



THE **STANDARD BEARER**

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

When, as children of God, we stand before the revelation of God recorded in the Scriptures, we know that behind our freedom stands God. God is so sovereign in all things, that even through our freedom He is executing and realizing His counsel for us and for all who stand in relation to us. That is an amazing thing. That ought to fill us with awe....

See "God's Providence and Sin" — p. 259

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March 1, 1996

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In This Issue ...

The gratifying article by Mr. James Lanting, "Protestant Reformed Worker Successfully Challenges Sunday Work Assignment," brings up the matter of law in the life of the Christian. Specifically, it brings to the fore the place of the fourth commandment of the law of God in the life of the Reformed believer: Remember the Sabbath Day.

This is an authoritative rule for the thankful life of the child of God today. Our creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, explains that the fourth commandment retains its validity under the new covenant and that its requirement is that redeemed saints observe a day: "the sabbath, that is, ... the day of rest" (Q. 103).

To this, commandments of men must give way, including commandments of employers.

There is one (there are others) who obeyed the fourth commandment, even though doing so cost him, and seemed likely to cost him still more.

The law of our nation still protects the righteous in their Sabbath observance. For this, we must be grateful, as for men who have ability, and willingness, to defend the righteous (rather than the transgressor) with law.

It is apparent from the letter of Rev. Barry Gritters that is part of Lanting's article that there is a Reformed denomination of churches that honors the law of their God. Twice, the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches bore witness to the Lord's Day before the highest officials of the United States. Gritters was right when he wrote, "Every local church of our denomination across the country will discipline and eventually exclude from membership any member who works on Sunday...."

How stark the (unplanned) contrast between the righteousness described in Lanting's article and the conduct of a church as reported in Rev. Gise VanBaren's column, "All Around Us." The grossest Sabbath desecration is made part of the church's activity on Sunday. Lawlessness is baptized to become a means of "evangelism." Lord Christ divides the time, attention, and praise of His people with lords Smith, Sanders, and O'Donnell.

On His Day!

"If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight ... (Is. 58:13, 14).

— DJE



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The Stilling of the Tempest

And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.

And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

But the men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?

Matthew 8:23-27

Jesus had spent the greater part of the day teaching the people in parables near Capernaum. As evening approached, Jesus instructed His disciples to go with Him by boat to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. As they crossed the sea there arose suddenly a great storm which not only frightened the disciples but threatened their very lives!

And Jesus was asleep in the boat.

Responding to the cries of the disciples for help, Jesus arose and rebuked the wind and the storm. Suddenly there was calm.

What a great miracle! The disciples marveled. What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

All of Jesus' miracles served as signs of the great work of salvation

He came to accomplish for the church. In this miracle we are taught how Jesus keeps and preserves His church as she passes through many storms on the sea of life.

As the disciples made their way across the Sea of Galilee by night, a great storm arose.

Such storms were very common on the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is a rather large lake, measuring thirteen by seven miles. The surface of the lake is 60 feet below sea level, making for very hot and humid temperatures, almost a tropical climate. However, the sea is entirely surrounded by mountainous terrain. When the cool air of the mountaintops comes rushing down and hits the humid air of the lake surface, violent storms suddenly erupt.

The disciples found themselves in such a storm. From the various gospel accounts of this incident we learn that there was a violent attack of wind, floods of rain, gigantic waves. And the little ship carrying the disciples and Jesus was quickly filling with water. They were about to perish.

The desperate situation of the disciples is representative of the desperate situation of the church in the world.

We must bear in mind that the small band of disciples on the Sea of Galilee is representative of the church of the New Testament era.

For not only were the disciples part of the church; but their teachings as apostles form the foundation of the church. The NT is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20).

If the disciples are representative of the church of the NT era, then the violent storm that the disciples encountered looks ahead to the spiritual storms the church will have to face.

Humanly speaking, the church has no more chance to weather the spiritual storms that come upon her than did the disciples the natural storm in their little ship on the Sea of Galilee.

The church of Jesus Christ has encountered and will continue to encounter many storms. This is due to the constant attacks of the powers of darkness. The powers of darkness are the devil and his host of fallen angels. They are also the world of the ungodly, who are under the spiritual control of Satan. These evil powers are the enemies of Christ and therefore also of His church. And they constantly attack the church, seeking her destruction. These attacks come in various forms: false doctrines, persecution, allurements to sin and worldliness. As a result, the church is buffeted by one storm after another.

These repeated storms threaten to sink the little ship of the church. For the powers of darkness are overwhelming in numbers, in resources, in experience. And the church has no spiritual strength of her own. Humanly speaking, the church has no more chance to weather the spiritual storms that come upon her than did the disciples the natural storm

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in their little ship on the Sea of Galilee.

In desperation the disciples called out to Jesus for help.

Jesus was sleeping. How could He be sleeping through all this? Perhaps He was exhausted from the many hours He had spent ministering to God's people. Certainly His sleep showed a complete trust in His heavenly Father to care for Him and the disciples. May our sleep be reflective of this.

When it became apparent that the ship would founder, the disciples awoke Jesus, crying, "Lord, save us; we perish."

Jesus arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

What a great miracle! Certainly this was no natural occurrence. It is true that the storms that rage on the Sea of Galilee subside as quickly as they come. But Jesus' word brought instant calm. One moment the seas were crashing in upon the disciple's boat. At Jesus' word there was instant calm.

In response the disciples marveled. What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him! This is a rhetorical question in which they express that Jesus is no ordinary man. Look, even the winds and the sea obey Him!

This miracle serves as a sign of how Jesus saves the church as she encounters the storms of life during the New Testament era.

From this miracle we learn, first, that Jesus has power over all things. He certainly has power over the wind and the sea. He demonstrated that through this miracle. And what is more powerful than the wind and the sea? Nothing stands before the onslaught of these two powers. If Jesus has power over the wind and sea, He has power over all things.

This power Jesus has as the Son of man. The disciples asked, "What

manner of man is this?" The answer is that He is the Son of man. This is the term Jesus used most often in referring to Himself. It is a term with a very definite meaning. It identifies Jesus as being human, the son of man(kind). But it also points to the humiliation and shame Jesus would endure on earth, culminating in the cross. Finally, it speaks of the exaltation and glory that awaited Jesus as a result of His humiliation.

Through this miracle Jesus demonstrated the power that would be His as the exalted Son of man. He would be given power over all things, even over the winds and the seas.

From this miracle, however, we also learn how Jesus will use His great power as the Son of man.

*At the
end of time
there will be
a storm
the likes
of which
the church
has never
faced.*

He will keep and preserve His church as she encounters the many storms of life. Again and again storms have broken out upon the little ship of the church. The very first was a storm of persecution. It raged off and on for over a century. But the Lord used His great power as the Son of man to preserve the church.

And then He brought the storm to an end. By this time another storm was brewing, a storm of controversy. The truth of the triune character of God was being denied, as well as the truth of the divinity of Christ. By the power of Jesus Christ the church weathered also this storm. And there have been many other storms, one after another. Through them all, Jesus kept the church, even causing the church to prosper.

At the end of time there will be a storm the likes of which the church has never faced. The powers of darkness will succeed in establishing the kingdom of the antichrist. This will be a worldwide kingdom, embracing all the nations of the world, in which unheralded peace and prosperity shall be enjoyed by all. Except that there will be no place in this kingdom for the church. She will be persecuted as never before.

But even then the Lord will preserve His church. And then He will return to the earth to bring an end to this storm and all storms for the church. For at that time He will destroy the wicked forever and bring the church into the glory of the new creation to enjoy the rest and peace of salvation eternally.

Jesus rebuked the disciples for their little faith. "Why were ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?"

No, the disciples were not unbelievers. They definitely had faith. Their faith was seen in that they cried out to Jesus for help when they saw their peril. Their faith was evident also when they marveled at Jesus' miracle.

But their faith was little. It was small and weak. The smallness of their faith was evident in that they were afraid in the storm. Jesus was right there with them all the time. But they were afraid.

And so Jesus rebuked them.

Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?

We must not be of little faith, as the disciples were. We must have a strong faith as we face the many storms that must yet break out upon the church.

Jesus performed this miracle exactly to strengthen the faith of His disciples — not just the 12, but His disciples throughout the ages.

Through this miracle we are taught very powerfully that Jesus is with us as we encounter the raging storms of life. He has power over all things, even over the wind and the sea. And He uses His power to preserve us to the end.

Let us look to this miracle and believe.

In the strength of faith let us look to Jesus, who has power over even the wind and the sea.

Let us call out for His help and protection.

But let us do so in the confidence that all is well. □

An Open Letter to Gary North

(Part One)

Dear Dr. North,

In your "I.C.E. Position Paper" of July 1995 (Institute for Christian Economics, P.O. Box 8000, Tyler, TX 75711), you respond to my editorial, "Jewish Dreams," in the January 15, 1995 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

As an ardent proponent of postmillennialism, you are sharply critical of my defense of classic, creedal, Reformed amillennialism. You say, "Such a view paralyzes Christians, making them short-run planners who are on the defensive."

There are elements in your "position paper" — important elements — that I appreciate.

Taking Eschatology Seriously

You take eschatology seriously. You have no time for the foolish notion that it does not matter to the faith, to the church, and to the Christian life whether one is amillennial, premillennial, or postmillennial. Believing postmillennialism to be biblical, you are intolerant of both premillennialism and amillennialism. Rightly so! In fact, in an editorial subsequent to the one against which you inveigh, I quote you at length to this effect (see the *Standard Bearer*, April 1, 1995, "A Defense of [Reformed] Amillennialism").

I also appreciate that with a scholar's knowledge and honesty you acknowledge the truth of one of the main assertions in the editorial, namely, that "sixteenth-century confessions had been amillennial." You are critical of the "Continental Protestant churches" for refusing to revise these creeds in the area of

eschatology, that is, for refusing to repudiate their amillennialism for postmillennialism.

You must keep in mind, however, that these sixteenth-century confessions, with the early seventeenth-century Canons of Dordt which neither abrogated nor modified the amillennialism of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, are the binding creeds of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). They are also the creeds of many other Reformed churches everywhere in the world. As long as these creeds are not revised in favor of postmillennialism, all these churches and every officebearer in them must teach and defend amillennialism. They must also condemn and reject postmillennialism and premillennialism. This is a matter of simple honesty. This is a matter of keeping the solemn vow by which the churches and officebearers have bound themselves to the doctrines taught in the creeds, including the doctrine of the last things.

It has long troubled me that the Reformed churches and their theologians have fallen silent on eschatology. Even those who speak out half-heartedly against the theonomic aspect of your Christian Reconstruction movement say nothing about eschatology. I cannot recall having read a vigorous defense of amillennialism in the last twenty years, even though you, R. J. Rushdoony, and others of your cohorts have been merciless, at times savage, in your criticism of amillennialism.

It is also commendable in your critique of "Jewish Dreams" that you

not only clearly indicate the radical differences of postmillennialism from amillennialism but also accurately, though roughly, describe amillennial eschatology. Postmillennialism, you state, holds that Antichrist and "mass persecution" are *past*: "The beast of Revelation is behind us: Nero." The earthly future of the church is physical victory: "worldwide conversion and ... transformation of society as a result of such a conversion."

You are correct when, in contrast, you analyze amillennialism as teaching that "the Church will remain a besieged outpost in the midst of an apostate civilization," although "outpost" does not do justice to the fact that the church is at the center of apostate civilization.

There are also elements — important elements — in your paper that are erroneous. As a scholar and a Reformed Christian, you ought to reconsider these matters.

Amillennialism and Augustine

First, it is unworthy of a Reformed scholar to attempt to "poison the wells" regarding amillennialism by alleging that the origin of this doctrine is the Roman Catholic Church: "The Reformed churches on the European Continent adopted the Roman Catholic Church's teachings on the millennium." This is the tactic by which the enemies of infant baptism and the covenant think to destroy the practice of infant baptism: "The Reformed churches adopted the Roman Catholic Church's teachings on infant baptism." If you cannot find

the origin of amillennialism in Jesus and the apostles, ascribe it to Augustine, who was influential in Protestant eschatology as in so many other doctrines. This has quite a different ring to it: "The Reformed churches on the European Continent adopted Augustine's teaching on the millennium."

Augustine set forth his understanding of the thousand years of Revelation in his *The City of God*. With other "spiritual" people he rejected the "millenarians'" explanation of the thousand years as a future, literal period in history during which the saints will enjoy "a holy leisure." Augustine added this devastating indictment of the view of the millennium of Revelation 20 that sees it as a carnal kingdom of earthly peace and plenty:

This opinion would not be objectionable, if it were believed that the joys of the saints in that Sabbath shall be spiritual, and consequent on the presence of God.... But, as they assert that those who then rise again shall enjoy the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink such as not only to shock the feeling of the temperate, but even to surpass the measure of credulity itself, such assertions can be believed only by the carnal.

Augustine's explanation was that the apostle John "used the thousand years as an equivalent for the whole duration of this world, employing the number of perfection to mark the fullness of time." The reign of the saints with Christ during the thousand years must likewise be understood "of the time of His (Christ's) first coming." The church is Christ's kingdom exactly because "His saints (are) even now reigning with Him." Augustine then described the nature of the saints' reign with Christ in a way that conflicts with the earthly dominion proposed by you and the other postmillennial Christian Reconstructionists:

Therefore the Church even now is

the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven. Accordingly, even now His saints reign with Him, though otherwise than as they shall reign hereafter (that is, as Augustine had made plain earlier, in the new creation where there will be no tares among the wheat — DJE).... For they reign with Him who do what the apostle says, "If ye be risen with Christ, mind the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Seek those things which are above, not the things which are on the earth" (*The City of God*, 20.7-9; see also J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed., London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968, pp. 479, 480).

The Victory of the Gospel

Second, you misrepresent amillennialism when you charge it with holding that "there is no earthly possibility of the widespread success of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Amillennialism believes that the gospel is now, will be, and always has been "successful" (we prefer to say, "victorious") on earth. Its triumph on earth is its accomplishment of the purposes of the risen Christ with the gospel. These purposes are the gathering of the elect out of all nations and thus the saving of the nations in them; the preservation of the elect in faith and holiness; the empowering of the elect believers and their children to live obedient lives to the Lord Christ in all spheres of earthly life; the building of the church; and the hardening of the reprobate. This victory is worldwide.

What you should have said is that amillennialism denies the possibility of widespread earthly success of the gospel in a carnal kingdom very much like that which the Jews of John 6 desired.

Amillennialism and Calvin

Third, you err when, however

weakly, you suggest that Calvin was postmillennial. John Calvin was not a postmillennialist in eschatology. John Calvin did not think that history will end with a splendid earthly triumph of the church. Calvin did not think that the great persecution of the church was past. He did not think that the kingdom of Christ in the world is a carnal kingdom. He did not interpret the prophecies in the Old Testament of the future glories of the Messianic kingdom as being fulfilled in a literal, physical manner.

With all the Reformers, Calvin explicitly repudiated the millennial dream of an earthly kingdom in which the saints exercise political power. In his thorough study of Calvin's eschatology, Heinrich Quistorp states that Calvin "decidedly rejects the chiliasm (millennialism — DJE) of the fanatics which

would make of the kingdom of

Christ a purely temporal and transient one."

Calvin judged the notion of a literal, earthly kingdom of a thousand years "a childish fantasy which hardly deserves the credit of refuting."

Calvin saw the dream of a millennium as "an impoverishment, not to say a destruction, of the Christian hope." For those who preach a millennium to the people of God "make the Christian hope into a hope that is merely relative to this world and thereby dissolve the true hope which is directed to the eternal future of the Lord and His coming kingdom."

For Calvin, "the kingdom of a thousand years (of Rev. 20 — DJE) is then the spiritual rule of Christ over individual souls in their earthly life until the completion of their course in death and the general resurrection." That Calvin taught that the rule of Christ in present history is solely spiritual through the gospel, Quistorp proves by a citation from Calvin's commentary on Romans 14:11:

Calvin saw the dream of a millennium as "an impoverishment, not to say a destruction, of the Christian hope."

Now the Lord reigns in the world only through the gospel and we give honour to His majesty only where faith recognizes it in the word ... thus we see that at present prophecy is only beginning to be

fulfilled. It will be completely fulfilled only on the day of the general resurrection when all the enemies of Christ will be under the sole of His feet. That this might come to pass, the Lord must first execute

His judgment (*Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1955, pp. 158-162).

(to be concluded) □

— DJE

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ Further Developments in the CRC

From Darrell Todd Maurina, Press Officer of United Reformed News Service, we received some of the following information:

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) voted to suspend ties with the CRC. The decision was taken at its triennial synod which met last October.

The Rev. Bruce Hoyt, stated clerk of the denomination, stated: "When the 1995 CRC synod occurred and took such a dramatic action and reversed effectively the previous decision [against ordination of women] we had really very little hope, not only because of the strong action but also because the nature of the action indicated that the church order, Scripture, and confessions were not as strong as they had been in the CRC. We felt we had very little option. They really felt there wasn't too much chance of a conservative move having any chance in the CRC." Hoyt added: "Suspension means we won't interact like sister churches, yet we're giving a strong warning that our relationship will have to be terminated if there is no change. The reception of ministers wouldn't apply anymore and the reception of members automatically would now have to be received on a case by case basis; there wouldn't be an automatic transfer."

On another front, it was reported by Maurina that the CRC Classis Kalamazoo, by a two-to-one vote, declined to declare the word "male" in their Church Order to be inoper-

ative in the classis. This means that, for the present, those churches in the Classis who have women as elders cannot send them to Classis as delegates — and the churches of the Classis cannot ordain women as ministers.

The strange part of the decision is that this same Classis overtured the Synod of 1995 to allow women in office. Why the "change"? It was evidently not so much a matter of change of heart as it was to accommodate those who oppose women in office. Minutes after taking this vote, the Classis voted (again by a two-to-one margin) to reject an overture from East Martin CRC to ask synod to prohibit women in office throughout the denomination.

Maurina also reports that one more CR church seceded and four new churches were formed from existing CR churches with a total of some 800 members. The Oak Glen CRC seceded with more than three-quarters majority of its members. Other independent churches were formed out of existing CR churches at De Motte IN, Highland IN, Westmoreland NH, and Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada.

Meanwhile, one CRC has hit upon an "evangelistic" scheme designed to attract the sports' lover: Super Bowl Sunday (January 28). Rogers Heights CRC in Grand Rapids has scheduled their "worship and praise" service on January 28 from 6 to 7 P.M. in their auditorium. From 7 to 10 P.M. all are invited to the Fellowship Hall (right next to the auditorium) to see the Big Game on 60" TV. There will also be a "half-time talk" titled: "What's a Promise Keeper?" One wonders whether that "talk" will include a discussion of the fourth commandment and our

"promise" to obey that and all of God's commandments in thankfulness.

■ That "Gut Feeling"

Scripture often speaks of "bowels," as, "his bowels did yearn upon his brother" (Gen. 43:30); "...how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:8); "...if any bowels and mercies" (Phil. 2:1); "Put on ... bowels of mercies..." (Col. 3:12). One finds many other similar expressions. For some reason, I had always thought that was merely figurative language: emotions often seem to affect our "bowels." I found very interesting, therefore, a report in the *Denver Post*, January 23, 1996, which claims that the "bowel" or "gut" involves more than simply a part of the body which is affected by external things. The article states:

Ever wonder why people get "butterflies" in the stomach before going on stage? Or why an impending job interview can cause an attack of intestinal cramps?....

The reason for these common experiences, scientists say, is because each of us literally has two brains — the familiar one encased in our skulls and a lesser-known but vitally important one found in the human gut. Like Siamese twins, the two brains are interconnected; when one gets upset, the other does, too.

The gut's brain, known as the enteric nervous system, is located in sheaths of tissue lining the esophagus, stomach, small intestine and colon. Considered a single entity, it is packed with neurons; neurotransmitters and proteins that zap messages between neurons; support cells like those found in the brain proper; and a complex circuitry that enables it to act independently,

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learn, remember and, as the saying goes, produce gut feelings.

The brain in the gut plays a major role in human happiness and misery. But few people know it exists....

So — Scripture's terminology is accurate after all — far more accurate than most thought. One is amazed both at the complexity of the human body which God created and at the Word of God which so accurately described the working of the body. So, when your "bowels yearn" after another and when you reveal "bowels of mercies," it is very literal after all!

■ Vineyard Ousts "Toronto Blessing" Church

The *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1995, reports on the ousting of the Airport Vineyard Fellowship in Toronto (as quoted in *Calvary Contender*, Jan. 15, 1996).

"In a split certain to send tremors throughout Pentecostal Christianity, a controversial Canadian congregation known for its ecstatic worship style that became known worldwide as the 'Toronto Blessing' has been ousted by its parent denomination." Pastor John Arnott of the Airport Vineyard Fellowship in Toronto said he was told last month by the Association of Vineyard Fellowships that his 1,000-member congregation had gone over the edge by encouraging worshipers to be so filled with the Holy Spirit that they would bark like dogs, swoon to the floor and laugh uncontrollably during services. This is a major break by "signs and wonders" John Wimber's Vineyard Fellowships with a main "laughing revival" church. And where does that leave the NAE whose 1995 speaker David Bryant said the Holy Spirit is in charge of the Toronto movement? Hank Hanegraaff warned that ministries like Arnott's represent something "extremely dangerous that could be a road to the occult."

The "Vineyard Fellowships" are charismatic and closely tied to the "Promise-keepers" movement. It

would appear from the above that even in these wildly "exuberant" groups, there can be "too much" of a "good thing." The Holy Spirit presumably leads in the performance of miracles, speaking with tongues, even in "holy laughter," but likely not in the animal sounds which have rocked some of the gatherings. Interesting, too, is the statement that this is "extremely dangerous" and could "be a road to the occult." Stronger language ought to be used: all of this can lead to full-blown demon possession (if it is not that already) — all in the name of the Holy Spirit. It is another of the signs of the end of time when many will claim that they have done "this" or "that" in Christ's Name — but Christ declares, "I never knew you...."

■ SIGNS OF THE TIMES: Infectious Diseases Up Sharply in U.S.

There was a time when most thought that infectious diseases would soon, and quickly, be wiped out. With immunizations and better drugs, it appeared only a matter of time and the world would be rid of some of the dreaded diseases of the past. It has not happened. Since 1980, according to a recent report, infectious diseases have *increased* by 58 percent!! The *Denver Post*, January 17, 1996, reports:

More than half of that (58%) increase can be attributed to AIDS. The aging of the population also explained some of the increase, with more people dying of deathbed infections such as pneumonia.

But even after accounting for those factors, rather than falling, the rate of infectious disease rose from 1980 to 1992, confounding "historical predictions that infectious diseases would wane in the United States," said Dr. Robert Pinner, whose report appears in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* this week.

Omitting AIDS, the rate of death from infectious diseases jumped by 22 percent from 1980 to 1992, the report said....

Elsewhere in the world, according to World Health Organization

statistics, both new and re-emerging infectious diseases are raging....

He said despite the advances of the past century, "we have never been more vulnerable" as a species to infectious diseases, because "we have unprecedented mixing of people."

And many thought that the prophecies of Revelation were too pessimistic and probably impossible of realization. But we see literally fulfilled Revelation 6:8, "And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth." That is the way it is — and the *increase* of these things, also foretold in Revelation, is now recognized.

■ Rejection of Hell

And the *Denver Post*, January 18, 1996, also reports:

A Church of England commission has rejected the idea of hell as a place of fire, pitchforks and screams of unending agony, describing it instead as annihilation for all who reject the love of God.

"Whether there be any who do so choose, only God knows," said a report by the church's Doctrine Commission, titled "The Mystery of Salvation."

Rejecting the medieval vision of the underworld, the report said: "Christians have professed appalling theologies which made God into a sadistic monster and left searing psychological scars on many."

Let Scripture speak: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18-19). □

Protestant Reformed Worker Successfully Challenges Sunday Work Assignment

Perhaps few readers of the *Standard Bearer* are aware that an obscure provision of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects workers who refuse Sunday work assignments for religious reasons. But rather than writing a dry article on this very important religious freedom that Reformed Christian employees should be aware of, this writer decided to publish (with permission) actual correspondence in a real Sunday work case involving Phil Dykstra, a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church. What follows should inform the reader of typical religious discrimination suffered by Christians objecting to Sunday assignments, the federal law protecting this important but often ignored religious freedom, and the successful outcome in this recent case.

Letter Memorandum
December 27, 1995
Warner Lambert Co.
201 Tabor Road
Morris Plains, NJ 07950

Attention: Attorney Bill Greenbaum

Re: Employer: Parke-Davis, Holland, Michigan
Employee: Philip Dykstra
Subject: Religious Freedom — Sunday Work

Dear Mr. Greenbaum:

I understand you are Parke-Davis' employment attorney. As

Mr. Lanting, a member of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, is a practicing attorney.

you know, our firm has been retained by Phil Dykstra, a 30-year employee of Parke-Davis, a subsidiary of Warner Lambert. Mr. Dykstra has recently been informed by his supervisor that he must either work Sundays or face a transfer accompanied by a \$3/hr. reduction in pay. We have informed Mr. Dykstra that this employer practice violates the religious freedom provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Employment History. Phil Dykstra has been employed by Parke-Davis for thirty years as a chemical operator. In 1981, after working the preferred day shift for some 15 years, Parke-Davis announced to Phil that it was beginning a continuous 12-hour shift, and that he would be required to work Sundays. Phil refused, and Parke-Davis placed him on the despised "graveyard shift" (midnights) Monday through Friday. Phil reluctantly complied with this compulsory change and has faithfully worked the midnight shift for the last 14 years. Work evaluations by Phil's peers and supervisors have been outstanding.

Now, 14 years later, Phil has been told that his midnight shift (Monday through Friday) has been eliminated and he must either work Sundays on the new continuous shift or face an undesirable transfer to the "Drying Room" and suffer a \$3/hr. decrease in pay.

Religious Beliefs and Practice. During his entire adult life, Phil has been a practicing member of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America, a nationwide (albeit small)

denomination in the Dutch Calvinist tradition. Dutch Reformed Calvinists fled religious persecution in the Netherlands in the 1800s and settled many towns in the Midwest, particularly western Michigan (Holland, Zeeland, Grand Rapids, etc.). Some of these churches, including the Protestant Reformed, stalwartly insist that their parishioners refuse Sunday work (except for work of necessity or works of mercy).

I requested Phil and his pastor to prepare letter memoranda setting forth his personal and the church's position on Sunday work. (See Exhibit A and B). I have attached their letters for your perusal. There is no question but that Phil's refusal to work Sundays is a sincerely-held religious belief and practice that is protected under the First Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Civil Rights Act of 1964. Sections 701(j) and 703(a)(1) of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(a)(1), make it unlawful employment practice for an employer to discriminate against an employee on the basis of his or her religion. As the U.S. Court of Appeals stated in the case of *E.E.O.C. v. Ithaca Industries, Inc.*, 849 F.2d 116 (6th Cir. 1988):

In 1972, an amendment to Title VII, §701(j), was enacted with the stated purpose to protect Sabbath observers whose employers fail to adjust work schedules to fit their needs. The Act thus requires that an employer, short of undue hardship, make reasonable accommodations to the religious needs of its

employees. It is also clear that the burden is on the employer to offer this accommodation. * * * Section 701(j) clearly anticipates that some employees will absolutely refuse to work on their Sabbath and this firmly held religious belief requires some offer of accommodation by employers.

Id. at 118

The employee bears the burden of establishing a prima facie case by showing that he holds a sincere religious belief that conflicts with an employment requirement. *Cooper v. Oak Rubber Co.*, 15 F3d 1375 (6th Cir. 1994). When the employee establishes a prima facie case of religious discrimination, the burden shifts to the employer to show that it could not reasonably accommodate the employee without hardship, with reasonableness determined on a case-by-case basis. *E.E.O.C. v. Arlington Transit Mix, Inc.*, 957 F2d 219 (6th Cir. 1991). It is the employer's duty or burden, not the employee's, to offer a reasonable accommodation honoring the employee's religious refusal to work Sundays. *E.E.O.C. v. Ithaca Industries, Inc.*, *supra*.

Moreover, simply offering an employee the availability of "shift swapping," where, as in Dykstra's case, it is virtually impossible to arrange a swap, is not "reasonable accommodation." *McGuire v. G.M.C.*, 956 F2d 607 (6th Cir. 1992). Furthermore, offering an employee an alternative that involves loss of wages or benefits is *de facto* not reasonable accommodation, but is discrimination. *Cooper v. Oak Rubber*, id. at 1379.

Reasonable Accommodation. Since it is clear that Phil Dykstra embraces a sincerely held religious belief and practice that prevents him from working on Sundays, federal law now shifts the burden on Parke-Davis to reasonably accommodate his religious beliefs.

It is my understanding that the only offer of accommodation has been to involuntarily transfer Mr. Dykstra, who is a chemical opera-

tor, to the "Drying Room," an unenviable and humiliating relocation where his skills and experience will be squandered. To add insult to injury, this forced reassignment entails a substantial reduction in Mr. Dykstra's wages.

With all due respect, this blatantly discriminatory conduct is not "reasonable accommodation" as required by the law. Accordingly, this alternative is unacceptable.

Dykstra's Suggestion. Since Parke-Davis has yet failed to offer "reasonable accommodation" short of "undue hardship," Mr. Dykstra suggests that Parke-Davis maintain the status quo — (midnight shift, Monday through Friday) — unless or until other accommodation can be arranged and agreed upon by the parties.

Mr. Dykstra is convinced that it would work Parke-Davis no hardship whatsoever to retain his current work schedule. The reasons for this are set forth in Exhibit C, which I requested him to prepare. His seniority, skills, and experience dictate that this is indeed a reasonable alternative.

Conclusion. Unless and until Parke-Davis can offer an acceptable "reasonable accommodation" of Dykstra's religious beliefs, we propose that Dykstra's shift status remain unchanged, and we respectfully request Parke-Davis to demonstrate how maintenance of the status quo would result in "undue hardship."

I await your reply.

Sincerely yours,
w/s James Lanting

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EXHIBIT

SUBJECT: SUNDAY WORK FOR
PHILIP DYKSTRA AT PARKE-
DAVIS

Date: December 19, 1995

To whom it may concern:

I am the pastor of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, MI, and write on be-

half of Philip Dykstra, member of our church, and employee at Parke-Davis in Holland, MI.

According to our religious convictions, Philip Dykstra may not and will not work on Sunday. The longstanding and still held position of our churches is that work on the Lord's Day is not permissible, unless it is a work of *necessity* (for example, fire-fighter, policeman) or work of *mercy* (for example, nurses, doctors, nursing home employees). According to anyone in our churches, the occupation of Philip Dykstra does not fall into either of these categories.

This is the official position of our churches, based on Holy Scripture, the Word of God. Every local church of our denomination across the country will discipline and eventually exclude from membership any member who works on Sunday in labors that are not of necessity or mercy. I know this because our churches, although spread across the country, number only about 30, and our practices are consistent and unanimous throughout. This was already our belief in 1941 when a letter was sent to the President of the United States by our denomination's Synod, objecting to unnecessary Sunday labor. In response to the President's promotion of Sunday labor, our Synod wrote, among other things:

... Concerning Sabbath labor we would say that it is our conviction and avowed purpose not to engage in same. The Lord God has from earliest times promulgated His Divine Law and this Law tells us in the 4th commandment that we shall keep His Sabbaths holy. Mr. President, we, as members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, have the earnest desire to so conduct ourselves on the Sabbath, in meditation, prayer, and Divine worship, that we may have a foretaste of the heavenly Sabbath. We feel and are convinced that such is the injunction of the Almighty Who is our Sovereign and therefore we refuse *unnecessary* Sabbath labor (*italics mine*, BLG. See *Acts of Synod of the*

Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 1941, pages 76, 77; also pages 26, article 38).

The same position was taken and expressed by our Synod again in 1961, again in connection with unnecessary labor by military in peacetime (see *Acts of Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, 1961, page 26, Art. 39; pages 54ff.; and letters sent to the military and then Rep. Gerald R. Ford).

This remains the conviction of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America.

Mr. Philip Dykstra has been a member of the Hudsonville PRC for 23 years. During my pastorate here for 15 months, he has been in attendance at worship services twice every Sunday with regularity. According to my knowledge from talking with long-time members, this has been his and his family's practice for their entire membership. Indeed, it is the regular practice of all of the members of our 600-member church. It is my desire that his religious convictions will certainly not be harmful with regard to his employment at Warner Lambert/Parke-Davis.

w/s Rev. Barry Gritters
Pastor, Hudsonville Protestant
Reformed Church

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January 9, 1996

SENT BY FACSIMILE
AND REGULAR MAIL
(201) 540-2424
Warner Lambert Co.
201 Tabor Road
Morris Plains, NJ 07950

Attention: William Greenbaum, Attorney

Re: Employer: Parke-Davis, Holland, Michigan
Employee: Philip Dykstra
Subject: Religious Freedom — Sunday Work

Dear Mr. Greenbaum:

After two weeks of difficult ne-

gotiations, this letter will confirm our phone conference yesterday during which we discussed Parke-Davis' latest offer of accommodation of Mr. Dykstra's religious objection to Sunday employment. I have discussed your proposal with Mr. Dykstra and he has agreed to accept your Company's offer, which I understand to be as follows:

1. Mr. Dykstra's recent reassignment to the "drying room" and \$3/hr. decrease in salary will be rescinded and Mr. Dykstra will retain his previous status and salary rate as a chemical operator.

2. Mr. Dykstra will be assigned as a chemical operator "rover" on the day shift (8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., Monday through Friday). He will report for this new assignment at 8:00 A.M. on Wednesday, January 10th, at which time he will be assigned to the "operating quad" which includes Buildings 40, 42, 46 and 48, performing duties essentially similar to his duties as chemical operator in Building 7.

3. Mr. Dykstra will be paid for the 8-hour shift he did not work on Tuesday, January 9th, which will be credited to his next regular paycheck.

4. It is understood by both par-

ties that neither Parke-Davis nor any of its agents or employees will engage in any retaliatory acts in response to Mr. Dykstra's asserting his religious freedom rights under Section 701(j) and Section 703(a)(1) of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

5. Mr. Dykstra will have an opportunity to "bid" and be considered for a "Supervisor 2" position of his choice, which will be offered in the near future.

6. Mr. Dykstra agrees to continue as a faithful and conscientious employee as has been his work history in the past.

I genuinely appreciate, Bill, your courtesy and professionalism in resolving this matter which is of the utmost importance to my client. Would you also pass along our sentiments to the Personnel Department for its good faith efforts in finally offering what appears to be a "reasonable accommodation" of Mr. Dykstra's religious beliefs.

Should there be any further developments in this matter, I would appreciate you contacting me immediately. Thanks again for your cordial cooperation.

Sincerely yours,
w/s James Lanting □

He Is There

The night is dark, and quiet all around me
All nature resting sweetly among the trees;
But yet I know that there is One who's watching
And He is ever watching over me.

The night is long, I cannot see the morning,
And all around the world seems fast asleep;
Yet there is One whose eye will never slumber
And over me a faithful watch will keep.

The night is still, and in the blessed quiet
I see my Savior holding out His hand;
"Come near, My child, for I so dearly love you,
Your troubled heart I clearly understand."

"The night was dark there in the lonely Garden
But when I prayed, dear child, it was for you;
So take my hand and we will walk together —
Trust me, and I will see you through."

Annetta Jansen — Dorr, Michigan

The Reformed View of Angels

(2)

In their relation to the church

What is God's purpose with angels in regard to His church? We read in Hebrews 1:14, "Are they (angels) not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Angels are the servants of the church as a whole and of the saints individually.

There are five items to be observed here.

1) Angels are messengers from God in heaven to His church on earth, appearing at the most critical points in the history of salvation. After the Fall God placed at the east of Eden cherubim to keep the way of the tree of life, for fellowship with God was no longer through the tree but through Christ typified in bloody sacrifices. God delivered the Law to Moses at Sinai by the hands of angels. The birth of Jesus Christ was announced to Mary and to Joseph by Gabriel, after he had announced the birth of John the Baptist. An angel appeared to the frightened shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem speaking of the birth of the Savior; then, a multitude of the heavenly host taught the shepherds and us to sing, "Glory to God in the Highest." After Jesus was baptized and had been tempted in the wilderness, angels came to Him and ministered unto Him. When Jesus groveled on the ground as a worm and not a man in the Garden, an

angel came to Him to strengthen Him. At the empty tomb an angel spoke the resurrection gospel to the women, "He is not here, he is risen even as he said." On the Mount of Olives an angel asked the staring disciples, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" and promised that Christ would return in like manner. And when Jesus comes at the end of time He will come with His angels in great glory. So angels are messengers, sent to reveal the will of God and to comfort both Christ and His church.

2) There are angels whose business it is to guard the people of God and their children. In Psalm 91 we find the wonderful words, "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." As parents, who cannot always have our eyes on our children, we take great comfort from the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:10, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." Little children of God have their own, personal angels, who go from the face of God in heaven to do His will, to watch over our children.

Not only is this physical protection that the angels give, but they safeguard our children from the devil and the world. We believe that God watches over us. We believe that He preserves us from the evil one. But we are not often aware of the *means* that God uses, those min-

istering spirits whom we may call guardian angels.

3) There is a sense in which the angels observe what is happening on the earth, at least in the life of the church and in the life of the saints. Jesus concluded two of His parables with the astounding words, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." When there is the refusal to confess our sins to God and to one another, and to extend forgiveness to one another, we may be sure that the angels in heaven weep. But when a sinner comes to repentance, the angels rejoice before God because they understand that repentance worketh life, and repentance comes to pass only by the irresistible grace of God! Angels delight in the grace of God in Christ!

The second proof we have for the position that angels are aware of what goes on in the church below is the rather difficult passage found in Ephesians 3:10, "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be made known *by the church* the manifold wisdom of God...." Paul says that he preaches among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, that he makes known the mystery which was hid from the beginning of the world, with the intent that the angels might know these things by means of the church!

When the church preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ, and when the members of the church confess and live that gospel, the wisdom of God in saving His church through Christ

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

is made known to the angels. They are not saved by that gospel, but they are deeply interested in it, and that interest is satisfied as the angels are attuned to the life of the church.

4) The angels of God are reapers in the great harvest at the end of the world. In the parable of the tares and the wheat (Matt. 13), the field is the world, the good seed stands for the children of the kingdom, and the tares are the children of the wicked one. At the end of the world, the Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire.

And those same angels shall bring the righteous into the kingdom of their Father. Accordingly, Jesus teaches in Matthew 24 that He "shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together the elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Angels reap, they gather, they bring together the elect unto Christ, and bring the wicked unto the flame.

5) Finally, we must notice that there is a change worked in the relationship between the angels and us due to the great victory that Christ achieved as the Captain of our salvation. According to our creation, and according to the manhood of Jesus Christ, we were both made a little lower than the angels. But because of His perfect obedience unto death, God has so highly exalted Christ that He is now higher than the angels. Thus Hebrews 1:4, "Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."

Because the child of God is represented by Christ, and is engrafted into Christ, we share in His exaltation and honor, and are given a place above the angels in the world to come. One of the implications of the church's sharing in Christ's glory is that when Christ returns to judge the quick and the dead, we

are going to judge with Him, and according to I Corinthians 6:3, we are going to judge the angels.

Questions that often arise

When the subject of angels is discussed, there are particularly two questions that people seek to have answered. The first one is, Do angels appear just before a child of God dies? Or, just as a saint expires, is it possible that he sees angels?

The question is prompted by certain remarks made by people as they die. You have heard of such statements, I am sure. Although I have been at the bedside of several saints as they died, I have not heard these words firsthand; but they have been repeated to me by other family members whose parents have gone the way of all flesh. For example, "Oh, it's very beautiful!" "I hear music!" "I see angels!" What are we to think of this?

Our response is that it is entirely possible. Who are we to say that it is not true? If we keep in mind that the soul of the redeemed child of God enters into glory at the moment of physical death, and if we keep in mind that Christ sends His angels to gather His people home, why is such an experience not possible? Although this may not be experienced in every case, we see no reason to doubt the authenticity of these remarks.

Another question that needs answering today goes something like this: "What do we say to those who claim to have seen angels in their lifetime, have had visions of angels, and have even heard angels speak?"

That is an entirely different question. Not as someone is dying, but while he is living! We do not believe it. We do not believe it because there is no longer any reason for God to send us angels, and to give us messages by angels. Not since the canon of Holy Scripture has been completed. We put such visions of angels in the same category as speaking in tongues, miracles of healing, and special revelations from God. All these were common dur-

ing the days of the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles. The reason for such things was that there was no New Testament yet — no full, written Word of God. Further, these miracles and revelations had the purpose of proving that what the prophets and apostles were saying was indeed true. But there is no longer any need for that.

This all reminds one of the rich man in hell of whom we read in Luke 16. This rich man says to Abraham in heaven, "I pray thee, father, send Lazarus to my father's house that he may testify to my five brothers, lest they also come into this place of torment." And Abraham says to him, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." In other words, they have the Bible. Let them give careful heed to what God says in the Bible. But the rich man objects (implying that he was brought into torment unfairly), "Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." And the final word of Jesus in the parable is, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." The Scriptures are sufficient. God does not speak through other means since the time the apostle John finished Revelation, and pronounced woe upon those who added to or subtracted from the Word of God. □



The Gifts Necessary for the Office of Elder (1)

Before we examine the gifts which a man must possess if he is to be qualified to serve Christ and His church in the offices of minister or elder, we must pay attention to the biblical terms used to refer to these offices. These terms give a great deal of insight into the kind of man Christ calls to serve in church office.

In the Old Testament there is the word translated "elder." While in some instances this word refers to old age, i.e., to elderly people,¹ more often the word refers to the chief men, the rulers of the people.²

From these passages we may conclude that, at least from the time of Moses, Israel had elders over the nation, over cities and towns, over thousands, over hundreds, over fifties, and over tens. These elders judged and ruled in both civil and ecclesiastical (moral, ethical) matters. At least in ecclesiastical matters we may trace the origin of the office of elder to these elders in Israel.

In both the Old and New Testaments there is also the word translated "shepherd" or "pastor."³ The shepherd tends or cares for the sheep. He guides them, feeds them, protects them.

In the New Testament there is the word translated "elder." This word refers to aged men and women in some passages.⁴ More frequently the word refers to the office

of elder in the church.⁵ While these men need not be the older or aged men in the congregation, they must be mature in the faith (I Tim. 3:6).

There is also the word translated "bishop." The literal meaning of this word is "overseer" or "superintendent." That this word refers to the elders of the church is evident from I Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:5-9 where both "elder" and "bishop" are used. The basic notion of this word, "bishop," is that of oversight or rule.

In addition there are two verbs used which give us insight into the office of elder. There is the word which, in Hebrews 13:7, 17, means to lead, to go before, to have authority over. The other verb means to feed or nourish.⁶ The elder, whether he be a teaching (minister) or ruling elder, must provide spiritual nourishment for the people of God.

Holy Scripture has much to say on the subject of the gifts or qualifications an elder must possess. Of the many passages which speak to this subject two demand careful and detailed study. These are I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. These passages speak of the following qualifications: blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to or lover of hospitality, apt to teach ("able to exhort and convince the gainsayers," Titus 1:9), not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre, patient,

not a brawler ("not given to riot," Titus 1:6), not covetous, rules his house well, not a novice, has a good report of them that are without, not soon angry, lover of good men, just, holy, and temperate.

Five comments in general about these qualifications need to be made.

1) These gifts do not apply to the elders of the church exclusively. These must characterize all of God's people. But these must be especially true of the elders.

2) While it is true that all of these qualifications must be evident in a man if he is to be an elder in the church, not all of the elders will possess all the gifts in equal or full measure. One elder, for example, may be more apt to teach than another. But all these gifts must in some measure characterize every elder.

3) Note the little word "must," in I Timothy 3:2. Literally the verse reads, "It is necessary therefore that the bishop be blameless...." This same word is used by Jesus in John 3:7, where He tells Nicodemus, "Ye *must* be born again." Regeneration is essential to salvation. Without this work of the Holy Spirit in one's heart, he cannot even see the kingdom of God. Likewise these qualifications (the "must" applies not just to "blameless" but to all of the gifts) are essential gifts for the office of elder. Lacking them a man cannot and may not serve as an elder.

*Consistories
and
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of the
Holy Spirit.*

Prof. Decker is professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Consistories and congregations must take great care in nominating and electing men for the office who possess these qualifying gifts of the Holy Spirit.

As complex as the application of such rules may seem under certain life situations, there is no excuse for our setting them aside or taking them with anything less than the utmost seriousness. The flock of Christ is too dearly bought for us to afflict it with the rule of men less gifted and diligent than the Word of God specifies!

It ought to be the constant prayer of the church that her Lord and Head will raise up such men to teach and rule his people. And let those who aspire to this office set foot upon that narrow path with fear and trembling. They are not, in themselves, sufficient for these things; their sufficiency can only be from the Lord, who dearly loves his bride the church.⁷

4) I Timothy 3:1 speaks of a man *desiring* the office of a bishop. While young men desire or aspire to the office of the ministry, we do not often think of men desiring or seeking the office of elder. This ought not be! We should think of

men desiring this office. Young men who possess these qualifications ought to desire the office of elder. They ought to prepare prayerfully for the office by reading and studying the Holy Scriptures. They ought to study the confessions of the church. They ought to prepare for this office by reading good Christian books on the doctrines of Scripture, church history, the church order, and the work of the church in preaching, administering the sacraments, and exercising Christian discipline. They ought to cultivate and develop these gifts and be willing to serve as elders if called by Christ through His church.

5) Finally, these qualifications for the office of minister or elder are gifts from Christ, the King of the church. This truth has several implications. One cannot be taught these things. A man must, for example, possess the gifts for the office of the ministry of the Word or he cannot be a minister. No amount of seminary training can change this! The most that a seminary education can accomplish is to provide the basic tools necessary for the ministry and assist a man in developing the qualifications with which Christ has

blessed him. That these qualifications are gifts of the grace of God means that Christ never calls a man to the office of the ministry or elder without also giving him the gifts and qualifications to serve in that office. Those who are called to serve as ministers and elders in the church may be encouraged by this. Apart from the grace of God the work is impossible, but with the qualifying grace of God a man is able to teach, preach, shepherd, and discipline the flock of God.

May God raise up young men in the churches, grace them with the qualifications to serve His precious, blood-bought saints as ministers of the Word and elders. □

¹ See Genesis 43:27, for example.

² Exodus 3:16; 17:5; 18:12, 17-27; 24:1, 9; Numbers 11:16; Deuteronomy 25:7-9; Joshua 7:6; Judges 2:7; I Samuel 4:3; II Samuel 3:17; I Kings 8:1.

³ Psalm 23:1; Jeremiah 3:15; Ephesians 4:11.

⁴ I Timothy 5:1-2.

⁵ I Timothy 5:1-2; I Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:17,28; James 5:14

⁶ Luke 8:32; John 21:15.

⁷ Lawrence R. Eyres, *The Elders of the Church*, p. 36.

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Carl Haak

John 7:1-31

“I Am From Him, and He Hath Sent Me.”

After the rejection in Capernaum, the Lord retired from the multitudes and went about Galilee in an almost secretive way, spending time instructing His disciples concerning His coming sufferings (see Mark 7-9). This was frustrating to His brethren, who believed that it was in His best interest to draw attention to Himself and His mighty works.

They did not at that time believe in Him as the Messiah sent down from God. Instead, they saw Him in an earthly and material sense as one having great potential for advance and honor in this life. To them the Feast of the Tabernacles was an excellent opportunity for Him to show Himself in Jerusalem and gain popularity. They urged Him to go down

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and make Himself known openly.

The Feast of Tabernacles lasted seven days (see Lev. 23:33, 34; Num. 29). The children of Israel were to dwell in "booths" (tents made out of palm branches) in remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt. Also associated with this feast was thanksgiving for the completed fall harvest. Various activities reminding Israel of their life in the wilderness would be performed in the temple throughout the week — for example, pouring out water from the pool of Siloam in remembrance of the water which flowed from the rock.

Our Lord would have nothing to do with an open and dramatic campaign to gain earthly popularity. Ever before His mind was the Father's divine program for His sufferings. Jesus knew that the attitude of the world towards Him as the Messiah could never be one of acceptance and honor, but one of hatred because He was the one who revealed their words as evil. He waited for His brethren to go up to the feast and then, approximately in midweek, followed "as it were in secret."

There is great anticipation among the people over whether or not He will appear at the feast. The division among the people over Him produces a hushed debate over whether He is a deceiver or a true man of God. The hatred of the religious leaders looms over the scene as none feels free to express himself openly concerning Him. Into this scene the Lord arrives and enters the temple to teach the people.

Immediately, and with some amazement over Jesus' boldness to engage in public teaching, the Jews seek to discredit His teaching. "How can an uneducated man teach anything of worth? Being unlearned Himself, all that He teaches must be wrong!"

In response the Lord penetrates to the heart of the matter that He has come to address and which is essential to knowing Him as the Son of God, the Messiah. "I am sent

from God! My doctrine is not mine but His that sent me!" What we must see unfolding before us in the passage is that the Lord insists that it is both known and manifested that He is uniquely sent of God as the One with Him from the beginning (see Prov. 8:22ff.; Heb. 3:1-3). Further, if one is truly desirous to obey the will of God as expressed in the Scriptures, one will know the certainty of both the doctrine and identity of Jesus Christ. But the Jews who rejected the revelation through Moses also rejected the revelation through the Son and sought to kill Him.

This they vehemently deny. "Who seeks to kill thee?" The Lord corrects this temporary lapse of memory by reminding them of the events of His last visit to Judea. When He had healed on the Sabbath day (John 5:1-18) they had indeed sought to kill Him, as was also public knowledge among the people. The people remember this, yet they still stumble over His identity as the One sent of God. "Do we not know His origins? Is not the Christ One who will mysteriously come down from heaven?"

This is the moment for the Son to make a clear proclamation of the truth: "I am not come of myself. He hath sent me!" This Jesus cries in the temple; for it is the very heart of the gospel, namely, the call to believe the record that God gave of His Son! (See I John 5:9, 10, 20.) This call results in a twofold fruit: some sought to lay hands on Him ... other believed on Him.

Outline:

1. Jesus refuses to go up to the feast openly (vv. 1-10).
2. The debate among the people at the feast, over whether Jesus is a deceiver or not (vv. 11-13).
3. The Jews' accusation that the Lord's teaching is false, and the Lord's response that He and His doctrine come down from God (vv. 14-24).
4. The division among the people on the question of His true identity

(vv. 25-27).

5. Jesus' proclamation that He is sent of the Father as His unique and only Son (vv. 28, 29).
6. The twofold response to the Lord's proclamation (vv. 30, 31).

Questions:

1. What do you know about the Feast of Tabernacles? Old Testament references? What is the significance of Jesus' going up to Jerusalem for this particular feast?
2. Explain why His brethren wanted Jesus to show Himself openly at this time. Why does the Lord refuse? Does the Lord deceive them into thinking that He had no intention whatsoever of going up to this feast?
3. What was the spiritual climate in Jerusalem when Jesus arrived? What were the people wondering about and debating among themselves?
4. Explain the tactics of the Jews in attempting to discredit the Lord's teaching and in preventing the people from listening to Him.
5. How does a person know of the certainty of the Lord's doctrines and His very identity as the Son of God?
6. Show how the Lord brings out that the Jews' problem was unbelief and hatred of Him as the One sent of the Father.
7. How does verse 24 fit in?
8. How did the Jews expect the Messiah to appear?
9. Explain the significance of Jesus' cry in verses 28 and 29.
10. Discuss the twofold response to the call of the gospel. Bring other Scriptures to bear on this point. How do we account for this difference among men? How is the Lord's cry in verses 28 and 29 different from what is understood as the free offer of the Gospel, and how is it instead the open proclamation of the particular promise and grace of God? □

Johannes Maccovius: Supralapsarian

Introduction

The pages of the history of the church of Christ are filled with large figures who dominate their age and who cast a long shadow over subsequent history. But by no means does God make use only of towering men who are gifted beyond us and who have a work given them of God which is remembered throughout the ages. God uses other men, lesser figures, whose names might appear in a footnote or two of some learned and seldom-read volume, but who are not forgotten in heaven because their names appear in the book of life. I am not speaking here of that noble and exalted company of saints whose names no one knows but God alone, whose deeds went mostly unrecognized in the time they lived, and whose graves are forgotten. They are the "last" which Scripture assures us shall be the "first" in the kingdom of heaven. But I am speaking of others, who in their own time were recognized as men of leadership and outstanding ability, whom God used sometimes in rather strange ways, but who are for the most part unknown today. It is worth our while to recall from oblivion some of these names.

Johannes Maccovius was one such man. Perhaps his importance lies especially in a "case" brought against him which was treated at the

great Synod of Dort and which had ramifications which touch on our own lives.

His Life

Johannes Maccovius was born at Lobzenic in Poland in the year 1588. That means, if we would put him in the context of some well-known events of the Reformation, that he was born about 25 years or so after the writing of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, and that at his birth the error of Arminianism was already taking hold in the soil of the Netherlands.

The name Johannes Maccovius is his Latin name, which he took, as was the custom in those days, when he became professor in a university. The name given him of his parents was Jan Makowsky, a name which clearly indicated his Polish ancestry.

The Calvin Reformation had influenced Poland to some extent, and Maccovius was by no means the only influential early reformer to come from that land. Maccovius, after his early education, was sent to Germany, where he studied at the principal universities. After completing his studies he returned to Poland, where he visited various universities in his fatherland as tutor to young Polish nobles. Somewhere he had become acquainted with that system of doctrine known as Calvinism, and he had eagerly embraced it and remained faithful to it all his life.

But his activities were not limited to the tutoring of spoiled sons of

foppish nobles. He began to engage various heretics in disputations. The Socinian heresy which denied the truth of the Trinity, and the Jesuit heresies which sought to reintroduce Roman Catholic teachings were the objects of his hatred. Powerful and influential Socinians and Jesuits matched their debating skills with this defender of Calvinistic orthodoxy.

It was especially through such disputations that his fame spread to other lands, and Maccovius soon received an invitation from the University of Franeker in the Netherlands to teach theology in what was a rather prestigious university. In 1614 he became a doctor of theology and in 1615 he was appointed professor of theology. There he remained for the rest of his life, dying in Franeker on June 24, 1644.

The man who was his colleague and chief promoter was Sybrandus Lubbertus, who also became his enemy and accuser in the "Maccovius Case."

We are told that, though Maccovius was an extraordinarily homely man, he was a gifted teacher and well liked by his students. In fact, he was so popular that his fame spread throughout Europe, and his reputation attracted students to Franeker from all parts of the continent.

Yet the outstanding feature of his life was his controversy with Lubbertus; and in that controversy lie significant events which are important for us today.

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The Controversy

Although it is not so easy to sort out precisely the issues in the controversy, it is clear that Maccovius applied what became known as the scholastic method to teaching theology. In brief, the scholastic method of teaching was a method of applying the principles of logic to theology and teaching theology as a logical system of truth. In fact, it was the logical clarity of Maccovius' teaching which made him popular with other students.

The difficulty seemed to be, however, that he sometimes carried the system of logical analysis and development too far. He was accused, e.g., of giving the same authority to logical deductions from the biblical truths as he gave to Scripture itself. But here again, it is hard to tell whether he actually did this, and even whether, in doing this, he was far from orthodoxy.

At any rate, he was a bitter and implacable foe of Arminianism and he fought Arminianism hammer and tongs. The war which he waged against Arminianism made him a despised enemy of the Remonstrants, for in him was found no compromise. Enemies of the truth are often willing to show friendship to defenders of the faith as long as there is the slightest hope of compromise. Perhaps there was no single theologian more deeply resented by these heretics than Maccovius.

In the course of his battles against Arminianism Maccovius was particularly determined to defend the truths of sovereign and double predestination. He made his defense over against Arminian efforts to teach that Christ willed the salvation of all men. But in the defense of the orthodox Calvinistic position, he went, in the opinion of his colleague Lubbertus, too far — too far in teaching that God decreed the reprobate unto sin; too far in teaching that the reprobate sin out of necessity.

Actually, the views of Maccovius came to the attention of Lubbertus and others in the examination of a student who, in 1616, was defending various theses involved in the supralapsarian position. The examiners traced the views of this student, whose name has been buried in oblivion, to his teacher, Maccovius. Thus, that with which Maccovius was charged came really from one of his students.

It cannot be denied that Maccovius, brilliant scholar that he was, carried, by his scholastic method, the doctrines of sovereign and double predestination too far, and did not properly teach the relation between reprobation and sin. It is also true that Lubbertus, whether he over-reacted to Maccovius' teaching or whether he himself did not always have things straight, made statements which seemed to support a desire on God's part to save all men.

Whatever may be the precise truth of the matter, the case was brought to the States of Friesland, which decided against Maccovius. Convinced he had said nothing wrong, Maccovius appealed to the Synod of Dort.

And so, while the Synod was doing battle with Arminian heresy, it had on the table as well the case of Maccovius. In the initial stages of the case, the matter was given to a political commission which attempted to settle the matter by trying to bring about agreement between Maccovius and his colleague Lubbertus. These efforts failed totally.

After the lack of success was reported back to Synod, Synod appointed another committee to study the matter and come with recommendations to Synod. The committee consisted of Dutch and foreign delegates: Scultetus from Heidelberg in Germany, Stein from Kassel, Breytinger from Zurich in Switzerland, Gomarus, Thysius, and a

Meyen all from the Netherlands.

It was striking that Gomarus, himself an ardent supralapsarian, was also on the committee. The committee met with Maccovius himself, as well as with Lubbertus. What happened on the meetings was never revealed, but the committee succeeded in reconciling these two warring colleagues. The committee reported to Synod that the matter was amicably resolved by a decision in which Maccovius himself had participated; that the committee had exonerated Maccovius from all error of any kind; but that Maccovius was reprimanded for his manner of teaching, for some rash statements which he had made, and for his one-sided supralapsarianism.

And so the matter was laid to rest.

Conclusion

This was an interesting aspect of the work on the Synod of Dort. It has significance for us today.

All who know anything about the Canons of Dort know also that these Canons are infralapsarian. It has been said by those who support infralapsarianism that supralapsarianism was anti-confessional. That would mean that we of the PRC, predominantly supralapsarian in our thinking, are in fact anti-confessional.

But the Maccovius case proves that this is not so.

While it is surely true that the Canons are infralapsarian, the framers of the Canons deliberately and consciously refused to condemn supralapsarianism. The issues of supra vs. infra were vigorously debated on the floor of the Synod and each position had its staunch defenders. The Synod had the perfect opportunity in the Maccovius case, and could very well have used Maccovius' rash statements as an occasion, to condemn supralapsarianism in the Dutch church. By refusing to do this, and by exonerating Maccovius, the Synod insisted that there was room in the Reformed churches for the supralapsarian

While it is surely true that the Canons are infralapsarian, the framers of the Canons deliberately and consciously refused to condemn supralapsarianism.

viewpoint. And this has continued to the present.

In the early years of our own churches, though now almost no one cares any longer about such questions, our fathers and grandfathers could argue long and furiously over the relative merits of the two viewpoints debated at Dort. But within our churches there was always room for both viewpoints, and the defenders of the one never sought ecclesiastical penalties against the other.

Gomarus, himself a strong supralapsarian, did join the committee in warning Maccovius against using unbiblical methods and making rash statements. These same rash statements are condemned in the Canons themselves, which tell us in no uncertain terms that we may not make God the author of sin.

But, at the same time, Gomarus

also, along with the rest of the committee, brought reconciliation between Maccovius and Lubbertus. And this could only have been done by showing Lubbertus that Maccovius, in his opposition to a universal love of God, was Reformed.

N.B. We add here a note for those who are interested in the issues of supralapsarianism vs. infralapsarianism. The question has to do with the order of God's decrees in His counsel. Both agree that the sole purpose of God's counsel is the glory of God's name. The "Infras" believe that God determined to glorify His name by the following order of decrees: man's creation, man's fall, predestination, salvation in Christ. The "Supras" believe that God determined to glorify His name through Jesus Christ and in Him the salvation of an elect

church. To accomplish that end, God determined the creation and fall of man along with the decree of reprobation. That the Canons are written from the infralapsarian viewpoint appears from such statements as: "Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby ... he hath ... chosen from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault ... a certain number of persons ... (I, 7). "[God] leaves the non-elect in his just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy" (I, 6). The "Infras" have always feared the "supra" teaching because it could lead to making God the author of sin. The "Supras" have always feared the "infra" teaching because it seemed to make the fall a mistake over which God had no control, so that salvation in Christ is Plan B when Plan A failed. The Reformed churches have always insisted that both viewpoints are acceptable. □

God's Providence and Sin

Having begun our study of God's providence, and having taken the position that God's providence embraces all things without exception, we stand now before the question: What is the relationship between God's providence and sin?

The subject before us is one that causes us to hesitate, lest we do wrong to the God whom we love. We know that Scripture throughout maintains the absolute sovereignty of God. At the same time, we realize that God is Holy. "There is no iniquity with the LORD our God" (II Chron. 19:7). For "He is the Rock,

his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deut. 32:4). It was surely with that truth in mind, that Elihu would say (Job 34:10,12), "...far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity.... Yea, surely God will not do wickedly."

How do we possibly maintain God's sovereignty also over sin, and yet not attribute sin to Him as the author of it?

The Reformed father Guido de Brés, in writing that document which has become known as *The Belgic Confession*, understood well that in insisting upon the absolute sovereignty of God over all things, he would have to answer the charge that he

then would also make God the author of sin.

Insisting that "nothing happens in this world without his (i.e., God's) appointment," a statement based on no fewer than 25 passages of Scripture, de Brés continued: "Nevertheless, God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed. For his power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that he orders and executes his work in the most excellent and just manner, even then, when devils and wicked men act unjustly."

We find a solid biblical foundation for maintaining both truths: 1) that God's providence also encompasses the moral acts of sinful men; and 2) that God remains pure and

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holy, without iniquity, and cannot be charged with being the author of sin. Let us look at each truth, and then give answer to the obvious mystery of this Bible truth.

God's governing of man's sin

When we speak of God's providence encompassing even man's sin, we must remember that God works all things for a purpose. We wrote of that truth in a previous article.¹ The Lord works all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 2:11). He will accomplish the highest purpose of His own good pleasure, namely, to bring all things to final perfection in Christ Jesus. That is how God would glorify Himself.

From the very beginning to the end of the world, God governs and guides all things toward the achievement of that end. This truth must be clear to us. It is fundamental.

Even through sin and death God upholds and governs all things to that end.

That God governs even the sinful actions of men is taught clearly in Scripture. In fact, the language of Scripture is far more explicit than you and I would ever dare to be in setting forth this truth. I would not dare to speak of God's sovereign government of sin, as does Scripture.

An astounding example of this is found in II Samuel 12. In the context, the prophet Nathan comes to David, who had been walking in impenitence. David had fallen deeply into sin, committing adultery with his neighbor's wife, Bathsheba; murdering her husband, Uriah; and subsequently living a life of deceit and hypocrisy. God in mercy sent Nathan the prophet who confronted David with a parable, the conclusion of which was, "Thou art the man!"

That Word of God, being worked in David's heart by the Holy Spirit, brought David to repentance, as he publicly confesses in Psalm 51. But David must also experience God's chastening hand for his sin.

In words we find absolutely stunning, Nathan proclaims, "Thus

saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun" (II Sam. 12:11). The Lord Himself speaks, saying that He Himself will do this. Astounding! How bold is the language of Scripture!

The fulfillment of these words is found in II Samuel 16:21,22. God, who forbids and abhors all adultery and fornication, punishes David's sin by Absalom's public raping of David's wives.

To say that God merely *permits* the acts of moral creatures, therefore, simply does not harmonize with Scripture's explicit language. God *governs*. The examples from Scripture can be multiplied.

Isaiah points to Assyria as the axe in God's hand and the rod of God's anger in exercising His wrath against the wayward children of Israel (Is. 10).

And in Acts, chapter 2, you have that remarkable passage that speaks at the same time of the responsibility of man and the sovereignty of God, as Peter proclaims concerning Christ: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23).

We have the testimony of the Bible that the crucifixion of Jesus was a willful act of disobedience and rebellion against God. But we read in Acts 4:26-28: "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."

Notice, they *were gathered together*. In other words, *God* gathered them together. He gathered them together, so that by their terrible act of wicked rebellion they crucified

Jesus, thus fulfilling God's eternal counsel. What an amazing testimony of the absolute government of Almighty God! God reaches His purpose, even our salvation, through the schemes and actions of wicked men.

God's freedom from the guilt of man's sin

Yet God cannot be charged with evil. "There is no iniquity with the LORD our God." Even though Scripture speaks so boldly about God's absolute sovereignty, Scripture is careful to uphold God's holiness. God is not the author of sin. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James 1:13).

God created us in such a way that you and I are always responsible for our actions. He created us free. We are free to act in accordance with our nature. You understand, of course, that our nature is now corrupt. Ever since the fall, and apart from the wonder work of regeneration, man's nature is corrupt. And because man's nature is totally corrupt, his freedom is limited to the bounds of that corruption.² But we are free to act in harmony with our nature. We can think our own thoughts. We make our choices from day to day, from moment to moment. No man is ever compelled by God to sin. And therefore we are responsible for our actions.

You are responsible for all that you do. Every man will give account for his own actions. You know that. You can't escape that either, except you stand in Christ Jesus who bears the responsibility for your sin.

That is the importance of being one with Christ by faith. When we belong to Christ, then He stands before God and gives account and an-

¹ See "Providence," the *Standard Bearer*, January 15, 1996

² If the Lord wills, we shall have more to say at some future date concerning man's freedom, and the effects of the fall upon man's will.

swers to our obligation. He does so in perfect righteousness, having satisfied God's demand for us.

But when, as children of God, we stand before the revelation of God recorded in the Scriptures, we also know that behind our freedom stands God. God is so sovereign in all things, that even through our freedom He is executing and realizing His counsel for us and for all who stand in relation to us. That is an amazing thing. That ought to fill us with awe — especially when we look back and see that in certain actions which were exceedingly foolish, God wrought those actions for our salvation. That is a work of grace. We do not deserve that He use our sin for our salvation. For there are many who stand condemned in their unrighteousness, and who go to hell responsible for their lives of wickedness before God.

The life of Pharaoh is an example of this. The account begins in Exodus 4. We read in different places in that account of Pharaoh's life that Pharaoh hardened his heart before God. That was an act of his will — an act freely determined by him, and an act for which God held him accountable. But at the same time we read within the same context that *God* hardened Pharaoh's heart. That is emphasized by the apostle Paul in Romans 9:17. "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth."

So God governs all the actions of sinful men. But He exercises His providential handiwork in such a way that He Himself is free from all sin, and man is responsible for his own actions.

Our refusal to delve beyond what is revealed

We readily confess that what is revealed in Scripture concerning this truth leaves us very conscious of the fact that we are mere creatures. There are aspects to this question of

the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's sin that we simply are unable to answer. We see through a glass darkly.

We see indeed. Scripture is clear.

We absolutely refuse to minimize the all-encompassing nature of God's sovereignty, or to admit that man in any way is able to frustrate God's purposes. To allow for such a conception would mean the death-blow to our Reformed, biblical faith. God is and remains the absolute sovereign, who governs all things, including the sinful actions of men.

At the same time we repudiate the charge of determinism that is sometimes brought against our Reformed confession. God does not treat a man like a block of stone. Man is a freely acting agent. He does what he does voluntarily and willingly, and therefore remains responsible for all his actions.

But we see through a glass darkly. God's ways are too high for us to comprehend.

In a mysterious way, too deep for us to fathom, God works with man in such a way that man can never act against that eternal counsel of the Almighty. But God works in such a way that He Himself never becomes the subject of man's actions. Neither is He in any way guilty of man's sin. All God's works are righteousness and truth.

God works with man in such a way that man does exactly what God

purposes. But man does so willingly, freely. The sinner sins because he chooses to sin. The devil hates and seeks to destroy because he wills to hate God. And so man also assumes the responsibility for his own acts. When God executes His judgment in the last day, the sinner will freely acknowledge that God is righteous in condemning him. God convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment.

So God works.

That is Scripture.

But the manner of this divine work is an inscrutable mystery not to be penetrated by human reason. It remains an object of faith.³ And so we say with Calvin, "As for us, we will adore with all reverence those mysteries which so far surpass our comprehension, until the brightness of their full knowledge shall shine forth upon us in that day when He, who is now seen 'through a glass darkly,' shall be seen by us 'face to face.' Then (saith Augustine) shall He be seen in the brightest light of understanding, that which the godly now hold fast in faith."⁴ □

³ John Calvin addresses at length the objections to this truth in his *Defense of the Secret Providence of God*, found in the book *Calvin's Calvinism*, available from the Reformed Free Publishing Association.

⁴ *Calvin's Calvinism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), p. 289.

Book Reviews

God Meant It for Good: The Covenant & the Church Today, by Ted Hoogsteen. Burlington, Ontario, Canada: Welch Publishing Company Inc., 1989. 99 pages. (Paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

The title is taken from Joseph's words to his brothers in Genesis 50:20 concerning their wickedness in selling him into Egypt, "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." The book explains Gen-

esis 37-50 rightly as covenant history, not merely the history of the vicissitudes and eventual success of Joseph. In this connection, the author corrects the common misinterpretation of the history that regards Joseph as the type of Christ and the central figure:

Occasional attempts have been made to compare Joseph with the Messiah, as if Jacob's favorite was the forerunner of Christ in this ac-

count.... Such interpretation may not fail to do justice to Judah. All Israel served with messianic overtones, but not at the expense of the main figure in the fourth generation, i.e., Judah (p. 60).

Although Hoogsteen does not use the term, he teaches that God keeps His covenant unconditionally: "Despite all the acts of faithlessness on the part of the early covenant people the Lord God sovereignly controlled the situation as the One faithful to his promise" (p. 25). Is there any other possible explanation of Genesis 37-50? Hoogsteen also affirms the absolute sovereignty of the God of Jacob, Judah, and Joseph in history:

The Pharaoh, with the whole Egyptian population, believed that he ruled absolutely. Not so. That unconditional sovereignty belongs to God only, as the covenant Lord. And he gave Pharaoh a lesson in world politics (p. 42).

Throughout, there is application of the history to the church today, particularly to her struggle with doubt in the face of adversity: "As in the world at large, fear suffuses also the Church, a contagious mass infection of doubt that God no longer regulates history" (p. 22).

Hoogsteen is mistaken in his severe condemnation of the early Joseph — the Joseph of the dreams about his family, the reports about his wicked brothers, and the coat of many colors: arrogant ("overweening in pride"); power-seeker; braggart; conceited; avaricious; and a tale-bearer (pp. 24, 25, 32, 37). On Hoogsteen's view, Joseph was worse than his brothers.

In fact, none of these actions of Joseph was sinful. All were holy. God gave him the prophetic dreams; Joseph had to prophesy. A child ought to report his brothers' wicked lives to his parents; otherwise, he connives at their sins. If there was any folly in the coat, it was that of Jacob who gave it to Joseph. Scripture never fastens any blame on the

young man Joseph. Joseph is the outstanding instance of the covenant young person who can and does live a godly life, *in his youth*, by the power of covenant grace.

Hoogsteen's surprising censure of the godly Joseph detracts from the truth expressed in Genesis 50:20, and from the comfort of the church implied in the text, for in this case it is perfectly understandable that a very wicked Joseph should be sorely chastised for his evils.

It is evidently an error on page 83, that Reuben's two oldest sons were killed. The reference to Genesis 38:7, 10 shows that Judah's sons are meant. ■

The Cambridge Platform: A Platform of Church Discipline Gathered Out of the Word of God; and agreed upon by the Elders and Messengers of the Churches Assembled in the Synod at Cambridge in New England To be presented to the Churches and General Court for their consideration and acceptance in the Lord (A New Edition of the Historic Puritan Congregational Church Order), ed. Darrell Todd Maurina. Lawrence, MI: The Reformed Tract Publication Committee, 3rd corrected printing, 1993. xiv + 57 pp. \$12 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

The justification for this expensive booklet is that it is the first reprinting of an important Congregational church order in modern typography. Darrell Todd Maurina has edited the text by comparing several modern printings of the *Cambridge Platform* (hereafter *CP*), so that he is confident that this is "the most accurate of all the editions as well as the most readily useable by nonspecialists" (p. xiv).

The *CP* is the book of church order drawn up in New England in 1648 by leaders of the Congregational churches. It represents their deliberate rejection of the Presbyterian polity that had just been set forth at the Westminster Assembly in "The Form of Presbyterian Church Gov-

ernment" and in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

In 17 chapters, each of which consists of several articles, the *CP* treats of the various aspects of the government, order, and discipline of the church. The opening chapters are devoted to Congregational ecclesiology.

It is the differences of Congregational church polity from Presbyterian polity that concern Reformed believers today, as they are the reason for this publication of the *CP*.

The *CP* obviously differs from Presbyterian church polity in that it repudiates the authority of major assemblies over the local church: "(It does not belong to synods to) exercise ... any ... act of church authority or jurisdiction" (16.4).

Less obviously but equally effectively, it differs from Presbyterian polity also by compromising the rule of the local congregation by a body of elders. The *CP* allows for churches without elders (9.3,4,5); permits the congregation to depose their elders (8.7; 10.6); and goes so far as to assert that "a company of professed believers ecclesiastically confederate" is a church "before they have officers, and without them" (10.2). In this context, the *CP* declares that the government of the church in part "resembles a democracy" (10.3).

It is not surprising that, as Maurina observes in his preface, many Congregational churches soon did away with elders.

The editor also candidly notes that the result of the rejection of an authoritative synod by the *CP* is that there is no solution in Congregationalism for the problem of division in the local church between the eldership and the membership of the congregation.

Of more impact was the question of what to do when the elders and congregation disagreed about a church act and could not come to agreement. Fifty years after the Cambridge Platform was adopted, the question was still a live issue.

The New Haven (Connecticut) County Association was only willing to consent to the later Saybrook Platform if it was understood that "if the Majority of the Brethren don't consent, the Elders can't proceed to act: If the Elders can't consent, the Fraternity can't proceed; in which Case, it is proper to seek Council" (p. xi).

This "Council," it must be remembered, to which the divided church turns in desperation, has no authority.

Editor Maurina is mistaken, therefore, when he advertises this new edition of the *CP* by suggesting that "Presbyterian readers of the Cambridge Platform are likely to find their stereotypes of Congregationalism to be severely challenged" (p. ix). On the contrary, Presbyterian and Reformed readers of the *CP* will find their sober assessments of Congregationalism solidly confirmed. Congregationalism denies the Kingship of Christ over the church in its two basic respects: rule

over the congregation by a body of elders and authority over the united congregations in prescribed areas by an authoritative synod. It denies this Kingship in its foundational document.

The *CP* is not a Reformed option, but another system of church government.

Cambridge lies over against Dordt and the London of the Westminster Assembly. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Mission Activities

Before we go any further, we have to make one correction from our last issue of the "News." You may remember that in that issue we included an item about Rev. Gritters and Mr. Gord Wassink going to Northern Ireland for two weeks to visit with our missionary, Rev. R. Hanko, and his family, as well as the Covenant Reformed Fellowship, on behalf of our calling church, the Hudsonville, MI PRC and our churches' Domestic Mission Committee. Well, since that report, Mr. Wassink's mother became seriously ill and passed away, making it impossible for him to go. Because of that, Mr. Tom Bodbyl, another member of our DMC, went in his place.

Congregational Activities

On Friday night, the 26th, and for most of Saturday, the 27th of January, more than one hundred members of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI met together for a Conference on Family Worship at Camp Geneva on the shore of cold, frozen, and windy Lake Michigan. This conference was sponsored by

Georgetown's Council and was meant to give detailed instructions as to what family worship should consist of and how it should be conducted.

As you can imagine, there were all kinds of activities planned for this two-day conference, with many of the participants staying over night. But the main emphasis of the conference was family worship, and the weekend began with a speech by Prof. R. Decker, a member of Georgetown, on Friday night, dealing with the "Historical Basis of Family Worship." This instruction was followed the next day by a speech by Rev. B. Gritters, pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, entitled "Family Worship — How?" It appears that these two speeches were well received; since, a week after the conference, Rev. R. VanOverloop, pastor of Georgetown, took an informal poll of his catechism students and found that many of them had noticed a difference in their family worship.

With that in mind, if you are interested in either audio or video tapes of these two speeches, you can obtain them from Georgetown by either calling or writing Mr. Randy Kamminga at (616) 669-0204, or 8541 40th Ave., Jenison, MI 49428.

The Consistory of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI, after hearing no objections from their congregation, de-

cided to change the time of their Sunday evening worship service to 6:00 P.M. This change took place on February 4.

In mid-January, after repeated bulletin announcements, about 25 members of the First PRC in Edgerton, MN got together and organized a Choral Society, with Rev. Brummel being their first president.

School Activities

The P.T.A. of the Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN met January 19 to hear Rev. A. Brummel, pastor at First PRC in Edgerton, give a slide presentation on Myanmar (formerly Burma). The entire congregation of Edgerton was invited as well.

There was a special Christian School Chapel by the Hope Christian School in Redlands, CA last month. This chapel was held in the auditorium of the Hope PRC in Redlands, and the topic was "Obedience to Authority."

Evangelism Activities

Members of our churches in west Michigan, as well as neighbors of the Byron Center, MI PRC, were invited to a series of Community Bible Study Classes at the Byron Center church. These classes, hosted by Byron's Evangelism Society, dealt with the subject of the Covenant Family. These classes were to be

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

held on four successive weeks last month.

The first class, entitled "The Blessedness of Single Life," was led by Byron's pastor, Rev. Doug Kuiper. The second, scheduled a week later, was entitled "The Husband as Head of the Family and the Wife as Help Meet for the Husband," led by Rev. R. VanOverloop. The third was to be led by Mr. Don Doezema and Mr. Bruce VanSolkema and dealt with "The Childless Couple in the Church." And the fourth and last class was led by Rev. W. Bruinsma and was titled, "Nurturing Covenant Children."

News From Singapore

Back in December the Sunday School of one of our sister churches, the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, launched a noteworthy project. They issued a challenge to those in Sunday School, including the adults, to memorize the 107 questions of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Plans called for memorization every Sunday in the sanctuary for 20 minutes after church. Prizes were also going to be awarded on the basis of a written test in November 1996.

Minister Activities

Rev. Dale Kuiper, pastor of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, declined the call he had been extended from the Grace PRC in Standale, MI. Since that decline, Grace formed a new trio of the Revs. M. Dick, S. Houck, and S. Key. Rev. Dick received the call.

The Doon, IA PRC has extended a call to Rev. W. Bruinsma of the First PRC in Holland, MI.

Food For Thought

"It is the peculiar business of faith's eye to see in the dark."

— A. Toplady □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's and Ladies' Society of the First PRC of Holland, MI extends its sincere Christian sympathy to their fellow members, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Wassink, in the death of his mother,

GERTRUDE WASSINK.

May they find comfort in God's Word, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 3:27).

Alan Elzinga, President
Shirley Casemier, Secretary

NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee Secretary, Mr. Larry Meulenberg (Phone: 616-453-8466). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, March 27, 1996, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Larry Meulenberg, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Grandville PRC expresses its heartfelt sympathy to its fellow officebearer, Dennis Dykstra, in the death of his father,

MR. STANLEY DYKSTRA.

It is our prayer that the Word of God and His tender mercies will be an unending source of comfort and peace. "But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies" (Lamentations 3:32).

Rev. Audred Spriensma, President
Cornelius Jonker, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The School Board of Covenant Christian School of Lynden, WA, on behalf of the Society for Protestant Reformed Education in Lynden, expresses its Christian sympathy to our faithful teacher, Genevieve Lubbers, and to her extended family in the loss of her sister,

EVELYN LUBBERS.

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

Mel Yonkman, President
Bob Kelley, Secretary

NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of Synod, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 1996, are hereby notified that all material for the 1996 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches should be in the hands of the Stated Clerk no later than April 1. Please send material to:

Mr. Don Doezema, Stated Clerk
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418