them obliquely, which may still ruffle feathers but not so much as if he took them head-on. But if there are specific weaknesses that an editor sees in the denomination, whether that regards its doctrinal position or as regards its practice, then he ought to address that frankly and forthwith. No doubt about that.

(to be concluded) □

Letters

■ The Westminster on Assurance

Thank you for your fine articles regarding the believer's assurance of salvation. Especially precious is Question and Answer 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which is the focus of your article in the August issue.

Would it not be enlightening for your readers if you included all four articles of Chapter 18 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, entitled "Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation"?

In your last editorial you quoted a portion of 18:3 in order to present a strong criticism of the Westminster Confession in regard to its treatment of the doctrine of

assurance. Perhaps if your readers could read Chapter 18 in its entirety, along with the proof texts given, they could be better informed regarding this subject.

Sincerely,
John Hilton
Waterville, Maine

■ Rejoinder

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We are thankful for the *Standard Bearer* (SB) magazine as we read it through the years to find it very edifying and faithfully bearing witness of the truth in this dark and sinful world. We would encourage you in your good work.

We are writing in response to

a mention made in the *Standard Bearer* (July 1) regarding our document "Proposed Policy for Fraternal Church Relationships" (hereafter "Proposed Policy"), and in anticipation of the forthcoming publication of the Acts of Synod.

In the interest of providing contextual background to our document and the PRCA's response, both of which will be published in their entirety in the Acts of Synod, and of avoiding misinterpretations, we request that the following rejoinder be published in the soonest possible edition of the *Standard Bearer*:

Rejoinder to Editorial
"Synod 2004, Hull, Iowa,"
Standard Bearer, July 2004

In response to the mention of

the ERCS (Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore) "Proposed Policy for Fraternal Church Relationships" in the above article, the ERCS wishes to make the following points of clarification:

1. The Proposed Policy is a first draft, and hence is in its infancy stages (hence the use of the term "Proposed").
2. The Proposed Policy was tabled at Classis 2004 of ERCS whereupon Classis requested that the Sessions of First Evangelical Reformed Church and Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church closely study the document towards the view of preparation for Classical discussion at Classis 2005.

3. Classis also instructed that the Proposed Policy be sent to the PRCA for the explicit purpose of soliciting feedback and response for our Denominational Contact Committee's consideration and deliberation as they work further to refine the policy paper.
4. The Proposed Policy submitted to PRCA for comments was the draft prepared *prior* to the study conducted by ERCS churches, and hence *does not* include revisions and recommendations made by the respective Sessions.
5. Until the ERCS Classis adopts the Proposed Policy, it remains a working draft and

not an explicit nor official statement of how the ERCS conceptualizes and establishes its relations with other churches/denominations. We regret that it has been made public prior to its adoption.

The ERCS hopes that the above points of clarification will put things in proper perspective with regards to the Proposed Policy. A copy of this letter has also been sent to the Contact Committee of PRCA for their information.

Thank you,
For His Kingdom,
Johnson See

Denomination Contact Committee
Evangelical Reformed Churches
in Singapore □

Feature Article

Mr. Peter Adams

Great Expectations

Anticipation of the 7th Family Holiday Conference of the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) created great expectations. Singles, couples, and several whole families gathered from the United Kingdom and North America to hear speeches, have fellowship, and relax from August 13-20, 2004. There were 80 attendees at this year's conference, up from 50 in 2002 — a cause for great thankfulness. The venue was an old estate that has been converted into a Christian conference center, located outside a small town between London and Cambridge, England. Professors D. Engelsma and H. Hanko of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America were the invited speakers.

Mr. Adams is a teacher at Eastside Christian School and a member, with his family, of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

(Pictures by Mr. Ed Bos.)

High Leigh Conference Center

The titles of the speeches reflected the theme for the week: The Covenant That We Must Keep, Keeping God's Covenant in the Church, Keeping God's Covenant in Marriage, Keeping God's Covenant in the Home, Keeping God's Covenant and the Exercise of Discipline, and Keeping God's Covenant and the Antithetical Life. The fundamental truths of God's sovereign grace and His unconditional covenant with Christ and His church were brought out strongly. The speeches stimulated good questions and discussions. A main issue was how to understand prop-

erly the conversion of God's elect even in infancy and the corresponding issue of how to deal with baptized children who are raised in believing homes.



*Prof. Hanko fielding questions
(Moderator: Mr. Jonathan Moore)*



*Guided Tour
of Cambridge University*

Incorporated into the conference program were optional day trips to Cambridge and London. Cambridge, an old and beautiful town, is home to the historic Cambridge University, with colleges dating as far back as the thirteenth century. The group on this trip was treated to a tour conducted by a Christian organization that emphasized the historical connection of Cambridge University to the Reformation in England. Included in the tour were the pulpit from which the first English Protestant sermon was preached and a college chapel designed by the Puritans where the head of Oliver Cromwell is buried. Some of the group went punting on the Cam River as part of the Cambridge experience.

The outing to London featured a tour of the Westminster Abbey, where the Westminster Standards were written in the 1640s. This trip

was introduced the previous evening by Mr. Chad Van Dixhoorn, who is finishing up his doctoral dissertation on the minutes of the Westminster Assembly. He not only discussed the meetings of the Assembly but also arranged our seating in the manner of the original gathering. During the visit to Westminster Abbey, the group was given special permission to see the Jerusalem Chamber, a room in which the Assembly met. After the formal tour of the Abbey, there was time to visit other sights in London.

The conference is also the occasion for the biennial general meeting of the British Reformed Fellowship. The BRF promotes the Reformed faith in Britain by publishing the *British Reformed Journal* and arranging the BRF Conference. Wales is the tentative location of the 2006 conference.

On Sunday evening there was a group discussion revolving around the spiritual situation that the British saints face. Various believers expressed deep frustration over the dearth of sound churches. For families with young children

this problem is especially troubling. The Belgic Confession's loving admonition of the necessity to join oneself to the true church was communicated. We who were present from the United States were reminded of how thankful we must be for the great blessing we have in belonging to true churches, with the addition of distinctively Reformed Christian schools. What a great responsibility we have to take full advantage of these opportunities. Our prayers are with our spiritual brothers and sisters as we

all strive to keep God's covenant.

Were the week's great expectations met? Yes! Joy was evident over the rich teaching and fellowship. Many thanks are

due to the BRF, and Jonathan Moore in particular, for the great effort expended to bring about this very worthwhile conference. As we parted, we commended one another to our faithful God, who alone upholds and keeps His covenant perfectly. □



Informal Question and Answer Time



The Conference Attendees

■ The Next Generation

One cannot help but wonder what kind of children our generation is raising. Public schools, in harmony with the rulings of the courts of our land, cannot use the Ten Commandments as the moral standard for society (separation of church and state, you know). The movie and television dramatize all manner of sins, violations of the Ten Commandments, as entertainment. The young people of the land watch this as a matter of course. Video games of violence and sex are popular. Vulgarities and swearing are commonplace — even leaders of the land make use of these vulgarities as well. People are “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.” The youth (and their parents, of course) are bombarded with advertising that emphasizes the material. How can it not be that a generation arises that knows not the Lord?

One ponders the question concerning our own youth — baptized and also confessing members of our churches. We thank God for our Christian schools, where the Word is not separated from the instruction given. We thank God that we are reminded in school, as also in the churches, of God’s requirements as set forth in the Ten Commandments. We thank God for worship in church on Sunday and instruction in catechism classes. God uses this to impress His Word on our hearts and the hearts of our children.

But is it all well with us? How can our youth not be affected by the drama on television and movie? How can the cursing and swearing so commonplace not affect our youth today? How can the gross

materialism of our society not affect them as well?

One cannot help but be deeply concerned when he hears, occasionally, young people discussing the future work that they are choosing because “that’s where the money is.” There should be concern also when one hears young people discussing the movie they saw the night before. Should there not be concern when one hears our youth swearing or using foul language? Then there is the emphasis on sports, and the expressed admiration of the heroes of the sports in the land. There is, also, the imitation of the dress fashions of this world — even when it borders on the lustful.

It is striking when a prestigious newspaper like the *Wall Street Journal*, July 9, 2004, presents an article expressing some of these concerns about “Christian” youth as well. Mr. Dale Buss penned the piece: “Christian Teens? Not Very.” It is of interest to read some of the things he has to say.

When I’m teaching Sunday school, I’m encouraged by what I hear from the teenagers at my evangelical Christian church in suburban Detroit. They seem to understand—and, more important, to believe—the bedrock tenets that will help them hew to orthodoxy throughout their lives and make them salt and light in the world.

But the hard numbers say otherwise. It turns out that, while they may profess the faith and indeed love Jesus, the vast majority of Christian teenagers in this country actually hold beliefs fundamentally antithetical to the creed. The forces of moral relativism and “tolerance” have gotten to them in a big way. In fact, some leaders believe that mushy doctrine among the younger generation ranks as the No. 1 crisis facing American Christendom today.

About one-third of American teenagers claim they’re “born again” believers, according to data gathered over the past few years by Barna Research Group, the gold standard in data about the U.S. Protestant church, and 88% of teens say they are Christians. About 60% believe that “the Bible is totally accurate in all of its teachings.” And 56% feel that their religious faith is very important in their life.

Yet, Barna says, slightly more than half of all U.S. teens also believe that Jesus committed sins while he was on earth. About 60% agree that enough good works will earn them a place in heaven, in part reflecting a Catholic view, but also flouting Protestantism’s central theme of salvation only by grace. About two-thirds say that Satan is just a symbol of evil, not really a living being. Only 6% of all teens believe that there are moral absolutes — and, most troubling to evangelical leaders, only 9% of self-described born-again teens believe that moral truth is absolute.

...Some commentators produce even more startling statistics on the doctrinal drift of America’s youth. Ninety-one percent of born-again teenagers surveyed a few years ago proclaimed that there is no such thing as absolute truth, says the Rev. Josh McDowell, a Dallas-based evangelist and author. More alarmingly, that number had risen quickly and steadily from just 52% of committed Christian kids in 1992 who denied the existence of absolute truth. A slight majority of professing Christian kids, Mr. McDowell says, also now say that the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ never occurred.

“There’s a greater disconnect now than ever in the history of the church in America between what a Christian young person says they are and what they actually believe,” says Mr. McDowell, who has ministered mainly to youth for more than 30 years. “Christianity is based on truth;

Jesus said, 'I am the truth.' But you have an overwhelming majority even of Christian kids saying there is no absolute truth."

...Nearly 60% of evangelical Christian teenagers now say that all religious faiths teach equally valid truths, according to Mr. McDowell. It's bad enough that they seem to have been co-opted by relativism from within our culture and even from within the church and family. But it's even more disconcerting to realize that we're relying on this generation for the future defense of Judeo-Christian civilization against the highly motivated forces of militant Islam.

Perhaps it's counterintuitive to believe this problem is as severe as that outlined by Messrs. Barna and McDowell. After all, we're told that spirituality is de rigueur among youths these days and that Christianity is right up there. But this zeitgeist largely reflects a pseudo-faith that is fed by a steady diet of pop-culture feints, from the allegorical "Lord of the Rings" movies to the T-shirt that recently adorned Pamela Anderson saying, "Jesus is my homeboy."

It ought to be a matter of serious concern. What of our youth? How much are they affected by the same things as youth generally?

Rightly we continue to insist on faithful catechism instruction. Rightly we educate them in the Christian schools God has given us. Rightly we warn them of the dangers of the world about us. One almost trembles when considering the world in which they must continue their pilgrimage. Doubtless, a large part of the problem with the youth is lack of proper and continued instruction. Our youth need all of the instruction we can give them. We pray earnestly that God keep the youth faithful — and that we continue faithfully to instruct the children God has given.

■ "Open Sundays"

Even the general press has taken note of it. What was once a

"day of rest," even for the non-Christian, has become as ordinary as any other day of the week. Most churches no longer teach the requirement for cessation of labor on Sunday. It has become even for church members a day for recreation, for work, and increasingly a day for shopping. Pressure is applied upon those who work in such establishments to labor there on Sunday too.

The change has taken place relatively quickly. Even in the world it has been noted. An article by Ted Anthony of the Associated Press appeared in the *Loveland Reporter-Herald* with the title and sub-title: "Once a special day... Sundays are starting to melt into every other day of the week."

Once, within living memory, it was a day apart in many places: a 24-hour stretch of family time when liquor was unavailable, church was the rule, shopping was impossible and—in some towns — weekend staples like tending the lawn and playing in the park met with hearty disapproval.

But America changed, and it dragged Sunday along with it.

Though Sunday still means worship and family time for millions of Americans, today it also means things it once didn't — 12-packs of Bud, the NFL on TV, catching up with the week's accumulated errands, picking up some CDs at Best Buy, moving through a 24/7 culture.

...In a land where the pursuit of happiness is part of the national charter, Sunday's evolution attests to both Americans' harried lives and their determination to wring every drop of fun out of every day of the week.

The article concludes:

The 20th century brought pushes toward a shorter working week, and a major work-reform law passed in the 1930s created more down time and made Sunday less pivotal — at the same time commercial culture really took hold.

These days, it's unimaginable to

many Americans, particularly younger ones: a mall closed on Sunday? The supermarket unavailable? Even laws governing Sunday alcohol, though they remain on some states' books, are falling away.

The older among us have seen these very facts. Years ago even the non-churchgoer and non-Christian observed Sunday as a special day. No longer is that true. It is one other factor affecting the youth, and our youth, today. How can one find a suitable job — without agreeing to work on Sunday? It is difficult to tell one's peers that he cannot go shopping on Sunday. And how many, perhaps still stealthily, watch the Super Bowl or other sports programs on Sunday? The day God gave for rest, spiritual rest, has become increasingly a day for man, when his pleasure is self rather than the service to his God. The consequences are clearly evident in the country. While professing faith, many will set up their own rules, following their own standards, while refusing to recognize the demands of the law of God.

■ "Critical ears listen to political sermons"

There is increasingly the attempt to still the voice of the church on moral issues such as "gay rights," "gay marriages," or abortion (otherwise: "woman's choice"). It is true that there is the danger that the "sermon" is not so much instruction from Scripture as a political speech, but it remains true that the faithful church and her preacher must label as "sin" that which Scripture condemns. To attempt to silence the voice of the church in its condemnation of sin is the attempt to stifle the "freedom of religion" of which our country has for a long time boasted.

The dangers are real, as appears from the following article of the *Grand Rapids Press*:

A recent Sunday found Tina Kolm changing her morning routine. Instead of attending a Unitarian Universalist service, she was at the Lenexa Christian Center, paying close attention to a conservative minister's sermon about the importance of amending the U.S. Constitution to ban gay marriage.

Kolm is one of about 100 volunteers for the Mainstream Coalition, a group monitoring the political activities of local pastors and churches. The coalition, based in suburban Kansas City, says it wants to make sure clergy adhere to federal tax guidelines restricting political activity by nonprofit groups, and it is taking such efforts to a new level.

The 47-year-old Kolm, from Prairie Village, said keeping church and state separate is important to her. She doesn't want a few religious denominations defining marriage — or setting other social policy — for everyone.

"What it's all about to me is denying some people's rights," she said.

But some local clergy think the Mainstream Coalition is using scare tactics designed to unfairly keep them out (of) the political process.

"Somebody is trying to act like Big Brother when there's no need for Big Brother," said the Rev. James Conard, assistant pastor at the First Baptist Church of Shawnee. "It's obviously an intent to intimidate."

The article continues by describing some of the activities of those who insist on monitoring the services of the churches to make sure that they adhere to the requirements of the U.S. tax code.

Such activities give grave reason for concern. While the preaching must be on the basis of Scripture and not politics, obviously Scripture testifies concerning homosexuality as well as abortion and other sins. It is not difficult to understand that opposition to these sins could be termed "political."

To have observers at the service to monitor the preacher and the church to see that this sort of "politics" does not take place, reminds of the police state. But we are coming to that state of affairs and, in fact, can anticipate more of this in the future. It becomes a matter of the opposition of those who hate God and His Word.

The statement made by Kolm is also very disturbing: "She doesn't want a few religious denominations defining marriage — or setting other social policy — for everyone. 'What it's all about to me is denying some people's rights,' she said." Does that position apply also to euthanasia? Does it apply to abortion? Does it apply to the question of having multiple wives (or husbands)? Does it not apply even to the question of murder? Should religious denominations define murder? The whole position comes dreadfully close to anarchy. □

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

John Wesley (3)

Introduction

John Wesley's itinerant ministry made a huge impact on ecclesiastical life in the British Isles. While most of his ministry was carried on in England, his influence was felt in Ireland and, to a lesser extent, in Scotland. While the Calvinism of Howell Harris and George Whitefield prevailed in Wales at least for a time, Calvinism deteriorated also there,

and, in time, Wesley's influence was to be found in Wales as well.

This influence continues to the present and has, in large measure, been responsible for the decline of church life in the United Kingdom. That Wesley's influence continues to the present is evident by a comparison of what Wesley considered to be non-negotiables in his method of evangelism and current practices in these countries. During the course of his work, all of which was conducted within the Church of England, Wesley was frequently asked why he did not separate from the established church. His response was that he wanted to live in harmony with the church in which he had been born, baptized, and ordained, but that to continue

in the church required that he be permitted to teach inward and present salvation by faith in Christ, to preach in houses and the open air, to maintain the church political structure of Methodism (within the Church of England), and to continue lay preaching. As long as the established church permitted him to practice these things, he would remain in it.

If one considers that Wesley meant something quite different from "inward and present salvation by faith in Christ" than a Calvinist (as we shall see), one can compare these non-negotiables with the state of evangelical religion in the British Isles today and note with ease the imprint of Wesley. Lay preaching, for ex-

Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

(Preceding article in this series: September 1, 2004, p. 469.)

ample, in spite of Romans 10:14, 15, is widely practiced throughout the British Isles, even by evangelicals and those who claim to be Reformed.

But it was the *doctrine* of Wesley that had the most significant impact on England.

Wesley's Mysticism

In the survey of Wesley's life that appeared in earlier articles, it became evident that Wesley was deeply influenced by mysticism, both the mysticism of the Middle Ages and the mystical teachings in some English writers. Many different mystical influences directed his thinking in his formative years. While later in life he abandoned some of mysticism's teachings, he continued to be mystically inclined. Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., in his book, *Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition*, speaks of the fact that mysticism has remained an important part of Methodist theology. And it is possible to distinguish between the Arminianism of the Remonstrants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as rationalistic Arminians, while Wesley's Arminianism could be called a mystical Arminianism.

That Wesley's Arminianism was directly affected by his mysticism is due to an inner relationship between the two. Mysticism emphasizes direct and personal union with God. As I noted earlier, Tuttle points out that mysticism tends to bypass the cross of Jesus Christ, because, in its determination to be led directly to God, it does not emphasize sufficiently Christ as the Mediator between God and His people.

Mysticism influenced Wesley's thinking in different ways. In the first place, Wesley was actually quite uninterested in doctrine. His biographer Vulliamy points out that Wesley did not want doctrinal formulation. Today he would be among those who boast of having "no creed by Christ." Yet, says Vulliamy, he became very angry

when anyone disagreed with him.

The doctrines of Scripture all have their center and focal point in the cross of Jesus Christ. And insofar as Wesley's mysticism tended to emphasize direct union with God, it denigrated the cross; and that denigration of the cross led to a disinterest in doctrine.

In the second place, Wesley's mysticism led to an over-emphasis on the inner life. This error is actually the opposite of doctrinal disinterest: all that counts in the Christian life is one's relationship to God. Doctrine is unimportant. It does not matter what a man believes; all that counts is his relationship to God.

In the third place, Wesley's mysticism led directly to his Arminianism. Wesley did not teach, although he understood well, that all our salvation is only in the cross of Jesus Christ. The error of not giving the cross its full due leads to an emphasis on human effort that denies the cardinal doctrine of sovereign grace.

Finally, Wesley's mysticism led him to approve of revivals.

Wesley and Revivals

The narratives of Wesley's life call attention to the fact that, at least in the early part of his open-air ministry, his preaching was frequently accompanied by the strange behavior that is characteristic of revivals, and is evidence, so it is said, of special outpourings of the Holy Spirit. Wesley himself did not, apparently, give a lot of emphasis to these special outpourings of the Spirit, and later in his ministry they ceased. Yet the entire work of Wesley is frequently called *The Wesleyan Revival*, and George Whitefield's work in New England, along with that of Jonathan Edwards, has become known as *The New England Revival*. It is on this basis and on the basis of other "revivals" in the British Isles and in America that evangelicals, some of whom claim to be Reformed, still are busy pray-

ing for revival and see revival as the only hope of the church.

These special outpourings of the Spirit that men call revival are generally characterized by such severe conviction of sin that the agonies of the consciousness of sin lead to bizarre behavior. And the deliverance from conviction of sin leads to such joy in the Lord that it too is manifested in unusual and strange conduct. An example of such an occurrence is described by Vulliamy in his biography. It took place during the preaching of one of Wesley's colleagues.

Inside the church at Everton, while Berridge was preaching or conducting his service, some of the people fainted and fell quietly on the floor, others roared and screamed, sinking down in horrible contortions; at one moment they felt themselves dropping into the blazing cavity of hell, and at the next, they were rising in ecstasies of joy and gratitude. Those who were less affected stood on the seats of the pews in order to see the disturbed congregation. The noise was incredible. Rustic boots hammered against the boards, broke the benches and split the sides of the pews. Children set up a shrill wailing. Women shrieked horribly, clapped their hands, or fell upon each other's necks. Some uttered short ejaculations of praise, and others shouted in wild triumph. Below the louder sounds there was all the while a noise of hard breathing, as of men half strangled and gasping for life. And above all the appalling din could be heard the powerful voice of Berridge, praying and preaching and calling on sinners, louder and more unmelodious, and louder still, until no voice, no human head or heart, could bear the strain any longer, and he walked out through the stricken multitude.

Berridge walked from the church to the vicarage, and there the work was continued. People were carried into the house like casualties from the scene of some hideous disaster. Children raved and struggled in passages. It was

observed by a witness that “almost all on whom God laid His hand turned either very red or almost black.” Some laughed foolishly “with extreme joy,” tears of inexpressible emotion running down their pale, radiant faces.

Stories of such conduct can be found in any history of revivals, as strange and as unwelcome as they are. They are supposed to be the manifestations of conversion on a grand scale. It is not my purpose to criticize the whole concept of revivals: their wrong view of conversion, their mysticism with its emphasis on feeling, their false description of the work of conversion and salvation in the hearts of God’s people, their wrong exegesis in making the biblical basis of revivals the national conversions of Israel in the Old Testament, and their failure to take into account God’s federal and organic dealings with men in the line of generations. It is more than passing strange that people who claim to be Reformed can continue to pray for such modern-day revivals as was supposed to have taken place in the past.

Wesley’s Arminianism

Although Wesley claimed to be uninterested in doctrine, he nevertheless was sufficiently interested to preach and teach a thorough-going Arminianism, and to pour out his spite and hatred of Calvinistic doctrines of grace. He despised election and reprobation and blasphemed it and the God who determined both. How it was possible for George Whitefield to continue to associate with such a man has got to be indicative of Whitefield’s own weakness. Wesley repudiated utterly the truth that Christ died only for His elect people, and he spoke of particular redemption as a failure of the cross. He vitiated the doctrine of irresistible grace, which he claimed to maintain, by balancing all salvation on the needle-point of man’s free will.

The evidences of his Ar-

minianism are numerous.

In his controversies with Howell Harris, George Whitefield, and Augustus Toplady, he showed a bitter antagonism against the truth of the gospel and of God’s sovereign and particular grace. After the controversy with Toplady, he felt compelled to publish a *Manifesto*.

We have leaned too much towards Calvinism. Wherein?

With regard to *man’s faithfulness*. Our Lord Himself taught us to use this expression....

With regard to *working for life*. This also our Lord has expressly commanded us....

We have received it as a maxim, that “a man is to do nothing in order to justification.” Nothing can be more false. Whoever desires to find favour with God should “cease from evil and learn to do well.”

Review the whole affair: Who of us is *now* accepted of God? He that now believes in Christ with a loving and obedient heart.

As to *merit* itself, of which we have been so dreadfully afraid; we are rewarded “according to our works,” yea, “because of our works.” How does this differ from *for the sake of our works*? And how differs this from *sendum merita operum*? as our works deserve? Can you split this hair? I doubt I cannot (that is: I have no doubt I cannot, HH).

The grand objection to one of the preceding propositions is drawn from matter of fact. God does in fact justify those who, by their own confession, neither feared God nor wrought righteousness. Is this an exception to the general rule? It is a doubt, God makes any exception at all. But how are we sure that the person in question never did fear God and work righteousness? His own saying so is no proof; for we know how all that are convinced of sin undervalue themselves in every respect.

Does not talking of a justified or sanctified *state* tend to mislead men? Almost naturally leading them to trust in what was done in one moment? *Whereas we are ev-*

ery hour and every moment pleasing or displeasing to God according to our works; according to the whole of our inward tempers and our outward behaviour.

Nothing could be clearer that Wesley put sanctification before justification; that he made sanctification dependent upon the human will, that man is able not only to do good works but to merit by them, and that therefore the whole of man’s salvation turned on man’s own choice.

He maintained as well the totally Arminian doctrines of a universal atonement, an atoning sacrifice of our Lord which only made salvation available to those who would believe in Christ. He defined the gospel, in close connection with his erroneous views of the atonement, as an expression of God’s willingness to save all men. He believed that those who never heard the gospel could be saved by the proper use of what natural light they possessed. Although giving the doctrine his own peculiar twist, he also taught Perfectionism, that is, that the sinner can attain perfection in this life.

Wesley regarded the religious consciousness as advancing from a lower to a higher condition; he believed in a law of ascending evolution, with a corresponding ascending scale of moral values and responsibilities. It is possible, while in the body, to reach a state of Christian perfection; but not of sinless perfection, for that would make of no account the sacrifice of Christ. “By perfection,” said Wesley, “I mean perfect love, or the loving of God with all our heart, so as to rejoice evermore, to pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks. I am convinced every believer may attain this; yet I do not say he is in a state of damnation or under the curse of God till he does attain. No, he is in a state of grace, and in favour with God, as long as he believes.”

This is a remarkable statement.

The only need we have for the cross of Christ, according to Wesley, is for the sins that remain after we have attained Christian perfection. That does not leave much for Christ to do.

And yet Wesley has cast a long shadow. His views are held ev-

erywhere. What is so troubling is that Wesley is honored by those who profess to be Calvinists, but who ignore that Wesley hated Calvinism with his whole being. What is so troubling is that Wesley's doctrine of justification by works is being taught today by many within

Reformed and Presbyterian churches. How few they be who hold to the truth of God's great grace in Jesus Christ given to us poor sinners, that God Himself may receive all the glory for the riches of His sovereign mercy and love. □

Grace Life: for the Rising Generation

Rev. Mitchell Dick

“Athens, Here We Come!” (2)

The 2004 Athens Olympic Games are over. The athletes came and conquered or were conquered. Spectators came and saw, booed, applauded, mashed a marathoner, and went home, or went to jail.

Here in Grace Life we want to linger in Athens a little while longer. For we are wrestling with a question. It is a question that will not go away. It is a question from which we must not fly.

The question has to do not just with the city, the place, nor with the Olympics of a certain city and time, but with Athens in a figure. Athens, we have written before, represents all the world. It stands for all the world and the world's culture even as Athens of old once did. It stands for the creations and performances of men — man's products, philosophies, governments, medicine, technologies, poems, piano concertos, and ping-pong players.

The question has to do with us, *the Church*, and this Athens.

The question is: *How do we, the Church, God's Jerusalem, God's city of God, the kingdom of heaven, relate to Athens?*

The question is vital. It is vital for any and every truly *graceful and godly* young life. It concerns our holiness in the world. It speaks to our witness to the world. Answering correctly, biblically, will be for the praise of God in our sermons and sonnets, our homes, our work, and our world. Distorted answers will land us either in a cloister or in the front row of the theater, watching “The Passion of the Christ.”

Jesus left us with this question. He who prayed just before He died and ascended to heaven prayed not that the Church of His redemption would be taken out of the world (John 17). But then He went ahead and by His cross effected a double crucifixion of world to us, and us to the world (Gal. 6:14).

So here we are, in and not of Athens. Jerusalem and Athens: two separate creations, these. Separated by the greatest of walls: *enmity*. Separated by the greatest wall builder: Jesus. O God, what to do in this world, and with this world, and for this world? Should we boycott their Olympics? Are they the Indians, and we the wagon circlers? Or may we read Goethe? Even *do* as the Athenians do? Might not one of us run, and train to run, five kilometers in thirteen minutes, fourteen seconds?

Paul, Athens, and Mission

We have a question then, which is a problem. The Lord has left us with it. It is a blessing. For in facing it we are forced to flex our faith. No problems, no need to work through things? We slouch all day in front of the television. And on Sunday we slouch in church. Problems? Blessed problems? Opportunities, these, to go to God, running, and to the Scriptures, believing. If you don't have any problems, you are either in heaven, or a slouch. That's the way life is....

In the presence of God, and in the light of the Scriptures, we find answers, Grace Life readers, to this “Christian and Culture” problem. There is the solution to the problem of the movie theater (maybe Proverbs 13:20?). There is the answer to our wondering whether we should try out for the Iron Man competition (try I Timothy 4:8). There is *still* the “culture mandate” (Gen. 1:28), which compels even and especially citizens of heaven to claim and to cultivate every square inch of this world, and maybe of the moon, and even of the world of logarithms, in the name of God....

Actually, there is lots of history and teaching in Scripture bearing directly on our view of, involvement with, and contribution to hu-

Rev. Dick is pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.

(Preceding article in this series: August 2004, p. 449.)

man culture. Jabel, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain are fine reprobate examples of society's cultured elite and enviable genius. Babel is a proud monument and scathing indictment of this world's culture and achievements. And a passage such as I John 2:15-17 is believers' and would-be lovers' everywhere caveat emptor and caveat cor concerning all, including the culture that is in the world. But there's also a Bezaleel, the Spirit-filled cunning craftsman of tabernacle-building fame (Ex. 31). The literary masterpiece that is Ecclesiastes. The choristers, dancers, and musicians of Psalm 149. And Paul who made *excellent* tents....

But Acts 17, verses 15 through 34, the record there of Paul's visit to Athens on his second missionary journey, is Scripture's locus classicus, I believe, answering the question of the relationship of Christ and culture, Christianity and culture, and culture and *you and me*.

First thing we see from this history is that Athens is the object of mission work. Athens has a problem. She needs to be saved. Of her glories there is no mention. Of her desperate straits Scripture speaks. Athens may be cultured and sculptured — a real beauty (though, to be sure, by the time the apostle arrived there, Athens was only an echo of her former glory days). She may be the praise of men. Philosophers from all over may study and spout their views there. But she and her citizens are lost. She needs no cultural enlightenment, no renaissance of the arts, and certainly no praise. She needs rebuke, and re-birth. She must have Jesus, and His Spirit and Word. Or she is the whole world and has lost her soul.

This, in fact, is the message of the entire Scripture concerning this fallen and disintegrated world and all of its culture.

Athens' culture then, as Athens' culture today, may be "good" in and of itself. It may be "good," as in "useful." It may show the glimmerings of natural light, a re-

gard for virtue and good order and for maintaining an orderly external deportment (Canons 3/4.4). But God, after all, has made man for *one* thing. That thing is that he love his God with all his heart, mind, strength, and soul. That thing is that he love his neighbor for God's sake. But fallen man will have none of this. And though he produce things as only men made in God's image can, he does this in defiance of the living God, and to declare instead, this god, Man. The culture and the cultured men of this world can only be, therefore, a stench in God's nostrils. Sculptured disobedience. Sauteed defiance. Is disobedience and defiance. Still. And damnable....

In the book of Acts Athens, philosophers, areopagus and all are *used* by the Spirit to speak of better things than those of which Athens herself could speak. They are used, Athens is used, to speak of the mission of the gospel. They, the Athenian setting and culture, are *servants*. The gospel is King. Acts 17 preaches what all Scripture preaches about the culture and productions of sinful men: *vanity of vanities...all without Christ and God is vanity!* Acts 17 cries out: repent, ye cultured despisers and spiritual slackers, repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ! Acts 17 warns that hell will be filled to the brim with Romeos and Juliets, Voltaires and Candides, Olympians, Stoics, Epicureans, and the unbelieving guys who may have invented the cell phone. Acts 17 gives something, some message and hope far greater than the message and hope of men. It is resurrection. There is a Christ, even Jesus, who is crucified for sins. And He is risen! And all men, and all culture of men, if they will not be idolatrous but pleasing to God, must be risen with Him....

Second thing. Paul, when he arrives in Athens in the first century A.D., is God's graced, willing, and powerful agent of this mission of the Scripture.

Some would argue this. They suggest that Paul in his preaching did not preach the gospel here, but actually preached as just one of those cultured men (citing poets, no less!) a compromised, cultured message to cultured men. Hence no real gospel here, and no great success.

These same and others contend that Paul at this time was on a vacation. Paul has just labored in Berea and Thessalonica. Jewish hounds are pursuing him relentlessly. He is conducted by friends to Athens where he might rest, goes the suggestion, from his martyrdom. And what better place than Athens? A veritable resort city, even a cultured, famous city. Here Paul could take a much needed break. Soon Silas and Timotheus would rejoin him, and they could resume their labors.

Of this alleged "cultured compromise" of the gospel I say it is a foolish idea. Paul's sermon here, though different from all his others, is Spirit-made to win cultured heathen. It exudes God's love, righteousness, and wisdom from the introduction to the end.

Of the vacation idea it is hard to be certain. But I do believe that if Paul needed a break, and was taking one, it was a working vacation. I do believe that, no matter what, Paul is on a mission. Sure he could sit in the spa. Sure he might marvel at the Monet (how do you spell anachronism?). And certainly he might see sermon material in some of the conclusions of a heathen poet. But for all that *Paul is always on a mission!* The mission is: to witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is on this mission as chosen Apostle of the Gentiles. As such he will conduct himself while in Athens, or while anywhere for that matter.

And Us....

Third, the Church today, and all Grace Life folks, must see that we are on the same mission.

Always.

In this world, in relating to Athens, while sitting in its stadiums, catching her subways, doing a little cultivating ourselves, contributing to her causes...*we must think mission!* The Apostle and all the apostles were gossellers of the gospel for the foundation of the New Testament Church. The New Testament Church continues building on the foundation that is laid, growing, developing, witnessing to the Truth for the gathering, defending, and preserving of God's elect. Matthew 28's "great commission" is still great, and still greatly relevant—mandating, detailing, encouraging us in our Christian mission to preach to and disciple the nations.

Beware, therefore, young Grace Life reader, this call of many even in Christendom today. They are calling one and all to go to Athens and be there and play there and compete there and learn and teach and give and take as if the principal thing for Jerusalem and Athens to remember is our shared culture, and the grace and calling we have in common.

They would especially entice

you, perhaps talented reader, to lead the way and be for the generation that now may arise, perhaps in the PRC of all places, which knows, really knows, the culture, and can speak at poetry slams with the best of them.

Come now, they are saying! Maybe even leave the Church for a little while, for the church of the university, or the church of the streets. We will teach you to sit down and to play and to rise up and to dance and to herald this new gospel....

Hear it? "Culture ye, culture ye my people," saith this world's god....

Beware!

Remember the mission of the Church and young Grace Life readers, Church of today and tomorrow. This is the principal thing for Christians to think about when relating to Athens and her culture, her human productions: *the priority of witnessing to the truth as it is in Jesus, and of the salvation that is in Him!* Get this principle down, have its light transform the mind, infiltrate the heart, move the soul, guide the body parts, and move the

bow across the strings of your violin.

Remember. And answers will come to lots of particulars re your Christianity, *your* culture, and the world's culture.

Wherever you are in the world — in the stores, in the factory, in the laboratory, hanging from pitons in the Tetons, entertaining or being entertained in a Carnegie Hall, or a Tanglewood, and whether you are working, on vacation, or what, you are on a mission, *this decidedly Christian mission.*

Remember. The Word is not "Culture ye, culture ye" my people.

But "Comfort ye, comfort ye" my people.

And the good news is, the gospel is, that there is a great warfare that is accomplished.

Not the culture warfare.

But the warfare against sin.

For the pardon of her iniquity,

To speak this message,

Jerusalem,

Be stirred.

And you, Jerusalem, shall be the Light,

The gospel Light,

Of Athens. □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. James Laning

The Apostolicity of the Church (2)

In the Nicene Creed we confess to believe "one holy catholic and apostolic church." The previous article contained a brief explanation of what is meant by the church's apostolicity, over against the false teaching of the Romish church. The truth concerning the apostolicity of the

church is closely related to a number of other fundamental doctrines of the Reformed faith. In this second and concluding article there will be a reference to some of these.

Apostolicity and Sola Scriptura

Gradually the truth concerning the apostolicity of the truth was perverted, until it came to mean that the Romish church alone had possession of an unwritten tradition passed down from the apostles. It is beneficial to consider how this came about.

One of the main opponents of the Christians in the first few centuries after Christ was a heretical group known as the Gnostics. The Gnostics (a term derived from the Greek word for knowledge) taught that a spiritual Christian was one who knew the inspired teachings of the apostles that were not found in Scripture. These teachings, or secret traditions, said the Gnostics, were inspired by God, and had been passed down from the apostles and entrusted to the Gnostics. Over against this teach-

Rev. Laning is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

(Preceding article in this series: September 15, 2004, p. 490.)

ing, some Christian writers said that there were indeed traditions on spiritual matters passed down from the apostles, but that these traditions were not secret, but publicly displayed, and that they were possessed not by the Gnostics but by the church.

But what were these traditions? It is very interesting to see how the answer to this question gradually changed over time. There is evidence that, at first, what the believers referred to as apostolic tradition was very similar to what we today refer to as our confessions. In fact, the Apostles' Creed was believed to be an accurate summary of this apostolic tradition. Just as we today speak of Scripture and the confessions, with the latter being the church's officially adopted summary of what the Scriptures teach, so they sometimes spoke of Scripture and tradition, with tradition referring to what the church on earth commonly confessed to be an accurate summary of what the apostles wrote in the Scriptures. This apostolic tradition was used by them in a way very similar to the way we use our confessions. Just as we use our creeds as a guide to a proper interpretation of Scripture, so they used what they referred to as the apostolic tradition to expose false teaching and point the way to the proper exegesis of God's Word.

It is easy to see how this teaching about apostolic tradition could be perverted to mean that there were some apostolic teachings not found in Scripture nor deducible from it. As this false teaching developed, there were those who spoke against it and continued to maintain that the apostolic tradition included only those doctrines explicitly taught in Scripture or clearly deduced from it. But this became harder to maintain once the Romish church started to do such things as denying the cup to the people in the Lord's Supper and promoting the worship of Mary.

Over against this false teach-

ing of the Romish church, we must maintain that there is no inspired apostolic tradition other than that which is found in Scripture. In the Scriptures the apostolic doctrine is set forth fully, completely, and infallibly.

Our Creeds: A Summary of the Apostolic Doctrine

The church has been guided by the Spirit of Truth to record an accurate summary of the apostles' doctrine in her creeds. If our creeds accurately summarize what Scripture teaches, and they do, then they accurately summarize the apostolic doctrine. By confessing from the heart the truths set forth in our creeds, we are "remaining steadfast in the apostles' doctrine."

Holding to the apostolicity of the church means holding to the creeds God has guided His people to confess. This truth is often denied. Over against the Romish church's insistence that one hold to *her* teachings in order to be part of the apostolic church, many have said that they hold to "Scripture alone," but then they have wrongly interpreted this to mean that a church that holds to the Scriptures has little or no need for official creeds. We must understand that this latter error is another rejection of what is truly meant by the apostolicity of the church.

The apostolicity of the church means that the church is guided into the truth centrally by means of the teaching of officebearers through whom Christ speaks. The apostles were uniquely inspired by the Spirit when they wrote the Scriptures. But this same Spirit is still today speaking through officebearers to guide the church to grow in her understanding of what is written in Scripture. All believers are officebearers, and God works through the office of believer to cause His church to grow in wisdom and understanding. But it is through the work of the special officebearers that God guides His church to make official

and binding declarations concerning what the truth of Scripture is.

The one occupying an office in the church has been given authority by Christ to be His ambassador (II Cor. 5:20). Christ speaks to the church through ambassadors that He calls and qualifies by His Spirit. That the church is apostolic means that it is built upon the truth that Christ continues to speak to His church through these ambassadors, not only when they are preaching the Word, but also when they are officially setting forth the truth of Scripture in the decisions that are made in the church's broader assemblies.

This is what took place when God guided our fathers to set forth an official summary of the apostolic doctrine in our creeds. Therefore, to be faithful apostolic churches, we must know, believe, and confess these creeds from the heart. This is what it means to remain steadfast in the apostles' doctrine.

The Danger of Turning from the Creeds to the Doctrines of Men

A church that departs from the truth found in the Reformed confessions is a church that is not remaining steadfast in the apostles' doctrine. This is a great danger. When a church apostatizes, she turns away from the truth that Christ has guided her to confess in her creeds, and she turns towards the errors taught by men.

In the first few centuries after the ascension of Christ, the Apostles' Creed and the other ecumenical creeds, such as the Nicene Creed, were cited as accurate summaries of the apostolic tradition. But as the churches departed from the truth of Scripture, they began to refer more to the writings of this or that ancient father to prove that this or that teaching belonged to the "apostolic tradition." At the time of the Protestant Reformation, the Reformers pointed out that the Romish church was really rejecting the *truths* taught by the ancient fa-

thers, and instead promoting the *errors* of the ancient fathers as the apostolic tradition. Over against this, the Reformers pointed God's people back to the Scriptures and the accurate summary of those Scriptures found in the church's creeds.

We must see the same danger in our own day. To hold to the apostolic truth is to hold to the truths of the Reformed faith. What we call the Reformed faith is the same as the apostolic tradition. Knowing this, we must beware of those who would redefine for us what is meant by the Reformed faith. There are many who will refer to errors taught by men, and

sometimes even by the Reformers, as being truths of the Reformed faith. Rejecting the *truths* that the Reformers taught, they seek to find the *errors* that they maintained and to promote these as the Reformed faith.

Over against this, we must maintain that the accurate summary of the Reformed faith, and thus of the apostolic tradition, is found in our Reformed creeds. The creeds set forth what it means to be Reformed. The fact that John Calvin may have maintained a certain position on a certain subject does not necessarily mean that his position on that subject is in agree-

ment with the truth of the Reformed faith. To be Reformed is to hold to the Reformed creeds. It is striking that some people, when explaining what it means to be Reformed, hardly mention, if at all, that it means that one holds to the truths set forth in our creeds. Yet this is precisely what it does mean.

Let us beware lest we be persuaded to turn away from these confessions toward the erroneous teachings of this or that man from the past. And let us be diligent to study and defend the truths set forth in our creeds, out of thankfulness to God for gathering us into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. □

Book Reviews



Christ On Earth: The Gospel Narratives as History, by Jakob vanBruggen. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998. 320 pages. No price (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Herman Hanko.]

Jakob vanBruggen, professor of New Testament in Kampen Theological University (Liberated), is a prolific writer, perhaps best known in this country for his book *The Future of the Bible*, in which he offered a convincing defense of the Majority Text of the New Testament Scriptures. In this book the author is concerned primarily with the question whether the four gospel narratives of the life of Christ are reliable.

The question that must be answered is: How does one determine their reliability? Many different answers have been given to that question, especially by higher critics; but the answer of the believer is: We accept their reliability because God the Holy Spirit is their Author and God writes with absolute precision what is true. If one asks for proof of their divine authorship, the answer of our *Confes-*

sion of Faith is the correct one: We believe "all things contained in them ... because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves" (Art. 5). That is, we believe that the Scriptures as a whole and the gospel narratives in particular are reliable because these same Scriptures testify that God is their Author, and the Holy Spirit seals that testimony of Scripture on our hearts by working faith in us.

But this is not sufficient for vanBruggen.

According to vanBruggen, the reliability of the gospel narratives must be decided on other grounds than that of divine inspiration. One important way to test the reliability of the gospels is to engage in internal criticism of them. This involves some questionable procedures and doubtful conclusions. The author, for example, spends a great deal of time on Luke 1:1-3. He is of the opinion that the reference is not to other written gospels, but to many oral gospels which were used in the church. In devel-

oping this thesis, the author makes no distinction between Luke's obvious appeal to his own inspiration ("It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things") and the declarations of others, but rather speaks of Luke's gospel narrative as being a confirmation of what others have said. Luke may even have been an unconverted witness to the ministry of the Lord. VanBruggen is also of the opinion that an original Gospel of the Hebrews existed, which may, in fact, have been the Gospel according to Matthew. In any case, Matthew, the author judges, is the first of the written gospel narratives.

Although he recognizes that the gospel narratives are unique biographies (because they are concerning a unique person), he has no good idea of why there are four and finds it extremely difficult to determine the individual viewpoint of each. He finally concludes that it is only a matter of learning the history (25).

Much time is spent in engaging the thinking of higher critics,

but vanBruggen's answer to their positions is not a charge of unbelief against wicked men who are out to destroy the Bible, but is limited to an analysis of the viewpoint of the evangelists. He never makes mention in this connection of the viewpoint of the Holy Spirit.

These methods bring strange results. His interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan and of the cursing of the barren fig tree are strange, to say the least. While crucially important teachings of the Lord go untreated, the author devotes no fewer than twenty-one

pages to the question of whether the Sanhedrin was permitted to carry out the death penalty in the trial of Christ. He concludes that it was.

There is much that is interesting and even worthwhile in the book. His harmonizations of the Gospels in many instances are enlightening. He addresses himself to some interesting questions, such as: Is it always possible to determine why certain elements are included in a gospel and why certain other elements are excluded? Did the evangelists write *only* of

things of which they had personal knowledge?

The book demonstrates the need to approach Scripture from the viewpoint of faith. When one approaches Scripture from the viewpoint of the human writers, one runs into a host of difficulties and is almost certain to fall into higher critical methods. When one approaches from the viewpoint of faith that the Holy Spirit is the Author of Scripture, all the questions that arise can be answered in a positive and biblically sound manner. □

Report of Classis West

September 2, 2004

Classis West met in regular session on Wednesday, September 1 in Randolph Protestant Reformed Church, Randolph, Wisconsin.

An officebearers' conference was held on Tuesday, the day before Classis. The theme of the conference was "Christian Education." The keynote address was given by Rev. Steven Key, who spoke on "The Biblical Basis and Goal of Christian Education." Rev. Allen Brummel then spoke on "The Consistory's Duty to Promote Christian Education," followed by Rev. Ron Hanko on "Christian Education: A Reformed Heritage," and by Rev. Carl Haak on "The Protestant Reformed Liberal Arts College: Our Next Goal!" Visitors to the conference included members of Randolph PRC, others from the Randolph area, members of Bethel PRC, and some schoolteachers from Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Classis met on Wednesday until early afternoon. Rev. Martin

VanderWal chaired the meeting. The students of Faith Christian School in Randolph attended and observed part of the meeting.

Most of the work of Classis was routine.

Due to loss of families, Bethel PRC requested a reduction in synodical assessments. This request was granted and forwarded to the Finance Committee of Synod.

Rev. Allen Brummel was appointed as moderator of Bethel PRC during its vacancy.

One discipline matter was treated in closed session. In this matter, Classis gave its approval to the Consistory to proceed to the erasure of a baptized member.

The following classical appointments were arranged for the three vacant churches of Classis West. For Bethel PRC: Rev. A. Brummel on Oct. 17, Rev. D. Kleyn on Oct. 24 & 31, Rev. D. Kuiper on Nov. 7, Rev. S. Key on Nov. 28 & Dec. 5, Rev. A. Brummel on Dec. 19, Rev. S. Houck on Jan. 2, Rev. D. Kuiper on Jan. 16, Rev. G. Eriks on Jan. 23 & 30, Rev. S. Houck on Feb. 6, Rev. R. Hanko on Mar. 6 & 13, and Rev. S. Houck on Mar. 27.

For First (Edmonton) PRC: Rev. S. Key on Oct. 10 & 17, Rev. M. VanderWal on Nov. 7 & 14, Rev. S. Houck on Dec. 5 & 12, Rev. R. Smit on Dec. 26, Rev. A. Brummel on Jan. 23 & 30, Rev. D. Kuiper on Feb. 20 & 27, Rev. R. Smit on Mar. 6, and Rev. D. Kleyn on Mar. 20 & 27. And for Doon PRC: Rev. R. Smit on Nov. 28 & Dec. 5, Rev. R. Hanko on Jan. 9 & 16, Rev. S. Key on Jan. 23, Rev. D. Kleyn on Feb. 13, Rev. M. VanderWal on Feb. 20 & 27, and Rev. G. Eriks on Mar. 20 & 27.

Classis West also asked Classis East to help supply these vacant pulpits.

The expenses of Classis totaled \$7,556.92.

At the end of the meeting of Classis, our president bade farewell, on behalf of Classis West, to Rev. Carl Haak, who will soon be taking up his labors in Georgetown PRC in Classis East.

The March 2005 meeting of Classis West is scheduled to be held in Bethel PRC, IL.

Rev. Daniel Kleyn
Stated Clerk of Classis West □

School Activities

This past summer season, now sadly just a memory, many of our Christian schools organized what can be called an annual fun day of cleaning and repairing. The school boards usually try to encourage members of their respective school societies to come and help other volunteers enjoy a day of repairs, cleaning, and weeding at school. Just such a day took place at Covenant Christian School in Lynden, WA on Saturday, August 28. Looking at their "to do" list, we find it hard to imagine that it all could be done on one Saturday. And as if that wasn't enough, the school board also made arrangements for a supper together and maybe a ball game afterwards. Activities began already at 9:00 A.M. and lasted until the work was done.

As you may remember, the Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN did not open its doors this fall due to declining enrollment. Despite (or maybe we should say *because of*) this fact, the board of the Free Christian School formed a new committee, called the Visionary Committee, which will work on promoting the school. This will include organizing school activities for the children, with a view to re-opening the school in the near future, the Lord willing.

Friends and supporters of Hull Christian School in Hull, Iowa were invited to a "Teachers' Appreciation Night" at the Westside Park in Hull on August 27 at 7:00 P.M. All that was needed to enjoy a night of fellowship and a light lunch was a lawn chair and an interest in Covenant education.

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

Denomination Activities

Somewhat related to the School Activities above, this past August 30 there was an Officebearers' Conference in Randolph, WI, the day before a meeting of Classis West, on the topic, "Christian Education." Rev. S. Key, pastor of Hull, Iowa PRC, started the conference at 9:00 A.M. speaking on "The Biblical Basis and Goal of Christian Education," followed at 10:30 A.M. with Rev. A. Brummel of the South Holland, IL PRC speaking on "The Consistory's Duty to Promote Christian Education." Rev. R. Hanko, serving our denomination as pastor of the Lynden, WA PRC, began the afternoon part of the conference at 1:00 P.M. by speaking on "Christian Education: A Reformed Heritage" and at 2:45 P.M. Rev. C. Haak, pastor of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL, spoke on "The Protestant Reformed Liberal Arts College: Our Next Goal!"

Mission Activities

We are thankful to be able to inform the readers of the *Standard Bearer* that the Fellowship in Ghana was invited to witness the Confirmation of Marriage of a couple of its members on Sunday, August 29, at the Mission Building after their morning worship service.

Mr. Herm Ophoff, a member of the Byron Center, MI PRC, was in our Pittsburgh Mission on Sunday, September 5, in part to visit with family in the area, and also to give a special presentation on the history of the PRC at the dinner fellowship of the Mission that Sunday. Having heard that presentation at our churches' 75th anniversary celebration a couple of years ago, I can safely say that those in attendance in Pittsburgh learned a lot of our history and should have

thoroughly enjoyed the presentation.

Pittsburgh is also continuing to expand their radio ministry. Their radio committee will be working on two new projects. The first will be the involvement of Rev. J. Mahtani in Don Matzat's "Let's Talk about Jesus" program on WORD FM, and second, they will continue to explore with the radio station a weekly "Reformed Minute," taking into consideration the funds available as well as Rev. Mahtani's schedule and other commitments.

Congregation Activities

The week of August 22 saw the congregation of the Doon, Iowa PRC involved in a church sidewalk project. Volunteers were needed for Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday evenings and Saturday morning and afternoon. Work began in the evenings around 7:00 P.M. Cement arrived at church at 7:30 A.M. on Saturday morning.

A pancake breakfast was held at Hope PRC in Redlands, CA August 28, with money raised going towards next year's Young Adults' Retreat.

Also from Hope in Redlands we read that their Sunday School participated in their annual end-of-the-year Sunday School program after their evening worship service on Sunday, August 29.

Rev. and Mrs. M. DeVries, newly installed in the Wingham, Ont. PRC, moved into the recently purchased parsonage in Wingham towards the end of August and are busy getting settled in their home. According to the DeVrieses, this is a parsonage that they will enjoy as their home and that will serve well also for Wingham's future pastors and their families.

The building committee of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL reported to their congregation recently that

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

they are in the process of replacing their stolen church sign.

Minister Activities

Rev. C. Haak accepted the call to serve as the next pastor of Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. The council of Georgetown in-

formed their congregation that plans are being made for the arrival of their new pastor. In order to help Bethel in their transition, Rev. Haak is tentatively planning to remain in Bethel until the end of September, and then he, his wife, and one daughter will move to Hudsonville, MI.

Rev. G. Eriks declined the call he had been considering to serve as pastor of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI.

The congregation of Hudsonville, MI PRC has extended a call to Rev. S. Key to serve as their next pastor. □

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

The Lord willing, on October 9, 2004, our parents and grandparents, **WILBUR and HATTIE LINKER**, will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them, and give thanks to God for their covenantal instruction and godly confession and walk of life. Our prayer is that He will continue to supply their every need and grant them many more years together with us.

Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord. The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel (Psalm 128:4-6).

- ❖ Bert and Jacqueline Mulder
Joshua, Eric, Bethany, Stephen,
Thomas, Jordan
- ❖ David and Christine Linker
Jessica (in glory),
Kathryn, Alexander
- ❖ Paul and Melonie Linker
Audrey, Nathan
- ❖ Jon and Michelle Bult
- ❖ Sarah Linker

Lacombe, Alberta

REMINDER!!!

The last issue of the volume year has been distributed. If you desire to have your copies bound, please bring your entire set (October 1, 2003 □ September 15, 2004) to the seminary by October 15. The cost of binding your own SBs is still \$13.00.

2004 FALL REFORMATION LECTURE

Rev. Charles Terpstra
will speak on

□ **Solo Christo** □

Principles of the Reformation: #2 □ □ Salvation by Christ Alone! □

Friday, October 29, 2004
7:30 P.M.

Sponsored by First Holland PRC Evangelism Committee
3641 104th Ave., Zeeland, MI 49464

Come, bring a friend; refreshments will be served

NOTICE!!!

Our Pastor, Rev. Steven Houck, will be completing his 25th year of service as a minister in our denomination this September, the Lord willing. An evening of thanksgiving to God for Pastor Houck's faithful work among us is planned for Sunday, October 10, at 7:30 P.M. following the evening worship service. You are invited to join us at Peace PRC in Lansing, IL for this joyous occasion.

Peace PRC
Bill DeJong, Clerk
Garry Eriks, Vice President

YEARBOOK CHANGES

Rev. Michael DeVries
P.O. Box 503 (for mail)
541 Angus St. (for visiting)
Wingham, ON N0G 2W0
Canada
Phone: (519) 357-1082
E-mail: mjdevries@sympatico.ca

And the e-mail address of Cornerstone's Bulletin Clerk should be SHPCO2@aol.com. That is, 5 capital letters and a numeral before the @ symbol.

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for October

Date	Topic	Text
October 3	"What Is Heaven?"	Lamentations 3:41
October 10	"The Saints' Everlasting Rest"	Hebrews 4:9
October 17	"Who Is Going to Heaven? (1)"	Revelation 17:8
October 24	"Who Is Going to Heaven? (2)"	Revelation 7:14
October 31	"What Is Hell?"	Matthew 25:41