



THE **STANDARD BEARER**

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

**"Every good Christian
ought to feel himself bound
in conscience and honor,
as well as in duty to his Lord,
to strengthen the hands,
and encourage the heart
of the spiritual Ruler,
who evidently seeks,
in the fear of God,
to promote the purity
and edification of the Church."**

Samuel Miller

See "Esteeming the Elders Very Highly for Their Work's Sake"
— p. 204

*Vol. 72, No. 9
February 1, 1996*

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In This Issue ...

"Good News from a Far Country" is a new rubric just for this occasion, although we have hopes of using it at least once more. Many of our northern North American readers will agree that the article in this rubric, "About the Brisbane EPC," is from a "far country" indeed. As we lie buried in snow and shiver with the cold, it is 100 degrees Fahrenheit in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

The article is by our friend and brother, the Rev. David Higgs. With his colleague, the Rev. Chris Connors, he attended the Protestant Reformed Seminary for three years, graduating in 1994. He is now pastor of the Evangelical Presbyterian congregation in Brisbane.

Rev. Higgs informs us concerning his own, and his family's, life since he left the States in the summer of 1994. He also tells us about the congregation of which he is pastor. A map helps us to appreciate the "problem" faced by the congregation.

The article serves to remind the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia with whom the PRC are one in the truth of salvation by God's sovereign, particular grace and with whom the PRC have some contact through the denominational Committee for Contact with Other Churches.

We may be reminded to pray for that small but faithful church.

We may be reminded to pray also that God will bless our work of contact so that there comes to be a closer, richer fellowship.

To the Rev. Higgs, it is a joy to hear from you. Come again, in the *Standard Bearer*.

—DJE



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Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

"I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well."

Psalm 139:14

Even though men and women can and do bring forth children, they cannot and do not by their acts give these children spiritual lives. They cannot cause their children to love God. In fact, in the text quoted above, we say that we are wonderfully and fearfully made because of God's marvelous works.

Being honest and thankful to God, we rightly confess that the spiritual life that appears in our children is God's gift, for which we owe Him everlasting thanks. That we read so clearly in Ephesians 2:8, 9. There Paul, as used by God, declares: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast."

Faith is God's gift to every one of His elect. We cannot and do not receive from our parents strength that makes us want any part of salvation. In I Peter 1:23 we read that we are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." That is why we sing *Psalter* number 383, as based on what our God wrote through David in Psalm 139:14: "All that I am I owe to Thee,

Thy wisdom, Lord, hath fashioned me." Then also we add: "I give my Maker thankful praise, Whose wondrous works my soul amaze."

The fact is that this work of God is presented very clearly in the life of the first two children who were born to Adam and Eve. Cain, that first child of them, hated God, and therefore hated his brother Abel, who revealed by his sacrifices his love of God, shedding the blood of his flock, manifesting that awesome truth that we deserve death, and that salvation comes only by the death of Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God. Just read Genesis 4:1-7.

We praise God because we are fearfully and wonderfully made by God, in His grace. Our salvation is legally possible because God had His Son Jesus Christ, our Savior, sacrificed upon the cross. That, indeed, is a fearfully and wonderfully performed work of God's grace, for our salvation.

Every elect child of God is the special work of God's grace. God causes all those whom He has eternally chosen in Christ to be His spiritually reborn children. Most often this happens to the children of parents who do in love believe in God, as their Savior; but He does also give spiritual life to children born of unbelievers. However, all those whom it pleases God to save and bring to heavenly glory were eternally designed to be such. Strikingly, we read in John 3:2-8 that Christ Jesus, our Savior, said: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Parents do not cause

their children to be born again. Those children receive a spiritual life which comes only by God's grace. Believing parents may desire to have spiritually righteous and holy children; but whether their children do receive this blessing is eternally decided already by God.

Look back again at the text quoted at the beginning of this article. We are "fearfully and wonderfully made" as God's elect children. And our calling is to praise God from whom all blessings flow. Even that desire of believing parents to have born-again children of God is because of what God does in them. They can and will teach their children. But whether these children believe in God is determined by what God does for them and in them.

Those who are born again have a spiritual life, which God eternally decided to give them by His Spirit. Go back, once again, to that basic truth quoted a moment ago. "All that I am I owe to Thee." The spiritual life that enables us to love God and want to walk according to His law comes from and by God's grace. We do not change God's eternal mind. He does not depend upon us, or upon our parents, in order to get His way. We do not make Him become our Savior. As David wrote: "Marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well."

God does not offer salvation. We cannot ask God to give us physical life, because we do not yet have it. And by all means we cannot ask Him for spiritual life before He has

already given it to us. We ask for spiritual life because God has already implanted it in us. We do not change God's mind and will. We do not move Him to do us good.

Indeed, we do pray to God. We do come to Him with spiritual requests. But we do that only because He has moved us to ask Him for it, as those to whom He eternally planned to give salvation. Every bit of our salvation depends upon what God eternally planned, and at the right moment realizes in us. In I Corinthians 12:12 we read: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." He has a perfect body, namely His church, planned by God eternally. And in time all its members are not merely born physically by God's hand. They are by God caused to know that they are members of Christ's body, as mentioned in the text just quoted.

Let us also bear in mind that in the church world Satan is working hard today. He is interested in, and is striving cleverly to destroy the faith of church members. What is more, we should bear in mind that the church world is divided into many factions that fight against each other. Satan is very, very subtle; and we must take careful heed of what Scripture presents to us concerning Satan. In Scripture we are warned: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." The awesome truth is that God, in His grace, causes us to be born again spiritually. Even as we were not born physically because we wanted it, so we are not born again spiritually because we wanted it. Rightfully we sing: "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow." Among those blessings is the desire to receive salvation as the gift of His grace.

We do not desire salvation until

God has already given us the desire for it. We do not change God. His name means I AM. It presents the truth that He, and He only, is God. It also presents the truth that He, and He only, is the One who saves us, even giving us the desire for salvation from the spiritual death into which Satan got us through Adam and Eve.

Satan is working very, very hard today. As we read in Genesis 3:1 he is very, very subtle. He came to Eve with a lie. Yes, his lie was that God had lied to Adam and Eve. And in the church world today Satan comes with many clever lies which are false doctrines. The awesome fact is today that, just as in the days of Adam and Eve, Satan is striving to get church members to become "gods, knowing good and evil." Just look up Genesis 3:5. And in some churches today salvation is presented as merely a physical blessing, which God offers us, and asks us to want and seek. Salvation is presented merely as a removal of the pain and misery which we deserve.

Indeed, that blessing will come upon all of God's elect children the moment that they die, and will be very wonderful in the day when all the elect will with body and soul enter the New Jerusalem. But the basic and the awesome fact is that today, just as in the days gone by, Satan gets church members to go against God by their false doctrines which he gets into churches. They teach and believe that God waits to see what men will do. He, God, offers salvation, and will give it to those who accept His offer. In some churches it is taught that God offers salvation, and that He will give it to men if they ask Him for it. Deliverance from sin is brushed aside, and deliverance from the punishment of sin merely means deliverance from the punishment that God warned would come upon sinners. He will change His attitude towards sinful men if they fulfill a condition, which He presents, and by which He invites men to get relief and bodily glory.

Indeed, God will deliver His elect from their punishment and hellish agony. But the basic element of our salvation is deliverance from the love of sin, and a spiritual change. Men will commit suicide, thinking that they are going to get away from what they are expecting to come physically upon them. But they do not escape. They enter into God's wrath, which brings them hellish agony, a misery far above what they experience in this life. And what the child of God, being born again, will receive, even before he dies physically, is that wonderful and marvelous work of God's grace, that he receives a new spiritual life of love of God. The basic element in the salvation which God gives His elect is his deliverance from Satan, and the sin he wants us to perform. If that is not taken from us, punishment cannot be removed from us. The blessed part of our salvation is that we are fearfully and wonderfully made as those who love God, and in that love want to serve Him with heart, mind, and soul, in every act which we perform.

Only when we find in our souls the desire to walk in love of God do we have evidence that we are "wonderfully made." And we must hold on tightly to that truth in the text above, that we *are* fearfully and wonderfully made. Being born spiritually dead we have no power or desire to cause ourselves to become spiritually alive. Salvation is one hundred percent God's gift to us. All that which we have and can do physically is because of what God enables us to do. Every heartbeat is caused by God. Similarly, every desire and ability to praise and serve God is His gift to us. We give Him thanks; but we do so only because He has worked thankfulness in us.

What a beautiful truth we have here presented to us by God. By God's grace we marvel at His work of salvation. Having that marvelous gift we praise Him, and thank Him from whom all blessings flow.

□

BRF Family Conference in England

From the secretary of the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF), I have received the following announcement concerning the fourth BRF Family Conference. The announcement is at the same time an invitation to members of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), indeed to all readers of the *Standard Bearer*, to attend the conference this summer.

The British Reformed Fellowship is holding its fourth FAMILY HOLIDAY CONFERENCE from 27 July – 3 August 1996 at Ashburnham Place, Battle, East Sussex, England (60 miles SE of London).

The theme of the Conference is to be “The Doctrine of the Church” and the speakers will be Professors D. Engelsma and H. Hanko. The doctrine will be expounded under the headings:

1) *The Church: Elected in Christ* – by the decree of eternal election.

2) *The Church: Gathered by the Gospel* – the sovereign work of the Son of God contrasted with modern methods of evangelism [Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 54].

3) *The Church: Its Nature* – a spiritual organism as distinct from an external organization.

4) *The Church: Its Institutional Form* – autonomous locally but each congregation part of a broader federation.

5) *The Church: Its Marks* – by

which the true church is distinguished from the false [Belgic Confession, Articles 28, 29].

6) *The Church: Its Sacraments* – baptism and the Lord’s Supper, with particular emphasis on the value and necessity of baptism for the children of believing parents.

Ashburnham Place is set in 220 acres of landscaped grounds in the heart of beautiful Sussex countryside, yet only 6 miles from the south coast of England. For many years the house was an ancestral home but has now been remodeled and extended to form a comfortable and welcoming Christian Conference Centre. It is an ideal location in which to enjoy relaxation, rest, and spiritual fellowship. The Centre affords a variety of accommodation to suit families, couples, friends, individuals, and groups, with washbasins in each room and bathroom facilities in close proximity to most bedrooms.

Two full-day coach tours have been arranged, one around the beautiful Sussex countryside and the other to the city of London. In addition, within easy reach of the Centre are the seaside towns of Hastings and Eastbourne as well as several historic castles, stately homes, and other places of interest.

London is served by both Heathrow and Gatwick airports, and frequent rail services connect the city to Battle (or nearby

Bexhill). The Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) have been represented at all the previous conferences organized by the British Reformed Fellowship, and we anticipate good representation again next year. The presence of members of the PRC at the Conference gives great encouragement to their British brethren who are often struggling to maintain a witness to the Reformed faith in their homeland. The Conference will also be a great time of fellowship and a trip to the UK is a wonderful experience. Why not think about it?

Brochures providing further information and booking forms are available from Mr. Tony Horne, “Bromstone,” Netherley Road, Stonehaven, Kincardineshire AB3 2QB, Scotland or from Mr. Bill Oomkes, 6299 Wing Avenue S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49512, USA (tel. 616-698-6697).

The BRF is not to be confused with the Covenant Reformed Fellowship (CRF), although some members of the CRF are also members of the BRF. The CRF is the mission group of the PRC in Northern Ireland. The BRF is a broader organization of men and women from Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales.

The BRF was organized in 1990 by Presbyterians concerned for the defense and propagation of the historic Reformed Faith in the British

Isles. The doctrinal basis of the Fellowship is:

- 1) The inspired, infallible, and inerrant Holy Scriptures.
- 2) The doctrines set forth in the Canons of Dordt, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Westminster Standards.

The objectives of the BRF are:

- 1) To promote a knowledge of the Reformed Faith in the British Isles, as defined in the doctrinal basis.
- 2) To organize meetings, conferences, preaching services, and other activities in order to further the Reformed Faith and to give practical expression to the unity enjoyed by Christians of Reformed persuasion.
- 3) To encourage the formation of groups in different areas of the country who will seek to promote the Reformed Faith on a local level.

The desire of many is the establishment throughout the British Isles of sound, creedal Reformed churches.

One of the instruments of the BRF is the *British Reformed Journal*, a quarterly publication edited by Mr. Hugh L. Williams. The June 1995 issue contains, among other solid, instructive articles, an article on "The Westminster Standards and the Gospel Offer," an article on "Baptism: Its Mode," and an editorial on "The Fight for the Reformed Faith: The Forgotten Kennedy." To subscribe, write Mr. Hugh L. Williams, "Fairhaven," 9 Chapel Lane, Walton-by-Kimcote, Lutterworth, Leicestershire LE17 5RL, England, UK.

Another important activity of the BRF is a family conference every two years. The conference scheduled for this summer will be the fourth. The first was held in Wales, the second, in Northern Ireland, and the third, in Scotland. The site — and a lovely site it is — of this year's conference is the south of England.

These conferences enable the far-flung members of the BRF to come together for instruction in the Word

and good fellowship. Another purpose is the exposure of others to the Reformed Faith as taught by the conference speakers. The conferences are means of witness and, thus, of the spread of the Reformed Faith in the British Isles. Attendance has steadily increased. From 50 at the first conference (on biblical marriage), the number at the conference in Scotland in 1994 (on the doctrines of grace) grew to some 150. People attended the conference from other countries in Europe.

The PRC have helped the BRF with the conference by providing the speakers. Also, members of the PRC have attended in increasing numbers, contributing by their testimony and in other ways. The BRF is mightily encouraged by this support.

The invitation to members of the PRC, therefore, is heartfelt.

But readers of the *SB* everywhere in the world are warmly invited to attend the conference, perhaps arranging vacation (holiday) plans to coincide with the July 27-August 3 dates.

The site is beautiful; the theme of the biblical speeches is solid and timely; the accommodations are commodious; the fellowship will be good.

Those who are interested should write either Mr. Tony Horne in Scotland or Mr. Bill Oomkes in the States for an informative brochure.

Mr. and Mrs. Bill Oomkes are working on the possibility of arranging a short tour in the British Isles before the conference for those who attend the conference from North America. The tour would have the group in Ballymena, Northern Ireland with the Protestant Reformed mission over the weekend preceding the conference. Any who may want to join in such a tour should let Mr. and Mrs. Oomkes know soon.

Ours is a time of abandonment of the Reformed Faith on a huge scale worldwide. Men and women

are offended at the doctrines of sovereign grace. Supposed friends of Calvinism are embarrassed by its distinctive particularism. They reprint Arthur Pink's *The Sovereignty of God* with the chapter on reprobation elided. They advertise the Reformed gospel as the teaching of a universal love of God in Christ for sinners and of a desire of God to save every human without exception. Even worldly scholars recognize this as false advertising. By this time, the Calvinism of the Synod of Dordt and of the Westminster Assembly has clearly and forcefully identified itself to all as *particular*. This is its offense, its scandal.

Thus is Calvinism wounded in the house of its friends. For not only is it corrupted by the fundamental tenets of universal grace of its mortal foe, Arminianism, but also the ancient charge against it by its enemies is implicitly sustained: on the basis of its own distinctive particularism — predestination, limited atonement, and irresistible, particular grace in the preaching of the gospel — Calvinism is unable to carry out evangelism and missions!

In an age of unprecedented universalism and free-willism — the gospel of man — these same friends of Calvinism direct their criticism mainly, and incessantly, against the "hyper-Calvinists." And what is the grievous sin against the gospel of these wretched folk, the "hyper-Calvinists"? Only that they consistently preach the love of God in Christ for elect believers and their true children. Some sin!

In the midst of this apostasy, opposition, and dubious friendship, there are still those determined to contend for the gospel of God.

We may help. □

— DJE

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About the Brisbane EPC

I have been asked by the editor of the *Standard Bearer* to write an article of news concerning myself and the congregation of which I am now pastor. I gladly accede to this request with the desire that it keep us in your memories and prayers. More, that this will be one of many means by which we grow in our knowledge of, and love for, each other.

As I begin to write it is 4 p.m. on Tuesday, December 19th. The temperature has just climbed over 38 degrees Celsius (approx. 100 degrees Fahrenheit), and is still climbing. This is a typical Brisbane summer's day. Brisbane is the capital of the state of Queensland. It is situated between the 26th and 27th lines of latitude, south of the equator. This is somewhat similar, I believe, to the position of Houston, Texas, north of the equator.

In January of 1995 I underwent, and passed, my *trials* before Presbytery. This is the name we Presbyterians call what our brethren with a Dutch heritage refer to as *examination of students* before the Classis or Synod. By passing these trials I became eligible for a call to any one of our congregations. Such a call was received from our Brisbane congregation. After accepting the call, I was ordained, and installed into office on April 22nd, 1995.

At the time of the call we were living in Launceston, in the island

state of Tasmania. To travel to Brisbane required a journey of over 2,200 kilometres (approx. 1,400 miles — similar, I think, to the distance between Grand Rapids and Houston). Part of this journey included an overnight ferry trip of 14 hours duration, across Bass Strait, to mainland Australia. Between Launceston and Brisbane we have only one other church of our denomination. This is situated just out of Sydney, which is about the half-way mark.

I have been in the ministry of the Word and Sacraments for just eight months now. A demanding office this is. But to preach the Word of God has been a source of continual joy to me. There have been, of course, the usual settling-in problems which most new ministers face. Whatever problems I have faced have been more than compensated for by a mature, godly, and hospitable congregation. But even more than this, I have been blessed with a Session (Consistory) which is also mature and godly. The Session has assisted me greatly in the work to which I am called.

God has blessed us, as a family, in situating us in our Brisbane Church. I have mentioned several of its qualities as a congregation; much, however, could be added to this. But we face a large problem as a congregation, too. Not only are we scattered as a *denomination*, but Brisbane is scattered as a *congregation*.

The Brisbane Church is one of our largest congregations, consisting of approximately 90 members and adherents (including children). But this number is scattered greatly. We worship, Lord's Day mornings, at a hired hall called "Bread House." On

the map on the next page you can see that this is near the centre of the city. We worship there to try to accommodate all the members of the congregation as best we can, as this is about the most central position. Lord's Day evenings, however, we worship in a school hall in a suburb called Oxley. We do this because the vast majority of the congregation lives in Oxley and the surrounding areas.

The scattered nature of our congregation promises no easy solution. We are, perhaps, too small to divide into two congregations. Yet, every Lord's Day we have members traveling well over an hour to church from Buddina, on the north coast. Also, we have a member living near Toowoomba, over one and a half hours' drive from Brisbane. We also have a Preaching Station (somewhat akin to your home mission centres) at Chinchilla. This comes under the Session of the Brisbane Church. Members of the Church at Bell and Chinchilla are part of this Preaching Station. The member at Kingaroy alternates between traveling to Brisbane, and traveling to the services at the Preaching Station.

But even this is not the end of the story. For the bulk of our people who live in the Oxley area, traveling to church in the morning requires a trip of at least 20 minutes. Indeed, I believe that only two families travel less than that time, and *all the rest* travel in excess of that time.

The widespread nature of our congregation makes Session visitations, pastoral work, and fellowship extremely difficult. But, almost as if to compensate for this, the Lord has blessed us with people who are

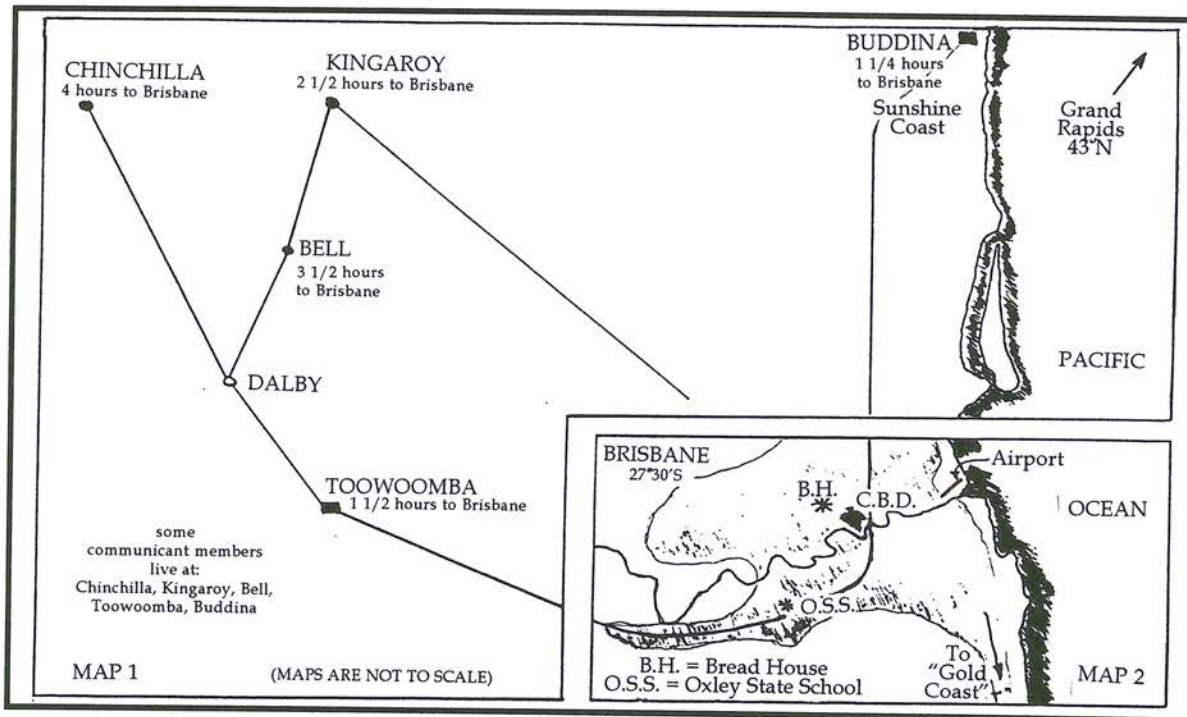
Rev. David Higgs is pastor of the congregation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia at Brisbane. He graduated from the Protestant Reformed Seminary in 1994.

willing to make sacrifices, to go out of their way to have fellowship, and to help those who travel great distances on the Lord's Day. And in all of this we are the stronger, and

praise our God for His goodness.

My family and I remember with fondness our three years spent with you as I studied in the seminary. We covet your prayers. We hope one

day to meet again in the flesh. We hope, also, that this article will give you some idea of our work and needs, so that you may pray for us with more understanding. □



The majority of communicant members and adherents live within the shaded area, approx. 20-45 minutes from Bread House.

Letters

■ An Untapped Resource

Your brief editorial, "Retired, Not Dead" (SB, Nov. 1, 1995), led me to conclude that the greatest untapped resource in our churches, in the area of church extension work, is retired men and women in the congregations. (The second greatest untapped resource is our young people, but that's another matter.) Local evangelism societies or committees receive dozens of letters per month requesting pamphlets and information regarding the Reformed faith. Ought these letters lie in a box for a month until someone finds time to respond to them? Ought not these requests be answered immediately, and then not only with the requested literature but with a warm, personal letter expressing what the Reformed faith means to us? Surely every congregation has a number of retirees who can donate a day or two per month for this

necessary work of personal witnessing.

Also, Mr. Editor, the churches would benefit from some lengthy editorials on the whole subject of "retirement." Surely these mature, experienced saints need more to fill their days than golf, vacation trips, and coffee hours. How are they to fill the last ten or fifteen years of their lives? We would be delighted to hear more on the subject.

(Rev.) D.H. Kuiper
Grand Rapids, MI

■ Kings Shall Be Your Foster Fathers

Your denomination kindly sends me a complimentary copy of the *Standard Bearer*, so it may seem somewhat invidious that I should comment, but I believe the articles, "Oliver Cromwell: Lord Protector" (Nov. 15, Dec. 1, 1995), are incorrect in some points, and in the interests

of accuracy I think these should be corrected.

First, the interesting point raised about rebellion is surely more problematical. In Henry VIII's time the king was the authority, no question. By William and Mary's time we were on the way to a constitutional monarchy. But here we were in transition. The king had authority — but so did the Parliament, to raise taxes for instance. Rutherford was writing *Rex Lex*. I suspect that for conscientious souls it was by no means clear who constituted "the powers that be." Baxter was a chaplain to the Parliamentary army. In that humorous book, *1066 and All That*, the Civil War is summarized as "consisting in the utterly memorable struggle between the Cavaliers (Wrong but Wromantic) and the Roundheads (Right but Repulsive)." I believe Parliament was right. The Stuarts, like the kings of Israel — all

bad! — were introducing the idea of “The Divine Right of Kings.” In France that culminated in a bloody revolution — in England there was a transition to democracy.

Second, I am by no means convinced by the arguments against an established church. Over the whole area of the second table of the law the interests of church and state run parallel. Scripture describes the magistrate as “a minister of God.” Of what era of the church is it prophesied that “kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers”? In this country the state schools are required to have assemblies which are broadly Christian. So last week the pastor of the church we attend took assembly in two state schools. This involved the quoting of Scripture, some exposition and application, and prayer. Your Supreme Court would rule such a meeting as being outlawed by the doctrine of no establishment of religion, though one may doubt that that was what was in the minds of the founding fathers. Is not a wholly secular state in reality a demonic one?

Michael Kimmit
Editor, *Peace and Truth*
Trelawnyd, Wales

RESPONSE:

Our Belgic Confession (Article 36) clearly teaches that the magistrates are obligated before God to enforce both tables of God’s law. To this Article, a footnote was appended by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1910. This footnote clearly makes a distinction between the magistrates’ calling to enforce both tables of the law and an Established Church. The footnote does not reject the idea that magistrates are called to enforce both tables of the law (“... it does positively hold that, within its own secular sphere, the magistracy has a divine duty towards the first table of the Law as well as towards the second...”), but it does reject the idea of an Established Church (“... feels constrained to declare that it does

not conceive of the office of magistracy in this sense, that it be in duty bound to also exercise political authority in the sphere of religion, by establishing and maintaining a State Church...”). In other words, the idea that the magistrates must enforce both tables of the law does not imply an Established Church. The key words in the footnote are “within its own secular sphere.” And this expression is set over against the expression “in the sphere of religion.” Within the secular sphere, but not within the sphere of the church, the magistrates must enforce both tables of the law.

Rebellion against constituted authority is always wrong. The one and only power of the church is the power of the preaching of the gospel by which “the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to himself ... a church....” Never may the church, in defense of her rights, resort to the sword, no matter what the provocation. Her existence in the world is guaranteed by the Son of God, who will preserve her, for all the ungodly are in His hands and they can never harm the church. The Lord Christ does not need the help of a church fighting a carnal warfare.

Peter, in his first epistle, reminds the church again and again that the saints are pilgrims and strangers in the earth because, by the wonder of regeneration, their home is in heaven from which proceeds their life. While they walk here below as pilgrims and strangers, they have a calling towards the magistrate: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (I Pet. 2:13-15). To this calling there is no exception.

Though it may appear at times (and especially during the reign of

Antichrist) that the church is destroyed by the enemy, the saints live in the absolute conviction that they have the victory; for faith (not earthly weapons) is the victory that overcomes the world. And the persecution which they shall have to endure is ordained by God for their salvation (I Pet. 1:6, 7). When we are persecuted, let us not rise up in rebellion against constituted authority (whether it be the authority of kings or the authority of those in power by the vote of the majority in a democracy), but let us “Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:12).

— Prof. Herman Hanko

■ More on Psalms-Singing

I would like to comment once more on your editorials in the *Standard Bearer* of May 1 and June 1, 1995 on “Music in the Church,” for from your response to my previous letter I see that I did not make myself clear. I apologize for that.

In your articles you stated that in the Greek Old Testament that Paul and the Ephesians and Colossians used, the Psalms were exactly labeled “Psalms and Hymns, and Spiritual Songs.” If my sources are correct, however, the individual Psalms in the Septuagint were titled as follows: 67 were called “Psalms”; six, “Hymns”; 35 “Songs”; 12, “Psalms and Songs”; two “Psalms and Hymns”; and only Psalm 76, “Psalm, Hymn, and Song.” My point therefore was that in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 the word “spiritual” could not have been a reference to part of the headings of the Psalms but was rather the instruction of Paul. And Paul could hardly have meant to qualify only the “Songs” with the word “spiritual.” Rather, he exhorts the people of God to sing Psalms, Hymns, and Songs (all Psalms!) which are “spiritual,” that is, products of the Spirit.

May I say also that, in my reference to “our 1912 version of the Presbyterian Psalter,” I did not mean at

all to belittle our Psalter. (I believe, in fact, that we have the best English translation of the Psalter that there is.) I intended rather simply to reflect on the origin of our Psalter. Around the turn of the century a committee, the membership of which came from six different denominations of strongly Calvinistic Presbyterians, was appointed to prepare a better English Psalter. The admirable goal of this committee was to create a Psalter which, while retaining the rhyming which was used in other Psalters for ease of memorization, was closer in thought to the

original Hebrew. They tried, too, of course, to select tunes to fit the words. And, significantly, they strove to produce a song book which had a bias to no one particular denomination. Those were ambitious goals. And by the grace of God the committee did a very good job. Nevertheless, their Arminian slant showed itself in a few numbers. There are also some numbers which could be improved by bringing the thought in closer harmony with the Hebrew text. And some numbers could be improved if the tunes used were more easily singable.

Is there a compelling reason for doing some work now to publish our own edition of the Psalter? Perhaps not. In fact, I share your fear that an attempt to improve our very good Psalter could revive a push, the likes of which vexed our churches in the 60s, for introducing a select number of "good" hymns. My judgment however is that, given the current leadership in our churches, this might be a *good* time for a project like this — and that it might be a mistake to wait.

John VanBaren
Grandville, MI

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ Calvin Seminary Profs.: Classis Went Too Far

Classis Grand Rapids East of the Christian Reformed Church in its meeting held on October 19, 1995 adopted a statement which dealt with "Ministry with Persons who are Homosexual." The statement has created additional unrest in the CRC. The concern of Calvin Seminary professors is indicated in a communication sent to Classis G.R. East and signed by the 14 professors who are also members in churches belonging to that classis. Darrell Todd Maurina of the *United Reformed News Service* presents this quote from their letter to the classis: "Furthermore, when in its deliberations on October 19, 1995 Classis had an opportunity to affirm the 1973 stance by adopting the minority report, it failed to do so. Instead of the clear statement in the minority report that homosexuality is a distortion of God's plan for sexuality and that sexual activity outside of marriage is disobedience, Classis chose to substitute in its place the ambiguous wording 'to discern what it means

to be faithful to Jesus Christ.' " They wrote further that, "media reporting and a lack of clarity in Classis' own handling of the report" had caused "widespread misunderstanding in the churches." The Seminary faculty also noted that "this combination of the report's silence with respect to the 1973 framework and classical action on the minority report left a strong impression that Classis was unwilling to affirm the theological and ethical principles of the 1973 report." They conclude, "Though the perception may be wrong and far from Classis' intention, this impression has been the occasion of much unrest in the church.... For the sake of truth and the well-being of the church we request that classis at its January 1996 meeting clearly affirm that all ministries to homosexual persons should follow the theological, ethical, and pastoral guidelines of the 1973 Synodical Report on Homosexuality."

One of the professors, Dr. John Bolt, also submitted a separate document of his own which consists of two parts, an "appeal" of the October decision and a "request that classis find an appropriate way to reassure the Christian Reformed Church and its member churches that it affirms the moral stance on homosexuality expressed by the 1973 synodical report and that ministry

to homosexual persons within Classis' jurisdiction should be guided by those principles."

According to reporter Maurina, Bolt noted that Classis GR East had made "two ironic outcomes" more likely. One was that "if the church must choose between a ministry that condones homosexual practice or no ministry at all, there is little doubt that it will take the latter route and thus marginalize homosexual persons all the more."

Second, according to Bolt, "classis cannot be indifferent to the ironic possibility that its unclear decision will jeopardize the carefully balanced and very fragile decision of Synod 1995 on the ordination of women. Once again, more than adequate fuel has been supplied for those who stoke the fires of secession on the ordination issue with the argument that women's ordination today means practicing gays in the pulpit tomorrow."

Rev. Wilbert VanDyk, retired academic dean of Calvin Seminary, also submitted a document to the classis which was not a "protest or appeal" of the action of October 19, but rather a request for "editorial clarification."

Maurina writes that VanDyk cited three examples of contrasts between the 1973 synodical report and the October 19 classical action: that

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"the action of classis seems to allow for the possibility of the legitimacy of monogamous homosexual relationships," that it "fails to identify homosexual orientation as 'a condition of disordered sexuality which reflects the brokenness of our sinful world,' " and that "in contrast to the 1973 synodical material which concludes that homosexual practice is 'incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture' (Acts of Synod 1973, p. 52), the action of classis, in accentuating the need for ministry to people with homosexual orientation, leaves unclear by what biblical standards such ministry will be shaped."

By the time this article appears in print, Classis Grand Rapids East will have met — and presumably taken action. Many will anxiously await the decision which must be taken.

The above action does appear strange. One can understand the concern expressed about the decision of Classis GR East. It is not difficult to see that the decision would cause additional unrest in the CRC. Against that decision, one professor submits an "appeal" and a "request to find appropriate reassurance" for the churches. Another submits a document which purports to be neither "protest or appeal" but rather a request for "editorial clarification." And 14 professors sign a letter of concern which they send to classis. One cannot help but wonder under what kind of church polity these men operate? Since when is an "appeal" directed to the body which makes a decision against which one is aggrieved? And when a matter is as serious as these men indicate, why are simply letters sent to the classis? Why is there no protest? Would that not be the way to force clarification of the issue? With these letters, mere letters of concern, it seems to me that classis could conceivably say, "Thank you for your interest and concern" — and then proceed with its other business.

There is something strange also that 14 professors all sign a single

letter sent to classis. Are the numbers of the signatories and their position within the churches supposed to influence a classis to change its position? Would it not be more appropriate and proper for each individual to present his own protest — not relying on numbers of signatories to convince, but rather coming with Scripture, the Church Order, and former Synodical decisions to show that the action taken was improper?

■ SIGNS OF THE TIMES:

Condemning the sin of ____ Forbidden in New Jersey

The *Standard Bearer* is also distributed in the state of New Jersey. It is there now against the law to condemn ____ as sin. In that state, as in all of the states, it is perfectly legal, and a matter of "free speech," to use God's Name in vain. It is legal, a matter of "free speech," to tell the filthiest of stories, to portray the worst of pornography, but it is illegal to condemn ____ as sin. Though perhaps a minister might be allowed to condemn ____ as sin from the pulpit, as soon as he steps outside of the boundaries of the church, he may not legally say anything against this.

A report of this sad development is presented in the *Christian Observer*, November 3, 1995. I copy it in its entirety:

In a tragic setback for free speech, Biblical morality, and the general free exercise of religion, a New Jersey federal district court has ruled in *Presbytery of Orthodox Presbyterian Church v. Florio* that the New Jersey homosexuals' rights amendment overrides one's constitutional right of free expression. The history of the *Florio* case falls into the following five phases:

1. The legislature of the state of New Jersey passed its "Law Against Discrimination" (LAD) which prohibits anyone in New Jersey, including transients, from communicating anything, either verbal or written, which might promote discrimination against homosexuals. Specifically, the statute forbids

anyone "to aid, abet, incite, compel, or coerce" discrimination against homosexuals (see N.J. State. @ 10:5-12, Title 10, "Civil Rights"; Chapter 5, "Law Against Discrimination"). Further, the statute includes no exception for religious speech (see *New Jersey Law Journal*, Dec. 5, 1994).

2. Rutherford Institute attorney Tom Neuberger filed suit on behalf of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as represented by the Rev. David Cummings. The suit charges that the statute violates the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment.

3. The attorney general's office of the state of New Jersey agreed not to enforce the statute against churches, claiming that such a religious exemption, though not written, is implied. The promise did not include, however, protecting a minister if he stepped off church property to disapprove of homosexuality (see *The Legal Intelligencer*, Nov. 17, 1994).

4. Partially on the basis of the state attorney general's promise, the trial court dismissed the Rutherford Institute's case, but Institute attorney Tom Neuberger appealed. The appellate court, the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals, ordered the original trial court to reconsider the statute's "effect on our fundamental constitutional right to freedom of speech."

5. Tragically, in late September the trial court ruled that the state of New Jersey has a "compelling state interest" to prohibit discrimination, and this "compelling state interest" overrides free speech liberties (see David B. Cruz, "Piety and Prejudice: Free Exercise Exemption from Law Prohibiting Sexual Orientation Discrimination," *New York University Law Review*, vol. 69, pp. 1176, 1178 [Dec., 1994]).

The ramifications of the latest ruling are significant. If enforced to its fullest extent, the statute would forbid any public disapproval of homosexuality, effectively making various passages of the Bible technically illegal if communicated in public (for example, Rom. 1:27; I Cor. 5:11; I Tim. 1:8-10). [Author: Mr. Tom Patterson]

If this position against speech

which condemns homosexuality as sin is maintained, if this is regarded legally as a matter of "discrimination," one wonders what the ultimate result must be. Surely we have an indication of the sign of the end of times. The sin (murder) of abortion

might well be the next sin the church is forbidden to condemn publicly — it would represent "discrimination" against a woman's "right of abortion." To condemn all other religions as false could likewise be re-

garded as "discrimination." Slowly, but surely, so it appears, the church will be "muzzled" so that it cannot condemn any sin anymore (except perhaps the "politically correct" sins of child abuse, etc.). □

Ministering to the Saints

Prof. Robert Decker

Esteeming the Elders Very Highly for Their Work's Sake

In the previous article in this series we called attention to the fact that, because Jesus Christ is pleased to minister His Word, rule His flock, and care for the needy through the lawfully called officebearers, the people of God must receive these men as the representatives of Christ Himself. Before proceeding to discuss the qualifications for the office of elder we call the readers attention to an address given by Dr. Samuel Miller to the members of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Dr. Miller was appointed in 1813 by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church as the second professor for Princeton Theological Seminary. Dr. Miller held this position for the next thirty-five years. Said Dr. Miller:

Christian Brethren,

Every consideration which has been urged to show the importance and duties belonging to the office of Ruling Elders ought to remind you of the important duties which you owe to them. Remember at all times, that they are your ecclesiastical Rulers; Rulers of your own

choice; yet by no means coming to you in virtue of mere human authority; but in the name and by the appointment of the great Head of the Church, and, of course, the "ministers of God to you for good."

In all your views and treatment of them, then, recognize this character. Obey them "in the Lord," that is, for his sake, and as far as they bear rule agreeably to his word. "Esteem them very highly in love for their works sake." And follow them daily with your prayers, that God would bless them, and make them a blessing. Reverence them as your leaders. Bear in mind the importance of their office, the arduousness of their duties, and the difficulties with which they have to contend. Countenance, and sustain them in every act of fidelity; make allowance for their infirmities; and be not unreasonable in your expectations from them.

Many are ready to criminate the Elders of the Church, for not taking notice of particular offenses, *as speedily, or in such manner, as they expect*. And this disposition to find fault is sometimes indulged by persons who have never been so faithful themselves as to give that information which they possessed, respecting the alleged offenses; or who, when called upon publicly to substantiate that which they have privately disclosed, have drawn

back, unwilling to encounter the odium or the pain of appearing as accusers, or even as witnesses. Such persons ought to be the last to criminate Church officers for supposed negligence of discipline. Can your Rulers take notice of that which never comes to their knowledge? Or can you expect them, as prudent men, rashly to set on foot a judicial and public investigation of things, concerning which many are ready to whisper in private, but none willing to speak with frankness before a court of Christ? Besides, let it be recollected, that the session (consistory in our churches, RDD) of almost every Church is sometimes *actually* engaged in investigating charges, in removing offenses, and in composing differences, which many suppose they are utterly neglecting, merely because they do not judge it to be for edification, in all cases, to proclaim what they have done, or are doing, to the congregation at large.

Your Elders will sometimes be called — God grant that it may seldom occur! — But they *will* sometimes be called to the painful exercise of discipline. Be not offended with them for the performance of this duty. Rather make the language of the Psalmist your own: "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil which shall not break my head." Add not

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to the bitterness of their official task, by discovering a resentful temper, or by indulging in reproachful language, in return for their fidelity. Surely the nature of the duty is sufficiently self-denying and distressing, without rendering it more so by unfriendly treatment. Receive their private warnings and admonitions with candor and affectionate submission. Treat their public acts, however contrary to your wishes, with respect and reverence. If they be honest and pious men, can they do less than exercise the discipline of Christ's house, against such of you as walk disorderly? Nay, if you be honest and pious *yourselves*, can you do less than approve of their faithfulness in exercising that discipline? If you were aware of all the difficulties which attend this part of the duty of your Eldership, you would feel for them more tenderly, and judge concerning them more candidly and indulgently than you are often disposed to do. Here you have it in your power, in a very important degree, to lessen their burdens, and to strengthen their hands.

When your Elders visit your families, for the purpose of becoming acquainted with them, and of aiding the Pastor in ascertaining the spiritual state of the flock, remember that it is not officious intrusion. It is nothing more than their duty. Receive them, not as if you suspected them of having come as *spies* or busy intruders, but with respect and cordiality. Convince them, by your treatment, that you are glad to see them; that you wish to encourage them in promoting the best interests of the Church; and that you honor them for their fidelity. Give them an opportunity of seeing your children, and of ascertaining whether your households are making progress in the Christian life. Nay, encourage your children to put themselves in the way of the Elders, that they may be personally known to them, and may become the objects of their affectionate notice, their occasional exhortation, and their pious

prayers. Converse with the Elders freely, as with fathers, who "have no greater joy than to see you walking in the truth." And ever give them cause to retire under the pleasing persuasion, that their office is honored, that their benevolent designs are duly appreciated, and that their labors "are not in vain in the Lord." In short, as every good citizen will make conscience of vindicating the fidelity, and holding up the hand of the faithful Magistrate, who firmly and impartially executes the law of the land: so every good Christian ought to feel himself bound in conscience and honor, as well as in duty to his Lord, to strengthen the hands, and encourage the heart of the spiritual Ruler, who evidently seeks, in the fear of God, to promote the purity and edification of the Church.¹

Though this address was given in 1832, it applies with undiminished biblical force to the people of God today. If heeded by God's people, what a difference it would make for the elders in their work and, thus, what a difference it would make for the lives of the people of God.

Immediately following the above address Dr. Miller makes the following interesting and significant remark:

... so every good Christian ought to feel himself bound in conscience and honor, as well as in duty to his Lord, to strengthen the hands, and encourage the heart of the spiritual Ruler....

The nature of the office before us (that of elder, RDD) also leads to another remark, with which the present chapter will be closed. It is, that there seems to be a peculiar propriety in the Ruling Elders (and the same principle will apply to the Deacons ...) having a *seat assigned them, for sitting together*, in a conspicuous part of the Church, near the Pulpit, during the public service, where they can overlook the whole worshipping assembly, and be seen by all. The considerations which recommend this, are numerous. It was invariably so in the Jewish Synagogue. The same practice, as we have seen in a former chapter, was adopted in the early Church,

as soon as Christians began to erect houses for public worship. This official and conspicuous accommodation for the Elders is constantly provided in the Dutch Reformed Church, in this country, and it is believed by most of the Reformed Churches on the continent of Europe. It is adapted to keep the congregation habitually reminded who their Elders are, and of their official authority; and also to remind the Elders themselves, of their functions and duties. And it furnishes a convenient opportunity for the Pastor to consult them on any question which may occur, either before he ascends the Pulpit, or at the close of the service.²

Unfortunately this practice has been abandoned in most Reformed Churches and even in some of our own Protestant Reformed Churches. For the reasons Dr. Miller cited the Elders ought to sit together.

Another practice which ought to be reinstated in the churches is that of the vice-president of the Consistory shaking the minister's hand before the latter goes to the pulpit.³ This is a reminder to the minister, the elders, and the congregation that the consistory is responsible for the preaching of the Word. For the same reason it is to be regretted that in some of our congregations the Elders go to the back of the sanctuary to shake the minister's hand after the service. The shaking of the minister's hand after the service is an indication of the fact that the Elders approve of what was just preached. The congregation ought to be able to see this. □

¹Samuel Miller, *The Ruling Elder* (Dallas, Texas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1987), pp. 211-214.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 214-215.

³There are, to the best of my knowledge, only two Protestant Reformed congregations where this practice has been retained, First PRC in Edmonton and Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, both in Alberta, Canada.

Hating the Haters of God (2)

We are living in the new dispensation. There is a difference between the old and the new dispensation. By this we do not mean that God has changed in His holy attitude toward the wicked. Neither do we mean that our attitude must be essentially different from David's attitude in the old dispensation. There is, however, a difference. By the command of God in the old dispensation the cause of the Lord's kingdom was advanced by the sword. God commanded David to fight the many wars and battles he was engaged in. He was commanded to exterminate with the sword those who were under the curse of God. This was the nature of the old dispensation, for reasons we cannot detail in this short article.

The kingdom of Christ is spiritual. The cause of the kingdom of Christ in the New Testament age is not advanced by carnal means but by spiritual means, the means of the preaching of the Word. The cause of the church of Jesus Christ is not advanced by the sword power in the new dispensation. Those in the history of the church who tried to do this were wrong. The crusades of the Middle Ages were terribly wrong for that reason. The rebellion of the Anabaptists at the time of the Reformation was rightly severely condemned by the leaders of the Reformation. Such misguided efforts wreaked havoc in the church and did great harm to the cause of Christ. Today, when there are those who

stir up rebellion against the state and promote physical violence in the name of Christ they must be severely condemned. This is true even for those who stand for a cause as serious as anti-abortion. In other words, our hatred for the enemies of God does not justify our destroying the houses of the wicked, ruining their property and business, or, even worse, taking their life in the name of God. All those who do this are condemned by God's Word.

In the New Testament age we show that we hate the haters of God by condemning their evil walk and evil confession and their blasphemy against God. We call them to repentance and if, after being often admonished, they continue in their sin and rebellion, we separate ourselves from them, and, as David did, we count them our enemies. We count them our enemies because they have shown themselves to be enemies of God. With the grace of God in our heart, with love for God in our hearts, we count impenitent wicked men as our enemies.

We must identify the enemies of God by their wicked deeds, by their opposition against the Word of God, by their blasphemy against the name of God. This is the same way in which David identified them, as is clear from the passage quoted from Psalm 139. This is not being wrongly judgmental. The Bible says, by their fruits ye shall know them. The enemies of God are those who openly show that they hate God. They hate the good and holy commandments of God. They laugh at the law of God and make sin their entertainment. They deny that there is a God in heaven and mock His

judgments. They hate the name of God, for they blaspheme His name. They hate the truth of God. They contradict it. They seek to displace the truth of God with the proud opinions of men. They promote doctrines that are contrary to the testimony of the infallible Scriptures. Adulterers, whoremongers, murderers, liars, and thieves, as long as they continue in these sins, are enemies of God. False prophets, heretics in the church, are enemies of God. Those who today in the church are working to overthrow the fundamental doctrines of God's Word and to replace them with false doctrines of men, these are the enemies of God.

There is a difference between one man and another, however. God's people are sometimes led astray for a time by false teachers in the church. They are deceived. They certainly have some responsibility for this. They are often led astray because of their own ignorance. They have not armed themselves with the Word of God. They have stayed in apostate churches that they should have left long ago. They have become ignorant of the truth, and in their ignorance they are as children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and by the sleight and cunning craftiness of men who lie in wait to deceive. Not all of these are enemies of God. Some of these must be pitied. They must be instructed in the truth. We must exercise great patience and love toward them to restore them to the truth of God. We must pray for them that God will bring them back to the truth of His Word.

Different from these, however,

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are avowed heretics and those who continue to live in brazen and proud wickedness before God even after their errors have been clearly shown to them from the Word of God and they have been warned and admonished many times.

You want a few examples of this? We certainly count the wicked movie stars of Hollywood and Broadway who promote their evil philosophy of life of fornication and adultery, and blasphemy against God through the media in our day, to be enemies of God. We do not say that these promote good art and American culture which we need to learn to appreciate, just cringing a little when they speak blasphemy and when the adultery they portray goes beyond our sense of decency. We do not entertain ourselves by watching their evil productions. We hate them. Because of our love for God we want nothing to do with the flood of evil that they bring into our society. We do everything in our power to guard our children and youth from the drug and violent culture of murder and hatred they pro-

mote. We count them our enemies because they are God's enemies.

The church today is overrun by heretics. Men are tolerated in the church at large who are working to overthrow the truths of the infallibility of the Word of God, teaching evolutionism and feminism and all sorts of other evil doctrines. The glorious truths of God's sovereign grace are being contradicted and replaced with humanistic doctrines that deny the glory of God. The foundations of many churches are being destroyed by these false preachers. God's people are left languishing, groping in darkness because the Word of God is not being preached and hirelings are in control of the church of God in many places. It is falsely imagined to be a mark of love to tolerate such evil men in the church year after year. Meanwhile they are allowed to spread their evil teachings and lead many astray and wreck the church. Churches refuse to discipline such evil men because it is claimed that this is not the loving thing to do. The holy apostle of the Lord dared to call anyone who did not bring the

true gospel of Jesus Christ accursed, even if he were an angel from heaven. Let him be anathema. Who dares to say that in the name of Christ anymore today?

The church today needs the true love for God that David had, a love that made him hate the haters of God and count them his enemies. The corollary of such love is genuine concern for the welfare of God's people, zeal for the truth of God's Word, and love for the honor and glory of the name of God. May God give us such men of God, men after God's own heart like David and, most importantly, like Him that is greater than David, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We join David in another Psalm. "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice" (Ps. 68:1-3). □

Chapter 5

Paradise the First (cont.)

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (1)

Concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil we read, first of all, in Genesis 2:9: "And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree

of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil." Further, in Genesis 2:16, 17 we read of the so-called probationary command: "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

First of all, we must emphasize

that this tree was a real tree. It was that, or it was nothing. It was perceptible to the senses, or it had no reality whatsoever; and, in the latter case, then all that stands connected with that tree — the command of the Lord God, the threatened penalty of death, the temptation, the eating of that tree, and sin — all these have, then, no reality. Besides, the tree of life, which is mentioned in the same breath with this tree, and all the other trees concerning which

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we read specifically that the Lord God made them to grow out of the ground and that they were pleasant to the sight and good for food — these also, then, would have no reality. You see, every presentation that would deny in one way or another the reality of these trees is a Bible-contradicting and faith-destroying presentation. The tree of knowledge of good and evil, unique though it was, was a real tree.

As to the place of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we may note that the Bible is not definite. Some have said that also this tree was in the midst of the garden. Others have insisted that it could not have been in the midst of the garden because this would be excluded by the very idea of this tree in relation to the significance of that part of the garden as the place of God's fellowship with man. We may note that Genesis 2:9 places the tree of life in the midst of the garden, but does not specifically locate the tree of the knowledge of good and evil there. And while Eve, in Genesis 3:3, speaks of this tree as being in the midst of the garden, this can hardly be regarded as conclusive. Suffice it to say that this unique tree was in the garden, that is, right in man's very home. The point is that this tree, and the Word of God attached to it, constituted an essential element in man's life in Paradise the First.

Moreover, it is also evident that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was very closely related to the tree of life — but related in significance and purpose by way of contrast. Not only is the close relationship between the two evident from the fact that they are mentioned together in Genesis 2:9 as the two special trees in the garden, in distinction from all the other trees which the Lord God caused to grow there; but this is plain especially from the fact that only in the way of obedience, that is, in the way of not eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, was the way to the tree of life open for man. This tree,

therefore, is in a way the very opposite, the antithesis, of the tree of life.

We may ask: wherein did the peculiar character of this unique tree consist?

On the one hand, it was a good tree in itself. This we must bear in mind. That tree was not as such a bad tree, but a good tree. It was a creature of God's hand: the Lord God caused it to grow from the ground even as He made all the trees of the garden to grow out of the ground. Even as in all the trees of the garden God proffered the fruit of the earth to man, so also in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Whatever the nature of the fruit of that tree may have been, the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a fruit tree; like the other trees, that tree was, in itself, pleasant to the sight and good for food. It was not, as a tree, an ugly tree. Nor was it, as a tree, a poison tree. This we must keep in mind, lest we fall into the error, in connection with the history and meaning of the Fall, that sin consists in things — mere natural, physical, material things as such. Nor is death a mere natural process. That tree as such was not a poison tree, a death-dealing tree, as though the eating and digesting and assimilation of its fruit would have disastrous and fatal effects of one kind or another upon man's physical existence. It was not like a bottle of medicine which you may have in your home, on which you may find the insignia of a skull and crossbones and the words, "poison if taken internally." Not at all! That tree was in itself a perfectly good fruit tree, pleasant to the sight and good for food, and proffering to Adam the fruit of the ground out of which the Lord God made it grow.

Yet, on the other hand, the Lord forbids Adam to eat of this tree. For thus we read in Genesis 2:16, 17. Hence, in that tree in itself was presented to Adam the fruit of the ground; and, at the same time, the Lord attached His commandment to that tree, forbidding Adam to eat of

it. Just as in all the trees, so in this tree the fruit of the ground, on which Adam's earthly existence was physically dependent, was offered to him. But unlike any other tree, this tree represented a divine prohibition.

Herein lies undoubtedly the key to the correct interpretation of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In distinction from the tree of life, it is prohibitive. For Adam the blessing of that tree of life lay in his freely partaking of it; but the blessing of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil lay in his freely abstaining from it.

The question is: why?

The answer is that the tree of knowledge of good and evil represents antithetically a great, a fundamental principle of man's existence, a determinative principle, a life-and-death principle. It is a principle which held true in Paradise, in the original state of righteousness. It is a principle which remains true even when man has fallen and the abiding truth of which he is made to taste by bitter experience. It is a principle which underlies the gospel of grace as well, and the truth of which becomes the glad experience and willing confession of God's people as they are saved in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What is that all-important principle of man's existence?

It was announced to the children of Israel in the plains of Moab as they were about to enter the land of promise, when the Lord through Moses reminded them of all His wonder-provisions for them while they were in the wilderness on the way to the land of Canaan. For thus we read in Deuteronomy 8:2, 3: "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might

make thee know (and here is the principle I referred to — HCH) that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." So fundamental, so abiding is this principle, that when 4,000 years later the last Adam appears and, at the very beginning of His public ministry, is confronted by the devil and his temptations, He cites it in answer to the temptation to command the stones to be made bread: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). The devil said in the wilderness: "Eat!" The last Adam, the Son of God in the flesh, replied: "Eating is not all of life! Man shall live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

This was the principle of man's existence from the very beginning, and it was embodied and represented in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree whose fruit Adam was prohibited to eat.

What does that principle mean?

It does not mean, as it is so often interpreted and as seems to be the assumption when it is frequently used in prayers preceding mealtime, that bread in itself does not feed man, nourish his physical existence, but that God's Word must bless it in order to make that bread nourishing. This idea is rather superficial, shallow; and it possibly even contains an element of superstition. For the fact of the matter is that when a profane man, an unbeliever, eats his bread (and his pie and his cake, besides), he wipes his mouth and gets up from his meal without ever thinking of God and His Word. But that man is nourished physically by the bread that he eats just as well as is the child of God who bows his head with the prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," before he takes a bite of food. Nor is this explanation in

harmony with the context in Deuteronomy, which certainly emphasizes that the Lord our God can make man live, if He pleases to do so, without the ordinary means of subsistence. Moreover, it is rather in conflict, too, with the use which our Savior makes of these words.

Nor is the meaning of this principle merely this, that man's natural existence is always sustained, not by things, but by the providential Word of God. In that case, the meaning would be that wheat and rain and sunshine are but one Word of God, and the manna which Israel received in the wilderness is another Word of God, the purpose of which was to teach that we must learn to see the Word of God in all things and to trust in God instead of in things as such. Now this is, of course, true in itself and as far as it goes. But this is not the final truth of this principle, as is again evident from our Lord and Savior's application of this passage in answer to the devil's temptation.

This deep, abiding principle means, rather, that man's life is such that it cannot be sustained by bread, by mere earthly bread. Indeed, man is earthy. He is taken from the earth. There is an earthy aspect to his existence. If that earthy side were all of man's existence, then mere bread, the mere fruit of the ground, would be sufficient to sustain him. Thus it is for a horse or a cow: all they need is the fruit of the ground. But thus it is not with man, who was made after God's image and who therefore stands related to God. Because the one man, the one living soul, has not only that earthy aspect to his existence, but also that other, spiritual side, he needs more than bread. For man, life, true life, consists in fellowship with God. To know God and His will, to love God and have fellowship with Him — that is life, true life, for man. To be directed by the Word of God and to obey in love, and thus to hear the

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Word of God's favor — that is life for man. Man cannot live by bread alone. His life must be sustained by God's blessing, by the Word of His grace.

This was the principle that was expressed in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That tree offers bread to Adam, good bread, prepared from the earth. And yet: it offers bread not to eat! Instead comes the Word of God, commanding him that, while he may freely eat of every tree, from this one tree he must abstain, and thus directing his life in the way of obedience to God. By abstaining from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam would exercise that other, that higher, spiritual side of his life: he would obey in loving friendship and service of the Lord his God, and thus truly live.

All of this, we must remember, is significant with respect to the fall and with respect to salvation. For it is this principle that man denied in Paradise when he fell. He chose the fruit of the ground, mere earthly bread, apart from God and His Word; and he died. It is this principle that the natural man has forgotten and denied ever since. He is by nature always prone to seek the things that are below, mere earthly things, as if he could live by them. It is in this light, too, that we can understand the true significance of Christ's application of the words from Deuteronomy at the occasion of His temptation by the devil. The choice for Him was: bread or God's fellowship in the way of obedience. That choice He confronted as the last Adam, the Mediator of His elect people. He chose the way of God's fellowship, the way of obedience, all the way to the bitter and shameful death of the cross, in order that all His redeemed people in Him might, for the sake of His perfect obedience, have the right to and the enjoyment of God's fellowship forever, through faith in His Name and in the way of covenant obedience.

□

John 6:60-71

“Will Ye Also Go Away?”

Judging on the basis of contemporary evangelism, Jesus was an utter failure in His sermon on the Bread of Life. When He began He had the crowds with Him, but by His preaching, Jesus “turned them off.” Because of the words He spoke about the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and especially because of His insistence on the truth of sovereign grace in election and reprobation, many of those who had before followed Him went away.

This rejection has continued ever since. Preach a Jesus who will bring about human brotherhood, who works miracles and will create a kingdom of peace and prosperity, who says that man has some ability to save himself, and you will pack football stadiums. But preach Christ crucified and raised, who draws His own to Himself, who is the sovereign Redeemer of totally depraved sinners given to Him of His Father’s election, and many will walk no more with Him. It is still at this same point, namely sovereign predestination and particular redemption, that Jesus is rejected today.

But, the Lord makes this personal. Do we, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, follow Him because of who and what He is, or do we follow Him for the same reason many of the “disciples” had for following Him in that day? The question of Jesus is: “Will ye also go away?” Do you want Me, the Christ of God, the Bread of everlasting life, the Christ of the cross, the Christ of sov-

ereign grace who saves those who are dead sinners given to him only by the grace of God?

Peter’s confession is spoken in the behalf of all those who are born not of the flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, but who are born of the will of God. Jesus’ words to us are eternal life. They are the end of all our sorrow, fear, and trouble. And we believe, and always will believe, that He is God’s anointed Son and our Savior.

We learn then that the saving grace of God takes place through the words of Christ. The words of Christ spoken that day only hardened the ungodly and unbelieving and they walked no more with Him. To the saved those words were the power and wisdom of God unto salvation. Christ is a sharp two-edged sword, and so are His words. It is by the wonderful love and grace of God that they are to us our peace, hope, and solid comfort.

Outline

1. The notice that many are offended at Christ’s words (vv. 60-65).
 - a. They find it a “hard saying” (v. 60).
 - b. Christ rebukes them (vv. 61-63).
 - c. Christ explains why they do not believe His words (vv. 64, 65).
2. Many disciples walk no more with Him (v. 66).
3. Christ’s question to the twelve (vv. 67-71).
 - a. The question (v. 67).
 - b. Peter’s answer (vv. 68, 69).
 - c. Christ answers their confession by telling them that even one of the twelve is a devil (vv. 70, 71).

Questions:

1. Verse 60. Exactly what was the “hard” saying which they could not hear? What was the point at which

He was rejected? How is this also true today?

2. Verse 62. In what sense is the ascension of Christ an even harder thing for unbelievers to accept than what Jesus had been saying to them about eating and drinking His broken body and blood?

3. Explain the importance of verse 63. How does it shed light over all He had been saying? What does it teach us about the Holy Spirit?

4. How does Jesus explain the reason for their unbelief? (vv. 64, 65). Is unbelief the cause of reprobation, or is reprobation the cause of unbelief? See Articles 6 and 15, First Head, Canons of Dordt.

5. In what sense were those that now left Him “disciples.” What does it mean that they walked no more with Him? What is it to walk with Him?

6. Why does Jesus ask at this point the question of verse 67? Is this a question He asks of us today? How does He do so?

7. Discuss Peter’s confession. Compare it with the one given in Matthew 16:16-18.

a. What does it mean that Jesus has the words of eternal life?

b. Why is it vital that we know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God?

c. How do we explain the difference between Peter and the many who walked no more with Him?

8. Is this our confession? Can we know that we will never go away from Jesus? Can we have the absolute assurance of salvation?

9. Why does Jesus announce *at this time and moment* that one of them was a devil? How is it related to Peter’s confession?

10. Why was Judas chosen to be one of the twelve? □

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Further Debate on Children in the Covenant

A recent issue of *Christian Renewal* contained a second response of Rev. Jelle Tuininga to my recent articles concerning children in the covenant, which I believe brings out the differences between us and the Liberated Churches better than I alone can describe it. Accordingly, I here present both his letter and my answer.

The Rev. Woudenberg has favored me with a gracious response, and I would like one more opportunity to reply to him.

1. History: Just what happened between Schilder and Hoeksema, and what caused what has been interpreted differently. Without doubt, at first, Schilder was more optimistic about cooperation with the Protestant Reformed than later when the facts became more plain to him. In this connection Schilder writes about his "considerable amazement" that Hoeksema would draw up a "Declaration" which would be binding on all the churches. Once Schilder saw the state of affairs, he wrote "The Stocking is Finished."

2. About "apocryphal anecdotes," I was relying on my memory of things I read years ago, as a student. I read the *Standard Bearer* fairly regularly, and also read a book by Hoeksema on the history of the PRs. Somewhere along the line I read that statement attributed to Hoeksema. Perhaps someone else wrote that Hoeksema had said it. In any case I didn't just suck it out of my thumb. Whether or not he actually said it, it would be completely consistent with the PR view on infant baptism. And

unless my memory completely escapes me, I was certain I had read that the Form for Baptism of Infants was used by the PRs with some significant changes from the one used in the CRC. If I am mistaken about that, I will gladly admit it. (I still hope to check this out in due time.)

3. It is sad that PR brothers construe every mention of "condition" as Arminian. Schilder writes: "For I know what the Arminian position is, and I also know that one can set the entire Declaration aside without falling into Arminianism. On the contrary, in order to hang on to sound, fundamental Reformed ideas, we affirm the promise of God is not prediction and is not realized without involving our responsibility. And faith is never a condition in the Arminian sense, any more than the condition of which the preface to the *Statenvertaling* speaks is an Arminian notion." The language of the *Statenvertaling*, says Schilder, "have not one drop of Arminian blood in their veins." A.C. DeJong talks about the "unreal dilemma" of either conditional or unconditional. He says we need both terms, and I believe he is right. God alone establishes the covenant, but in the outworking of the covenant man's whole-soul belief-ful commitment is necessary. In that sense it is conditional. "In all covenants there are contained two parts." Feenstra, in talking about children who later manifest themselves as unbelievers, says, "In any case, we may not say that the baptism which they received appears to have been worthless. From God's side, this baptism, administered according to His Word, was earnestly meant as a sealing of His grace. And it renders even more grave the guilt of those who reject such great grace in indifference."

Arminianism and hyper-Calvin-

ism are two horns of a dilemma and neither one is right. Baptism will either be a blessing or a curse. Just as the same water of the flood drowned the world and saved Noah, so baptism either "drowns" us or saves us (1 Pet. 3: 20, 21). But it is valid for every single child of believing parents that comes to the baptismal font. It will come to count against you or it will give you great blessing. It is never neutral. "And this is just saying that the comfort and confidence of God's covenant mercy may never be severed from covenant keeping" (Murray, *Christian Baptism*). Baptism is never an "announcement" that God will save all his elect, but in baptism God compels us to believe (Holwerda). The PRs don't really want to speak of covenant breaking, but passages such as Luke 12:47-48, Rom. 6:9ff, 1 Cor. 10:1-5, Heb. 6:4-6, 10:26-30, 12:16-17 cannot be understood apart from covenant breaking. Says Murray: "Without question the blessing of the covenant and the relation which the covenant entails cannot be enjoyed or maintained apart from the fulfillment of certain conditions on the part of the beneficiaries."

The continued enjoyment of this grace and of the relation established are meaningless. Grace bestowed implies a subject and reception on the part of that subject.

Woudenberg wants to uphold the principle of non-contradiction, and says that I violate logical consistency. Well, first of all, our logic is not the criterion for what the Bible says. Our logic must be subservient to God's Word. But how does Woudenberg escape the same logical inconsistency with these statements: "to assure us by this divine pledge that we are spiritually cleansed from our sins as really as we are outwardly washed with water" (LD 27, A. 73); "We thank and praise Thee that Thou hast forgiv-

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en us and our children all our sins" (prayer with baptism). How is this logically consistent with the fact that not all baptized children are saved? What I'm saying is that Woudenberg can no more escape what he calls "contradiction" on the part of God than I can.

Another question for Woudenberg: if baptism is only valid for the elect children, and since we don't know who is elect, does that not invalidate every baptism? Where is the certainty of God's promises? All we can say is: I hope it is for you, I trust it is, but I don't know for sure. What kind of comfort is that? Anthony Hoekema says: "If one thinks of the covenant of grace as established only with the elect, the character of the covenant of grace is totally changed, for then there can be no possibility of covenant breaking. Further, the covenant of grace is then deprived of its objectivity, since one cannot know whether one's children are covenant members or not."

Finally, a helpful quote from Kline from, *His Oath Consigned*: "When covenant is no longer identified with election and guaranteed blessing, and especially when the baptismal sign of incorporation into the covenant is understood as pointing without prejudice to a judgment ordeal with the potential of both curse and blessing, certain questions that have long ensnared the polemics of infant baptism are eliminated from consideration as no longer relevant. Within the framework of the approach to covenant and baptism being developed here, the practice of infant baptism would clearly have no presumption that the children of believers are Christians by birth. No theory of presumptive regeneration as the basis for the administration of baptism of infants could be reared on the foundation of law covenant. Neither, on our approach, would the baptism of infants of believers signify a divine promise that they were destined to secure the blessings of the covenant sooner or later. Hence, there would be no need to theorize how the baptism of such might serve as a means of conveying to them the grace supposedly sealed to them by the rite, much less to apologize for the numerous

cases in which that grace never is conveyed."

J. Tuininga
Lethbridge, Alberta

I appreciate Rev. Tuininga's willingness to acknowledge that his understanding of Protestant Reformed history has been based more on rumor and vague memory than established fact, and even more his expressed intent to investigate these matters further; for I am sure, if he does, he will find that he has misconstrued our teachings even more.

To begin with, our Declaration of Principles was not, as he intimates, a confession-like statement "binding on all the churches," but rather an honest effort to give an answer to those who were asking whether Prof. Holwerda was correct in his claim that we did not have a distinct covenant view of our own and would be willing to receive the Liberated view into our churches. It was not that all who would join our churches were required to consider this "binding on" their consciences, but we did want it known or "declared" for their sakes that we did indeed have our own covenant view, and could not accept the Liberated view as it implicitly countenanced a common grace view such as we had rejected at the origin of our denomination (which Rev. Tuininga confirms to be so when he argues that baptism is a "sealing of grace" to some who in the end prove not to be children of God — in contradiction, of course, to the Canons' teaching that grace is irresistible).

And so is it when Tuininga writes, "PR brothers construe every mention of 'condition' as Arminian." This too is not true, for both the Hebrew and Greek grammar of Scripture contain many conditional constructions, with which any responsible student of Scripture must deal. Our problem is with the way this is done, as comes out as Tuininga goes on.

To begin with, there is his simple identification of our covenant view with election, as though we

maintain that children enter covenant with God simply because they are elect. We do not deny the importance of election — no Reformed believer should — but no one gains covenant fellowship with God simply by being elect. That comes, as Paul points out, only through faith, Galatians 3:7: "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Such faith, of course, is given only to the elect (Eph. 2:8), and not to the reprobate (John 10:26); but it is also quite possible for an elect child of believers to be baptized and raised in the faith, and yet not come to conversion and faith, so as to know the reality of covenant fellowship with God, until later in life (Luke 15:17). Covenant life comes only through faith in Christ (Acts 4:12).

Because Tuininga does not see this, he ends up with his endless dilemmas, as with the Baptism Form when it says God "has forgiven us and our children all our sins." There really is no reason to assume that Olevianus, Datheen, and vander Heyden, who worked in turn at compiling this form as finally adopted by Dort, had in mind with "our children" anything other than what Paul did when he identified covenant children as those who follow in the faith of Abraham. This is borne out by the fact that this statement is followed by a petition to God to apply this baptism personally to the children being baptized. The inner application of baptism is not something that can be presumed or taken for granted; God must bring it to pass when and in whom He wills. The external sign does not bring anyone automatically into the covenant, as Tuininga wants to think. It only points the child to the truth that salvation is only through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:11), and only those who believe, as some do very early in life, come through this faith to know in personal experience what covenant life is really about.

So also regarding those "covenant-breaker" texts in which Tuininga finds so much contradic-

tion, as a close look at the leading text on this (Gen. 17:14) makes clear. Breaking the covenant is not to be in it and then out of it — contradicting the Canons' view of perseverance — but to fail to apply the covenant sign, and the truth sealed by it, to one's children, so that the continuity of the covenant between the generations is broken and not carried on.

Still, most basic in all this is Tuininga's attraction to irrationality — via Kierkegaard, Barth, and Berkouwer, etc., it would seem — and its rejection of logic. He is right when he says human "logic is not the criterion for what the Bible says" — after all, he is the one who identifies Aristotle's logic with common grace, not we. That, however, does not eliminate the fact that there was logic in the Bible long before Aristotle ever turned a syllogism. It was there in God's creation of language. Properly used, every word, phrase, sentence, and punctuation mark is a logical statement devised to express one thought, not several, and certainly not one that can be contradicted by another (while, was it not Satan who first suggested that a contradiction can be valid when he proposed to Eve, in Genesis 3:5, "ye shall be as gods"?). So Moses laid down the first principle of all

logic in Numbers 23:19, "God is not a man, that he should lie ... hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" God's Word has no place for contradiction. And John, when putting forth the first principle of New Testament theology, wrote, John 1:1, "In the beginning was the *logos*" — the Greek word from which the word "logic" derives, whose equivalent is not the English "word," or the Dutch *woord*, but the Latin *ratio*, or what we might call *reason* (and not far removed from the *wisdom* of Proverbs 8:12,22-31). Logic was there *in the beginning*, at the creation of the world (John 1:3); and are we now to disallow it?

The result of doing so comes out in Tuininga's repeated struggles with contradictions in the Reformed faith, so that he concludes that to be consistently Calvinistic is "hyper-," while to be consistently Arminian is unacceptable as well, so that we must hold to them both in spite of their essential contradiction. But it will not work; and I wish Rev. Tuininga would see this. It was, after all, this kind of thinking that indeed allowed the *Gereformeerde Kerken* to maintain common grace and presupposed regeneration, but which also led them on to the denial of the inerrancy of Scripture and

which brought about that terrible spiritual demise now taking place in their midst, along which path the CRC is quickly following. They no doubt continue to sprinkle their babies, presuming them, I suppose, to be regenerated and recipients of covenant promises, but at the same time the covenant is being broken through their failure to pass on to these children the true meaning of this sign, namely, the truth of salvation alone by grace and through faith in Christ.

We can only urge Rev. Tuininga, and those who follow him, to come back to the time-honored way of the fathers who, comparing Scripture with Scripture, sought out those non-contradictory truths from which our confessions were formed; by which alone those confessions can be maintained; and through which we, as believers of a common faith, work together to restore what has been so severely compromised. And for that purpose, may I suggest that some serious consideration be given to the work of Herman Hoeksema, who loved the Scriptures and spent his life seeking their harmony and preaching it to his congregation and who was not — as I can assure you, as one who knew him personally — the ogre so many seem driven to try to make him out to have been. □

Book Reviews

Secession, Doleantie, and Union: 1834-1892, by Hendrik Bouma. Tr. Theodore Plantinga. Appendixes by Theodore Plantinga and Peter Y. De Jong. Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada/Pella, Iowa, U.S.A.: Inheritance Publications, 1995. 302pp. \$13.90 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

The availability in English of a reliable account of the union efforts of the *Afscheiding* ("secession") and *Doleantie* ("grieving") churches from 1886-1892 is noteworthy. This history of the contact and negotiations between the two Reformed bodies in the Netherlands that culminated

in the united synod in Amsterdam on June 17, 1892 is informative, instructive, and moving.

Yes, moving. For Christian Reformed, Protestant Reformed, Canadian Reformed, Free Reformed, and other readers in North America, this is family history. And the family was Christ's church, acted upon and acting by the catholic impulse of the Word and Spirit of her Head.

At the third provisional synod of the *Doleantie* churches in The Hague, after agreement had been reached on vital issues of union and after powerful speeches by Abraham Kuyper, president of the *Doleantie*

synod, and by J. vanAndel, deputy of the *Afscheiding* churches, van Andel extended the right hand of fellowship to Kuyper. A spontaneous "Amen" sounded from the packed West Church. The "Amen" "sealed the bond between the two groups of churches which had been established by God" (p. 177).

Present at the united synod in 1892 was the aged Simon vanVelzen, last living "father of the Secession of 1834." Too old to speak to the huge assembly (he had to be carried into the church building), vanVelzen had his son tell the first general synod of the Reformed Churches in the

Netherlands (new name of the united churches) and the throng of saints that the union was "the 'fulfilment of the great wish of his heart' ... that all God's children might be able to live together as brothers" (pp. 210, 211).

The churches wrestled with several important issues as they sought each other in the truth. One was the proper principle of church reformation. The *Afscheiding* churches insisted that the principle was separation from the apostate State church as a false church.

Another principle was the basis of union. The *Afscheiding* churches urged union "on the basis of unity in the Reformed confessions and in Reformed church government." Under Kuyper's influence, the *Doleantie* churches had put forward an "Act of Union" that was speculative and philosophical. The *Afscheiding* position prevailed.

Yet another point of difference, not settled at the union of 1892, concerned the place of theological training in the church. The *Doleantie* argued for theological training in a university (the Free) separate from church control. The *Afscheiding* contended for the seminary as the school of the churches.

One of the special virtues, and benefits, of this history is its use of synodical decisions and official reports in relating developments.

It is annoying that periodically the author, evidently a minister of the "Liberated" Reformed Churches (no information on the author is given), grinds an axe for these churches (see pp. 58, 104, 105).

The appendixes by Theodore Plantinga and Peter Y. De Jong are appropriate and valuable. Plantinga briefly considers the churches that stayed out of the union of 1892, the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Free Reformed Churches in North America. Dr. De Jong gives historical background of the union in the events of the Secession of 1834 and of the *Doleantie* of 1886, including the apostasy in the Netherlands before 1834.

Regrettable is De Jong's passing, but deliberate, criticism of Simon vanVelzen, a leading minister of the Secession of 1834: "... whose zeal for the Reformed faith was not always exercised without blemish" (p. 248). vanVelzen was the soundest, firmest, and most fiery of the ministers of the Secession. It is this kind of advocacy of the Reformed faith, particularly the sovereignty of grace, and this kind of Reformed minister that make the agony of a Secession or a *Doleantie* every 50 or 100 years unnecessary.

The Reformed reader who enters into the spirit of this history will close the book with a sense of overwhelming grief at the present spiritual condition of the churches of the history — the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN). In 100 years this denomination of van Velzen and Kuyper has become the churches of Harry Kuitert, who praises doubt of all doctrines, and of the official approval of homosexuality, not only the depraved nature but also the vile practice.

Sad, inexpressibly sad.

"Lord Jesus Christ, preserve and gather — in the unity of the truth — Thy little flock!" ■

Saved By Grace: A Study of the Five Points of Calvinism, by Ronald Cammenga and Ronald Hanko. Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1995. 257pp. \$10.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Pastor Arie denHartog.]

The Reformed believer never tires of the study of the doctrines of grace. He feels constrained out of love for God to testify of these great truths before the world. He believes that these glorious doctrines stand at the very heart of the gospel. They are not mere minor truths which if one denies he can still be called a credible Christian. They are foundational truths to the whole of the gospel. For this reason we rejoice at the publication of another treatise on these great doctrines by two of my colleagues in the ministry.

Many books have been written on the doctrines of grace, and one might therefore say that there is no need of yet another. The justification for such a treatise however is first of all what we have stated above. Also, over the years, even in the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches, there have arisen new interpretations of these doctrines that have, we believe, been serious compromises, not the least of these being the propagation of the false teachings of common grace and the well-meant offer of the gospel.

The excellence of this new book *Saved By Grace* is first of all that it is replete with scriptural quotations. The authors succeed in demonstrating beyond doubt that the doctrines of grace are indeed the teaching of the Scriptures. These doctrines are taught throughout the Scriptures and are central to them. In many instances brief expositions are given to explain specifically what the cited passages have to say about the doctrines of grace. If I would have any criticism of these parts of the book, I would only say that some of the more difficult passages could have received more detailed treatment. I realize however that one is always constrained to be as concise as possible in order not to discourage the average reader.

A second excellent feature of this book is that it begins with a chapter on the sovereignty of God. The authors show in this chapter how the truth of the absolute sovereignty of God underlies all the doctrines of grace. The doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty divides between true and false religion.

The God Whom we must know is a sovereign God. Knowledge of God begins with the affirmation of faith that God is and that God is sovereign. Since God is, He is Sovereign. If He is God, He must also be a sovereign God. If God is not sovereign, the inescapable implication is that He is not God. This is the great issue that divides true religion from false religion! This is the great issue that separates the true church of Jesus Christ in the

world from the false apostate church! This is the issue that distinguishes faith from unbelief: the sovereignty of God!

The excellence of this book in the third place is that it sets forth the doctrines of grace boldly and unashamedly. It makes no compromise of these doctrines at the points where they are offensive to the natural man and even to modern-day Christendom. It boldly maintains double predestination and refutes the commonly defended error of the well-meant offer of the gospel.

Also very helpful is that this book, in connection with each of the five doctrines, answers the commonly-heard objections to the doctrine of the Word of God and the major heresies that over the years have arisen in the church in an attempt to oppose the truth of God. There is a great need always for Christians to remember the heresies of the past in order that we do not fall again into the same errors. The right under-

standing of the truth comes through its clear distinction from false doctrine. The condemnation of false doctrine, as unpopular as this might be in today's church world, is absolutely necessary in defense of the truth.

There are three other features of the book that we greatly appreciate. The first is that each chapter gives a statement of how the particular doctrine of grace being treated relates to the other five. This shows how the doctrines of grace form a glorious unity. One cannot deny the one without also denying the others. There have always been those who claim to be "three point" or "four point" Calvinists. This is, however, an impossibility. All the doctrines of grace are aspects of the one central truth of the sovereignty of God in the salvation of men. Each chapter also includes a short section on the practical significance of the doctrine to the life of the Christian. The right confession and defense of the doctrines of God's Word requires that we see the practical implications

of these doctrines for the faith and life of the child of God. The doctrines of grace are the living truth of God, in which we find our solid comfort and joy, and in which we glory day by day. There is a lengthy appendix to the main body of the book which lists statements from the great Reformed Confessions which relate immediately to the doctrines of grace.

Finally this book is accompanied with a short study guide (\$3.95) to help promote the study of the doctrines of grace in the church.

We commend Pastors Cammenga and Hanko for writing this book. It is our hope and prayer that it may be greatly blessed of the Lord in the church as an aid for God's people in a life-long meditation on the wonders of the amazing grace of God. Also we hope that this book will be useful for Reformed believers in fulfilling their calling to defend and to testify of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the glory of God and the salvation of His people. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Trinity PRC in Houston, TX did some fine-tuning with their two radio broadcasts heard each Sunday over KTEK 1110 AM. Every Sunday at 10 A.M. and again at 1 P.M., Rev. Mahtani, Trinity's pastor, will introduce the message to be given on the Reformed Witness Hour that same day at 4 P.M. Although these two one-minute messages entitled, "Reaching the Nations with the Gospel of Grace" will continue to bring the simple message of the gospel to the listeners in Houston, they will now also serve to promote the R.W.H.

Also related to this fine-tuning, Trinity mailed out in early Decem-

ber, 1,500 brochures advertising these Sunday broadcasts, along with scheduled up-coming Christmas and New Year's church services, Christian S.I.N.D.H.I. special Christmas and New Year's meetings, and a new doctrine class on the Belgic Confession which was to begin meeting the first week in January. This particular class was designed to attract those in the area who were interested in learning more about the doctrine of grace as it is found in the Belgic Confession.

The Evangelism Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, with the support of Hudsonville's Council, sponsored two special church services at the end of last year. Rev. B. Gritters, pastor at Hudsonville, preached two sermons based on II Peter 3:10-14. On Old Year's evening he carefully explained what the sudden return of Jesus will mean for this world, namely that the earth and

its works will be burned up. And then on New Year's morning Rev. Gritters answered the related question, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be?" Before the world ends, how shall we live? These two services were advertised with special ads in the Grand Rapids Press. The Hudsonville congregation was also encouraged to consider inviting friends, family, and neighbors to church for those special services.

Mission Activities

Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the First PRC in Holland, MI, and elder Don VerMeer of the Hull, IA PRC left on January 2 for a month-long visit to Ghana, West Africa. This trip was planned by our churches' Foreign Mission Committee and was intended to make a final determination of the advisability of asking our

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

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Synod to establish Ghana as a mission field. And if it should prove to be advisable, to attempt to determine details of beginning the work there. The FMC was especially eager to send Rev. Bruinsma there because of his experience in Jamaica, where he and his family spent some years as missionary for our churches.

Rev. Bruinsma was to look at the situation in Ghana from a practical point of view. If we were to send a man and his family there sometime in the future, where would they live, and what about school, money, transportation, etc.? In short, Rev. Bruinsma was to look at the situation and try to answer the many problems and questions facing a missionary, with the experience gained from Jamaica. These two men were to spend the month in four different areas, including the capital, Accra, renewing old and making new contacts. They were scheduled to return home on February 1.

Young People's Activities

The Young People of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA sponsored a Christmas Singspiration after their evening service on December 24. This program included several numbers from Hope's choir, as well as special numbers from the young people.

Post high school young people were invited to a special meeting on December 31 at the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. Plans called for a Bible discussion followed by refreshments, as the young people ushered in the new year.

The Y.P.'s Society of the Pella, IA PRC recently donated \$500 towards the cost of padding the pews in their church auditorium.

The Young People of the Edgerton, MN PRC invited not only their own congregation, but the congregations of the Doon and Hull, IA PRCs as well, to a Christmas Singspiration on December 17.

Congregational Activities

On Sunday evening, December 31, the congregation of the Bethel PRC, presently meeting at the Holiday Inn in Itasca, IL, held their service at and with the Peace PRC in Lynwood, IL.

A congregational meeting was called, back in December, at the Byron Center, MI PRC. They not only approved their annual budget that night, but they also approved a proposal to present to Rev. Doug Kuiper, their new pastor, a gift of \$3,500 for furniture and furnishings for the parsonage.

We also send our congratula-

tions to one of our sister churches, the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, who celebrated their 14th anniversary as a church on January 27.

Minister Activities

The Grace PRC in Standale, MI has extended a call to Rev. Dale Kuiper, presently pastor at the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. With Rev. Kuiper on that trio were Revs. Dick and Terpstra.

Rev. C. Terpstra, pastor of the South Holland, IL PRC declined the call he had been extended from the Doon, IA PRC.

Food for Thought

"Every blessing that God confers upon us perishes through our carelessness, if we are not prompt and active in rendering thanks."

— John Calvin □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 25, 1996, our dear parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. HERMAN OPHOFF, celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to our heavenly Father for their enjoyment of a Christian marriage, and for His giving us God-fearing parents who taught us also the fear of the Lord. It is our prayer that God may continue to bless them in the way that lies ahead, and that they may experience His peace which passes all understanding.

- * Steven and Karen Ophoff
Steven Charles
- * Bruce and Rosanne VanSolkema
Tedd, Andrew, Nancy
- * John and Patricia Ophoff
Jessica, Monica

Grand Rapids, Michigan

NOTICE!!

Covenant Christian High School is accepting applications for the Band and Choir positions for the 1996-1997 school year. Those interested should call the school at (616) 453-5048 or write to Agatha Lubbers, Covenant Christian High School, 1401 Ferndale S.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49544.

NOTICE!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet at the Pella Protestant Reformed Church in Pella, IA, on Wednesday, March 6, 1996, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. An officebearers' conference will also be held on Tuesday, March 5, the day preceding Classis. All material for the classical agenda is to be in the hands of the Stated Clerk thirty days before Classis convenes. Delegates who need lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the Clerk of Pella's consistory, using the forms provided for this purpose.

Pastor Steven Key, Stated Clerk