



THE **STANDARD BEARER**

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

Who will ever fathom
that great love whereby
the Father cast the Son
of His bosom from Him,
cast Him away in wrath,
declared Him accursed to
utter desolation for your
sins and mine?

See "Victors Over Death" — page 267

*Vol. 72, No. 12
March 15, 1996*

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Editorially speaking ...

We welcome the appearance soon of a new magazine on the Presbyterian scene in North America. It will be published by "Concerned Presbyterians" in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Although the magazine is not yet named, it will set forth, and contend for, historic, creedal Presbyterianism. The magazine will have, I suspect, a distinctly Southern Presbyterian flavor. All the better! Let us hear from the spiritual heirs of James Henley Thornwell. There is a need in North America for a periodical that boldly advocates and applies the truths of confessional Presbyterianism, while at the same time resolutely defending the faith against its detractors.

The editor is the Mississippi pastor known to many of us, the Rev. Eugene Case.

That magazine will be published four times a year and will be supplemented by four "newsletters." The subscription price is \$15 a year.

May 1, 1996 has been set as the date of the first issue.

To subscribe, write:

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The noted Dutch Reformed theologian G.C. Berkouwer died recently at the age of 92. Author of many books, including the acclaimed "Studies in Dogmatics" series, and influential both in the Netherlands and in North America, Berkouwer will be widely praised at his death.

But not by us.

Berkouwer became an open adversary of the Reformed doctrine of election and reprobation, particularly as confessed by the Protestant Reformed Churches. By his theological method of raising questions that he both left unanswered and suggested were unanswerable and by his heretical teachings, specifically on predestination and on the doctrine of Scripture, this admittedly erudite theologian became responsible, in large part, for the falling away of his own Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) and of other Reformed churches. It is reported in the Dutch press that two years before his death Berkouwer publicly defended Harry Kuitert's recent book, *Het algemeen betwijfeld christelijk geloof. Een herziening* (*The Catholic Doubtful Christian Faith. A Revision*). This book denied every cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith.

At death, theologians must give account, finally, to the Great Shepherd of His sheep.

Foremost among the questions put to theologians by the Judge are these: did you keep my sheep in the truth, and were you orthodox?

— DJE



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

Victors Over Death

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 15:55-57

O Death! Thou fearful monster with thy deadly sting!

We and our dear ones live all our lives in the awareness of thy presence.

A mother takes her newly born infant in her arms, holds it close to herself, and is immediately aware of a tremendous responsibility placed upon her. Her child must not be too hot or too cold, must have enough food but not too much, must be covered at night but very carefully.

As the tot grows older there are new threats on its life. Drafts, germs, diseases seem to hover all around. The little tyke is warned, "Don't do this," and "Don't do that."

As he goes out to play or is sent off to school, other dangers threaten his life. He must learn to look both ways before he crosses the street, and must be alert for automobiles and for all sorts of dangers everywhere.

Actually the threats on our lives only increase. As we grow older, health problems increase, sicknesses

and diseases threaten our lives. In one word, we live in the midst of death, for sooner or later the grim reaper takes us as its prey, and soon our place knows us no more.

O Grave! Thou hungry receptacle of the dead!

A father and his children stand beside you grieving over the loss of a wife and mother. A mother pours out her sorrows over you in the loss of a precious daughter. Many come to visit you, but find no comfort here. No one can fill the empty spot left by the loss of a dear one. I know.

Here lie the dead of all the ages, for it is appointed for all men to die, and afterward follows the judgment. The grave is the portal, as it were, to hell, for accursed is every one who does not abide in all that is written in the book of the law to do it.

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether good or evil (II Cor. 5:10).

Dying we all die!

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"The sting of death is sin!"

I was conceived and born in sin. The guilt of Adam was my guilt from the moment of my conception. Therefore I am by nature incapable of any good, depraved, corrupt, inclined to hate God and my neighbor.

How readily I adjust to sin round about me. I adapt myself to the company of sinners and willing-

ly I set myself in the company of the scornful (Ps. 1:1).

The trouble is that sin breeds sin. One sinful deed occasions another, even worse than the former. There is no turning back. It is impossible to call a halt. He who sins becomes the slave of sin and falls into the bondage of death, according to the righteous judgment of God. For the soul that sins must die.

"The strength of sin is the law."

God is God, the righteous Judge of heaven and earth. He is our Creator, our Sustainer, sovereign Ruler of our lives. He justly demands of us: Love Me. Serve Me with your whole being, heart and mind and soul and strength. God blesses those who love and serve Him with eternal, glorious blessings of intimate fellowship and life.

But, on the other hand, God justly condemns all those who transgress His commandments. For "accursed is every one who abideth not in all that is written in the book of the law to do it."

The righteous God punishes sin already in this life, but not only in this life, even in everlasting condemnation of hell fire.

God's justice demands that the soul that sins must die everlastingly under His consuming wrath.

Left to ourselves we can only cry out:

In Thy wrath our spirits languish,
Sinful 'neath Thy searching eye;
All our days are passed in anguish,
In Thy wrath we pine and die.

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"O death! Where is thy sting?"

God is merciful! O yes, His mercy is a just mercy! He has in the far reaches of eternity chosen unto Himself in sovereign good pleasure a people whom He takes unto Himself, saying, I will be a Father unto them, and they shall be My sons and My daughters to dwell with Me in My house forever.

To make this possible, God was willing to sacrifice His most precious possession to redeem His people from the power of sin and death. He chose His Son, the Christ, to be their Redeemer. And the Son willingly surrendered Himself unto the curse of everlasting divine wrath to bring His people to glory. The Shepherd was willing to lay down His life for His sheep.

Therefore in the fullness of time God sent His Son into the world, born of the virgin Mary, born under the law, to bear the curse of the law and deliver us from the bondage of sin and death into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Who will ever fathom that great love whereby the Father cast the Son of His bosom from Him, cast Him away in wrath, declared Him accursed to utter desolation for your sins and mine? Who will ever comprehend the love of Christ that He manifested all His life in bearing the curse that should have fallen upon us, and that while we were still sinners?

Why should God have done that for me? Do not ask: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" But rather confess through your tears: "I was there as part of a fallen human race when we cried: 'Crucify Him! Crucify Him!' And we still make ourselves guilty of rejecting Him with our sins!"

Yet God was in Christ reconciling us unto Himself, not counting our sins against us. Christ died in our stead. For as in Adam all died who were in Adam, so in Christ all those are made alive again who are

included in Him. Amazing grace! Boundless love!

Up from the grave He arose
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes.

He arose a Victor over death's domain

And He lives forever with His saints to reign.

He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!

By Christ's resurrection our salvation has become an accomplished fact. When He suffered agonies of hell, we suffered those agonies in Him. When He died, we died. When He arose, we arose! And now we are seated with Him at the right hand of God in His glory (Eph. 2:4-6).

"O Grave, where is thy victory?"

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"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

Law! You cannot touch me, you cannot condemn me, for there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Through faith in Christ we are as completely righteous as if we in our own bodies had atoned for all our sins. God sees no sin in Israel, no transgression in Jacob, but deems us worthy of eternal life and blessedness.

Sin! You no longer have dominion over me. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the bondage of sin and death. We are new creatures in Christ, born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God that liveth and abideth forever.

We are washed, sanctified as saints in Christ Jesus, dedicated to our God, to live unto Him even as we live through Him. In our hearts we have the beginning of eternal joy, a joy unspeakable and full of glory! No sorrow, no pain, no loss of dear ones can deprive us of that joy.

We can confess with our fathers of former times, "The eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... is for the sake of Christ His Son, my God and my Father, on whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt, but He will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body: and further, that He will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to my advantage; for He is able to do it, being almighty God, and willing, being a faithful Father" (Heid. Catechism, Lord's Day 9).

It may not seem so now, yet it is so very true that the moment of our death is better than the moment of our birth. In fact, it is the greatest moment of our lives, for it is the realization of God's eternal purpose with us. Great day! Glorious day. For this is our coronation day!

Besides all that, we have the blessed hope that when this earthly house of our present tabernacle collapses, we have a house, not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens. Christ is there preparing a place for us. When that place is ready and we are ready for that place, He is coming to take us unto Himself, that we may be with Him in His glory.

And, as if all that is of minor importance, our bodies will rest in the grave in anticipation of the coming of the Lord. When He appears, this mortal will put on immortality, and this corruptible will put on incorruption. Death will be swallowed up in victory!

More than conquerors are we, through our Lord Jesus Christ!

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? I thank God in Jesus Christ our Lord! □

*The
moment
of our death
... is the
greatest
moment
of our
lives.*



An Open Letter to Gary North

(Part Two)

(In his "I.C.E. Position Paper" of July 1995, Dr. Gary North responded to the editorial "Jewish Dreams" in the January 15, 1995 issue of the *Standard Bearer*. Here I conclude my response to this leading Christian Reconstructionist postmillennialist by way of an open letter begun in the March 1, 1996 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.)

In my response to your colleague Gary DeMar in the March 15, 1995 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, you will discover your fourth mistake. You claim that "the prayer in Answer 191 (of the Westminster Larger Catechism — DJE) is clearly a postmillennial prayer." This claim, with the implications that you draw from it, is the heart of your piece against my "Jewish Dreams." But, as I demonstrated to Gary DeMar, who also appealed to Question and Answer 191 of the Westminster Larger Catechism in support of postmillennialism in creedal Presbyterianism, Question 191 does not teach postmillennialism. The Westminster divines did not explain the second petition of the Lord's Prayer as a postmillennial prayer. Since I have already explained Question 191 in my response to DeMar, I may be permitted here merely to quote what I wrote earlier. In order that the body of this letter not become overly long, I will add this explanation of Question 191 as a postscript.

Be assured, contrary to your assertion that "Engelsma does not believe that Christians should pray the

prayer of Answer 191," we Reformed amillennialists do think that Christians should pray the petition of Question and Answer 191 of the Westminster Larger Catechism. We pray it fervently. We pray it with the confidence that God will grant it. But the granting is not, and will not be, an earthly kingdom and physical dominion. Nor may any Presbyterian have this hope in mind when he prays. If he does, he prays contrary to the revealed will of God and angers God with his self-willed petition.

No Footnotes

Fifth, you are evidently unfamiliar with the *Standard Bearer*, particularly with the editorials in the magazine. At one point you express suspicion of the editorial "Jewish Dreams" as "masquerading as a serious theological essay." At another point you are disgusted because of "brief, unfootnoted essays critical of Christian Reconstruction." Here, taking off the gloves, you compare me unfavorably with Hal Lindsey because Lindsey at least has footnotes (though inaccurate) in his writing against the theonomists: "Academically speaking, ... Engelsma is trailing Hal Lindsey on this issue."

Hal Lindsey!

The *Standard Bearer* is not a theological journal. It is written for believers, not for scholars and theologians. I trust that the editorials are researched and accurate. But as a rule you will look in vain for footnotes. This does not mean, howev-

er, that there is no interaction in the *Standard Bearer* with theologians and scholars of a contrary mind.

This is your sixth mistake. You are aggrieved that I do not respond to, or even mention, the works on postmillennialism by leading Christian Reconstruction writers: "A serious Calvinist theologian who is doing his best to inform his readers about what lies ahead for the church would mention the existence of such books."

Did you not notice the quotation from David Chilton's *Paradise Restored*, giving publisher, date, and pages, in the editorial that you criticize? Apart from this, your judgment is hasty. For I have been following up on "Jewish Dreams" both with responses to letters and with a series of editorials, "A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism." In these subsequent articles I have been, and will be, referring to, quoting from, and responding to the postmillennialists whom you mention, as well as others.

I would have thought that you received the *Standard Bearer* regularly. Apparently this is not the case. To ensure that this material is available to you, I am sending you all of the articles on eschatology that follow "Jewish Dreams."

Those Insulated PR's

Last, you display ignorance of the membership of the PRC when you describe us as "people who are very insulated culturally and ecclesiastically, and who have not been

exposed to the larger world of Calvinism." I get the impression that you Christian Reconstructionists solemnly pass this nonsense around among yourselves. Some time ago another of your men publicly dismissed us as "rural and isolationist." I suspect that the source is the Christian Reformed Church's longstanding charge against us of being "anabaptists" on account of our denial of common grace and our insistence on a spiritual antithesis between the believing church and the ungodly world.

It is high time that serious, fair, Reformed thinkers put this bit of polemical cheap-shot aside and got down to brass tacks with the real issues at stake in the Protestant Reformed denial of common grace and affirmation of the antithesis. Nominally Reformed and Presbyterian people are going to hell today exactly because they are conforming to the world in keeping with the tenets of common grace. In teachings and conduct, Reformed and Presbyterian churches are being swallowed up by the world, because they have convinced themselves that the world outside of Christ is full of goodness and wisdom by virtue of the common grace operations of the Holy Spirit.

There is nothing that Reformed churches and people need more urgently today than powerful preaching and teaching of the antithesis as the antithesis is still unashamedly confessed in the PRC.

This has absolutely nothing to do with world-flight, isolation, and insulation. It never did.

Look into our doctrine of the antithesis a little. Judge our position, not by the caricatures of our enemies but by our own confession. Was Paul an anabaptist because he exhorted, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate" (II Cor. 6:17)? Was John trying to form a people who would be "very insulated culturally and ecclesiastically" when he warned, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not

of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4)? Was the Holy Spirit an advocate of world-flight when He inspired, "Israel then shall dwell in safety alone" (Deut. 33:28)?

Visit a PR church, any PR church. Talk with a PR minister, any PR minister. If ever you are in Grand Rapids, give me the opportunity to introduce you to the typical PR church-member, male or female — knowledgeable of and interested in everything Calvinistic. Meet the farmers, businessmen, doctors, dentists, lawyers, registered nurses, teachers, bankers, engineers, and other members of the trades and professions. Let me take you through our Christian schools, so that you can see that for a long time (much longer than Reconstructionists have been advocating Christian education) Protestant Reformed parents have taken their baptism vows seriously and have been training their children to serve the Lord Christ, in obedience to His will in Holy Scripture, in every sphere of human life in the world.

"In the world, but not of the world" — this, and not isolation, is our calling, our purpose, and, imperfectly, our life.

The Coming of the Kingdom through the PRC

Indeed, if someone, foolishly, were of a mind to make the comparison, it would be evident that the PRC have done, and are now doing, far more, by the grace of God, to extend the kingdom of Christ than all of Christian Reconstructionism. There is a denomination of sound, Reformed churches across all of North America bearing witness to King Jesus; there are missions both at home and abroad; there is contact with and help of likeminded churches in foreign lands; there is an extensive system of Reformed, Christian schools in which thousands of boys and girls have been reared to honor the sovereign, triune God; there are the godly lives of thousands in every ordinance and sphere

of human life; there is the oversight, admonition, and discipline exercised through bodies of elders; there has been the giving of hundreds of thousands of dollars to help the poor through active diaconates; there are innumerable books, pamphlets, and other writings.

We are doing only that which is our duty to do, so that we are unprofitable servants. But what the PRC are doing on behalf of the coming of Christ's kingdom does not suffer by comparison with the efforts of the whole of Christian Reconstruction.

In fact, if the Holy Spirit should have in mind (which He does not) to bring about your millennium, everything is in place in the PRC, and in other faithful Reformed and Presbyterian churches, for the lightning to strike. I cannot think of anything that we have left undone, except, perhaps, to pray, "Lord, send revival," with the proper, practiced pathos in our throats. But even in this respect, we are not completely unfit instruments for the arrival of the millennium, for we do earnestly pray the petition that Jesus taught us, "Thy kingdom come."

You end with a challenge:

Someday, a theologian in the Protestant Reformed Church ought to write a detailed book on eschatology. Then he should follow this with a detailed academic critique of theonomic postmillennialism. I do not expect either challenge to be accepted.

Do not give up on us too quickly. For one thing, Herman Hoeksema has done significant work in eschatology. Have you read the section on eschatology in his *Reformed Dogmatics*? Have you read his masterful commentary on the book of Revelation, *Behold, He Cometh*?

Besides, more may be forthcoming.

It is possible that the eschatology of Christian Reconstruction will indeed be examined in the light of the Reformed faith, especially since no one else is doing this.

There may even be some footnotes.

Hal Lindsey, indeed!

Cordially,
DJE

P. S.

You appeal to Question 191 of the Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) as a confessionally Presbyterian teaching of postmillennialism.

The prayer in Answer 191 is clearly a postmillennial prayer. It was made mandatory by the Westminster Assembly. It calls for the visible establishment of the kingdom of God in history.... Engelsma owed it to his readers to point out that the Savoy Declaration's statement (an Independent confession — DJE) was lifted from the Larger Catechism. But to have admitted this would have undermined the force of his statement in the previous paragraph that the Westminster Confession of Faith does not teach postmillennialism.

Since our largely Reformed readership may not be familiar with this question and answer of the WLC, I quote it here:

Q. What do we pray for in the second petition?

A. In the second petition (which is, Thy kingdom come), acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel-officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate: that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted: that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with

him for ever: and that he would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of his power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends.

This is basically the same explanation of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer that is given in Lord's Day 48 of our own Heidelberg Catechism, with the exception of the maintenance of the church by the civil magistrate.

Neither the Presbyterian nor the Reformed explanation is postmillennial.

I made this clear in my response to your fellow postmillennialist Gary DeMar, who had also objected to my editorial with an appeal to Question 191 of the WLC, as though this were Presbyterian postmillennialism. What follows is my response to DeMar in the March 15, 1995 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

The four quotations by DeMar from the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms prove absolutely nothing for a postmillennial interpretation of the Westminster documents. No amillennialist has any difficulty with these expressions whatsoever. All of these statements square perfectly with "Engelsma's notion that 'the church in the endtime will be a persecuted church, not a triumphalist church.'" Christ has been restraining and subduing His and our enemies by His sovereign power since His ascension into heaven (Eph. 2:20-23). The fulfillment of this sovereign restraint and subduing in history does not require the "Christianizing of the world" and a kingdom of earthly power and glory. The risen Christ restrains and subdues His enemies by His secret providence, and He governs and exalts His church by His grace.

The right understanding of the Larger Catechism's explanation of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, in Question 191,

an explanation that is virtually identical with the explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism in Question 123, will serve to make clear the meaning of all of DeMar's quotations from the Westminster Catechisms.

In the second petition, the Catechism explains, believers pray that God in Christ will destroy the kingdom of Satan and build up the kingdom of Christ, which is the church. DeMar thinks that this refers to some future time before the coming of Christ. Also, he supposes that the destruction of Satan's kingdom and the victory of Christ's kingdom in this future time are *earthly*, that is, physical, political, social, and visible to the bodily eye. The saints will have dominion: the carnal kingdom.

He is mistaken on both counts. Christ has been destroying the kingdom of Satan and building up His own kingdom, the church, ever since He ascended into heaven. The nature of the defeat of Satan's kingdom and of the victory of Christ's kingdom is *spiritual*. It consists of the gathering out of Satan's kingdom of the elect; of the sanctification of the elect to serve the Lord in every sphere of life; and of the preservation of the church in truth and holiness against the onslaughts of the devil. The perfect answer to the second petition will be granted in the Day of Christ.

How does the Larger Catechism itself sum up its explanation of the second petition? "...that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him for ever."

There is not so much as a hint of postmillennialism in Question 191 of the Larger Catechism or in the other quotations adduced by Gary DeMar. One finds postmillennialism in these confessional statements only if he has decided beforehand to un-

derstand "restrain," "subdue," "defend," and "conquer" in the earthly sense they had for Old Testament Israel in the day of shadows.

The answer to Question 191 of the Larger Catechism is by no means "almost identical to that of The Savoy Declaration (26.5)." Chapter 26.5 of the Congregational Savoy Declaration (which I quoted in the editorial "Jewish Dreams") differs radically from Question 191 of the Presbyterian

an Larger Catechism. The Savoy Declaration posits "enlarged" churches enjoying "a more quiet, peaceable, and glorious condition than they have enjoyed" *"in the latter days, Antichrist being destroyed ... and the adversaries of the kingdom of his dear Son broken"* and *"in this world."*

Take note: *"in this world."*

The Independents who drew up the Savoy Declaration, dissatisfied with Presbyterian

Westminster's refusal to do so, gave clear expression to the postmillennial dream of an earthly kingdom. Their churches are taught to look forward to earthly peace, earthly prosperity, and earthly power!

Christian Reconstruction has no basis in any Reformed or Presbyterian creed for its dream of a carnal kingdom in history. □

— DJE

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ A Shameful Death, Indeed!

Time Magazine, December 11, 1995, has a cover story with the title "A Shameful Death." The account is shocking indeed. Though one comes to expect the most awful crimes, this one seems almost to top them all. The account tells of a cute little six-year-old. She seemed popular with her schoolmates and teachers. She had been taken under the wing of Prince Michael of Greece, who promised to finance her full private-school education up to college. But this little girl was brutally murdered. Murdered by her own mother. *Time* states, "When the police arrived, she confessed to killing Elisa by throwing her against a concrete wall. She confessed that she had made Elisa eat her own feces and that she had mopped the floor with her head. The police told reporters that there was no part of the six-year-old's body that was not cut or bruised. Thirty circular marks that at first appeared to be cigarette burns turned out to be impressions left by the stone in someone's ring. 'In my 22 years,' said Lieut. Luis Gonzalez, 'this is the worst case of

child abuse I have ever seen.'"

Horrible though the above may sound, is it not to be expected — given the lack of value placed upon human life in our society? Each year, so we are told, there are at least one and a half million abortions in this country. That's a total of over 30 million since abortion was legalized by decree of the Supreme Court of our land. That does not even take into account the many very early abortions caused by medications or physical devices.

If a small baby is killed just before legal birth, that is considered a matter of "choice." The fetus is only a bit of "tissue." But if the mother should kill the baby immediately after birth, the country is horrified. The details of this murder are broadcast for all to hear. One is a "shameful death," the other is merely the removal of tissue.

In December 4, 1995 there appeared a full page advertisement in the *New York Times* by the National Right to Life Educational Trust Fund (reprinted in *Christian News*). Here is presented a "shameful death" indeed:

In September, 1993 Brenda Pratt Shafer, a registered nurse with thirteen years of experience, was assigned by her nursing agency to an abortion clinic. Since Nurse Shafer considered herself "very pro-

choice," she didn't think this assignment would be a problem. She was wrong. This is what Nurse Shafer saw.

"I stood at the doctor's side and watched him perform a partial-birth abortion on a woman who was six months pregnant. The baby's heartbeat was clearly visible on the ultrasound screen. The doctor delivered the baby's body and arms, everything but his little head. The baby's body was moving. His little fingers were clasping together. He was kicking his feet. The doctor took a pair of scissors and inserted them into the back of the baby's head, and the baby's arms jerked out in a flinch, a startle reaction, like a baby does when he thinks that he might fall. Then the doctor opened the scissors up. Then he stuck the high-powered suction tube into the hole and sucked the baby's brains out. Now the baby was completely limp.

"I never went back to the clinic. But I am still haunted by the face of that little boy. It was the most perfect, angelic face I have ever seen."

A "shocking death" indeed! Perhaps the description is too much for sensitive stomachs. But it points out the callousness evident in our day toward life. Why should the brutal killing of a little six-year-old gain the attention of *Time* magazine, on its cover, no less — and the bru-

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tal killing of the unborn be a routine "procedure" carried out thousands of times every day in our land?

The Congress of the United States, according to reports, has passed a law outlawing "partial-birth abortions" such as the one described above. The same reports indicate that likely the Senate will be unable to override the threatened presidential veto.

But Scripture speaks concerning all of this in Romans 1:29-32, "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

■ New Questions Concerning Divorce

In the Denver *Post* I have read of an attempt to make divorce more difficult to obtain. The writer of the article is obviously opposed to the attempt, but it is of interest to hear what she has to say.

In the nightmare scenario of big government, where states and federal agencies generate sprawling regulations whose tentacles reach into the most private areas of our lives, nothing is so sinister as the movement to legislate family values.

The latest tactic, grinding its way through state legislatures in Iowa and Washington, is the effort to prevent unhappy couples from getting divorced.

The theory is that kids are better off with two parents in the house even if they hate each other.

It's not what we might call enlightened public policy....

...The problems caused by divorce are undeniable. One-third of the

single-parent families headed by women in the U.S. live below the poverty level. And study after study suggests that children of divorce bear psychological scars even in the best of circumstances.

But before we invite state legislators into the delicate area of marriage mediation, we might ask them to apply themselves more earnestly to the tasks we already have assigned them, namely providing high-quality public education, equal opportunity, enforcement of court-ordered child support, protecting the quality of our air and water, and maintaining safe neighborhoods....

It has become apparent to many outside of the church that "no-fault" divorces, marriages quickly made and as quickly broken, have contributed to the unrest, instability, vulnerability of families and especially is dreadfully hurtful to children. The writer, above, would place much of the blame on government for not providing "high-quality public education," though good education ought to be provided by parents, not government. But there are some state governments, obviously, which rightly recognize the terrible toll that easy divorces have made on society. The drama of movie and television has promoted the ungodly attitudes evident in society towards marriage. Many will doubtless resist, even to the death, the attempt of governments to return to the older "morality" of marriages for life, and divorces which can be obtained only on provable grounds of adultery.

The church, though in many instances it has adopted the same worldly attitudes towards marriage, knows what God's Word requires. It forbids, of course, in the seventh commandment all forms of adultery. And Christ clearly taught in Matthew 5 and 19 that marriage is permanent — for what God has joined together let no man put asunder.

But all of this represents another sign of the end of the age. Where families are effectively destroyed, the consequences will be seen in all of society. Where God's Word is ig-

nored, the consequences threatened by His Word will surely follow. It would seem too late for any governmental body to turn back the clock.

■ Persecution on a Grand Scale

The *Christian Renewal*, January 8, 1996, quotes from *Frontline Fellowship News* concerning the plight of Sudan's Christians. Perhaps it is well to remind ourselves that Christians in many places of the world face severe persecution, slavery, and death. It is another of the signs of the end of time.

Tens of thousands of Sudanese Christian men, women and children have been kidnapped and sold as slaves by government soldiers and Arab militias. A recent research trip by *Christian Solidarity International* to the Nuba Mountains gathered shocking evidence of the ongoing Islamic slave trade in Sudan.

An Arab slave trader openly described how marauding gangs of soldiers have regularly swooped on villages of Christians — killing, looting and capturing as many slaves as possible. This campaign was part of the Islamic government's attempt to capture the South of Sudan for Islam. "The slaves, in most cases children and young women, are taken north where they are forced to provide agricultural labor, domestic work and sexual services against their will," reported one CSI team member. "Slavery is used to debilitate the Christian communities; they are forcibly dispersed and/or imprisoned. They have to surrender and submit to becoming Muslims or they are killed."

An Arab slave trader, Ibrahim, described how he resold 162 African children and young women back to their families. Ibrahim claimed that the raids are organized by the government of Sudan which arms the Arab militias and encourages them to attack African villages in the South — keeping booty and capturing slaves.

The research team estimates that 1.5 million people have perished and more than 5 million have been displaced out of a population of 8 million South Sudanese....

Christ Himself foretold, "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my

name's sake" (Matt. 24:9). It is now occurring with increasing frequency across this globe. Nor is it impossible that soon those who are Chris-

tians in this land will have to face some of the same atrocities for Jesus' sake. □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

Infant Baptism

"The covenant of God shall be sealed unto the children of Christians by baptism, as soon as the administration thereof is feasible, in the public assembly when the Word of God is preached."

(Church Order, Article 56)

"The ministers shall do their utmost to the end that the father present his child for baptism."

(Church Order, Article 57)

With Articles 56 and 57 the *Church Order* begins its treatment of the sacraments. Ecclesiastical regulations pertaining to the administration of the sacraments will take up the next nine articles of the *Church Order*.

The space devoted to the sacraments indicates how highly the Reformed churches esteem the sacraments in the life of the church. The administration of the sacraments has a vital place in the ministry of the local congregation.

At the same time, the articles of our *Church Order* make plain the zeal of the Reformed churches to guard the sacraments. The sacraments must be administered, but they must be administered *properly*. Precautions are taken to prevent their desecration.

Precautions are taken *by the churches in common*.

Each congregation has the re-

sponsibility to see to the proper administration of the sacraments in its own fellowship. To be sure!

But the calling extends further. The churches have a responsibility with respect to each other — corporate responsibility. In these articles of the *Church Order*, the churches of the federation exercise mutual supervision over each other with a view to maintaining the purity of the sacraments.

To whom is baptism to be administered?

"The covenant of God shall be sealed unto the children of Christians by baptism...." The children of Christians are to be baptized. In baptism the covenant of God is sealed to them.

Comes out in Article 56, not only the Reformed persuasion concerning infant baptism, but the basis that underlies this practice. That basis is the covenant of God. The children of Christians are included in the covenant of God. If the covenant of God is "sealed" unto the children of Christians by baptism, they are *in* that covenant. Baptism does not

make them partakers of the covenant, but *seals* the covenant to them.

The children of "Christians" are to receive baptism. This means that the parents must make a Christian confession and be living the Christian life. Since the confession and walk of God's people is under the supervision of the local body of elders, these parents must be members of the local congregation in which they present their child for baptism.

In this connection, a couple of questions arise.

"May parents who are only baptized members present their child for baptism?" The answer to this question is, "No." The reason is simple. If these parents can assume the vows of baptism, they can also confess their faith.

"May parents who are under censure present their child for baptism?" Again, the answer is, "No." Censure involves the suspension of the privileges of church membership. One of the privileges is the administration of the sacraments. If parents are under censure, baptism must wait until after the censure is

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lifted. It goes without saying that if only one of the parents is under censure, the other parent is still in a position to present their child for baptism.

When is baptism to be administered?

Article 56 calls for the administration of baptism "... as soon as the administration thereof is feasible...."

The emphasis is on the feasibility for the parents. The child must be home from the hospital and the mother sufficiently recovered from child-birth. But this feasibility also concerns the church. A consistory meeting must be held. Baptism cannot very well be administered during another special service, like a communion service.

Nevertheless, baptism must be administered as soon as is feasible. There must be no unnecessary delay. Respect for the sacrament and appreciation for its significance demand this.

This is not to approve of the practice of *vroeegdoop*, "early baptism." In the days of the Reformation, this was the practice of the Roman Catholic Church. Because of its teaching of baptismal regeneration, Rome baptized children when they were only a day or two old. Often the mother was not able to be present. Rome even made provision for emergency baptisms in case of serious illness.

Even in the Reformation churches, many maintained the practice of early baptism. Often baptism took place at the first worship service following a child's birth. Because many churches held mid-week services, baptism was administered during these services and not on the Lord's Day. Some held to early baptism on the basis of the fact that the children of Israel were required to administer circumcision on the eighth day.

The practice of early baptism is not enjoined in Article 56. The sacrament is to be administered "... as soon as the administration thereof is feasible...."

One special circumstance relating to the time of the administration of baptism is covered in the decision that our Synod of 1960 appended to Article 56. That decision concerns the baptism of adopted children.

Adopted children shall be baptized only when their legal adoption shall have been made final.

Who must present the children for baptism?

Article 57 answers this question.

The ministers shall do their utmost to the end that the father present his child for baptism.

As it is the covenant of God that underlies infant baptism, it is the truth of the covenant that lies behind the stipulation that the father present his child for baptism. The father is the head of his home. He is first of all responsible for carrying out the vows of baptism. It is fitting, therefore, that he present his child for baptism.

Presenting his child for baptism means more than simply that the father holds his child while the questions of baptism are asked and the sacrament is being administered. That is part of it. But it also means that the father goes before the consistory to request the baptism of his infant.

The *Church Order* does not require fathers to appear before the consistory in order to request baptism. Nevertheless, this is the local regulation in all of our churches, so far as I know. And it is a good regulation.

It is a good regulation, first of all, because covenant parents ought to seek the administration of baptism for their children. It is a good regulation, secondly, because it gives the minister and consistory the opportunity to inquire with regard to the father's understanding of the significance of the sacrament. Questions or concerns that the elders may have are able to be addressed.

But there are exceptions. It is not always possible that fathers present their children for baptism. Exceptions would include the situation of an unwed mother, a widow, a father who is incapacitated, or a father who is not a member of the church. But these are exceptions. The rule is that fathers present their children for baptism.

How is baptism to be administered?

Article 56 stipulates: "... in the public assembly when the Word of God is preached."

There is to be no private administration of baptism. The sacraments have been given to the church. The sacraments function as means of grace in the church.

Here the *Church Order* is opposing the practice of private baptism conducted by the Roman Catholic Church, as well as by certain radical groups that arose during the time of the Reformation. It is true that early on the Reformed made certain allowances in exceptional cases. It was permitted to baptize critically ill infants, or adults who had never received the sacrament. Condemned criminals facing execution, who had repented and desired baptism, might be baptized, although with the advice of the synodical delegates and in the presence of the consistory.

But these were exceptions reluctantly granted. The rule was that baptism should be administered in the public assembly. In time the exceptions fell away.

Not only is the sacrament to be administered in the public assembly, it is to be administered "... when the Word of God is preached." Here the real difference between the Reformed and Roman Catholicism is highlighted. Not the sacraments are the chief means of grace, *a la* Roman Catholicism. But the preaching of the Word is the chief means of grace, and the sacraments are subordinate to the Word. The power of the sacraments in the lives of God's people depends on the preaching of the Word.

The sermons preached when baptism is administered ought to be appropriate to the occasion. Baptism often takes place during the morning worship service, customarily the service at which the Heidelberg Catechism is preached. Frequently application to baptism can be made out of the particular Lord's

Day on which the minister is preaching. Otherwise a special sermon ought to be made emphasizing the meaning of baptism, God's covenant that is the basis for baptism, or the responsibilities of covenant parents with respect to their baptized children.

In this way we can be sure that

the administration of baptism will not degenerate into a mere liturgical ceremony. The covenant God will be honored. The truth of His covenant established with His people in Christ Jesus and in the line of continued generations will be proclaimed. And we and our children will be saved. □

Contribution

Rev. Rodney Miersma

Burn Or Bury?

In each edition of the daily newspaper one finds a section dealing with notices of recent deaths along with the funeral arrangements. More and more common in the funeral arrangements is the notice of cremation. Cremation is the reduction of a dead body to ashes by means of fire. More and more people are seeing this as an alternative to the more traditional burial in the cemetery. For most of us cremation is a subject with which we are not at all acquainted. Undoubtedly this is due to our heritage, for among Christians cremation has never gained wide acceptance. However, as the world is becoming increasingly one community in which we meet with many different nationalities and cultures we see instances of cremation more often. As churches, as we go to other parts of the world in our missionary labors, we encounter cultures where cremation is the norm rather than the exception. This would be the case in such countries as Singapore and India, just to name two.

The question that confronts us is, should we as Christians commit

our bodies to the furnace rather than to the grave? When you are dead you are dead. Does it really matter whether your body returns to the dust slowly through decay in the grave or whether the whole process to reduction is over in a matter of minutes by fire in the furnace? Perhaps the matter of cost enters in. Since funeral expenses are high and getting higher, should one as a good steward look to the cheaper alternative of cremation? To help us answer these questions we will have a look at the history of cremation both from a secular and biblical perspective.

From the Cremation Association of North America I have an article entitled "History of Cremation," which I will quote in full.

Scholars today quite generally agree that cremation probably began in any real sense during the early Stone Age — around 3000 B.C. — and most likely in Europe and the Near East.

During the late Stone Age, cremation began to spread across northern Europe, as evidenced by particularly informative finds of decorative pottery urns in western Russia among the Slavic peoples.

With the advent of the Bronze Age — 2500 to 1000 B.C. — cremation moved into the British Isles and into what is now Spain and Portugal. Cemeteries for cremation developed in Hungary and northern Ita-

ly, spreading to northern Europe and even Ireland.

In the Mycenaean Age — circa 1000 B.C. — cremation became an integral part of the elaborate Grecian burial customs. In fact, it became the dominate mode of disposition by the time of Homer in 800 B.C. and was actually encouraged for reasons of health and expedient burial of slain warriors in this battle-ravaged country.

Following this Grecian trend, the early Romans probably embraced cremation some time around 600 B.C. and it apparently became so prevalent that an official decree had to be issued in the mid 5th Century against the cremation of bodies within the city.

By the time of the Roman Empire — 27 B.C. to 395 A.D. — it was widely practiced, and cremated remains were generally stored in elaborate urns, often within columbarium-like buildings.

Prevalent though the practice was among the Romans, cremation was rare with the early Christians who considered it pagan and in the Jewish culture where traditional sepulchre entombment was preferred.

However, by 400 A.D., as a result of Constantine's Christianization of the Empire, earth burial had completely replaced cremation except for rare instances of plague or war, and for the next 1,500 years remained the accepted mode of disposition throughout Europe.

Modern cremation, as we know it, actually began only a little over

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a century ago, after years of experimentation into the development of a dependable chamber. When Professor Brunetti of Italy finally perfected his model and displayed it at the 1873 Vienna Exposition, the cremation movement started almost simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic.

In the British Isles, the movement was fostered by Queen Victoria's surgeon, Sir Henry Thompson. Concerned with hazardous health conditions, Sir Henry and his colleagues founded the Cremation Society of England in 1874. The first crematories in Europe were built in 1878 in Woking, England and Gotha, Germany.

Meanwhile in North America, although there had been two recorded instances of cremation before 1800, the real start began in 1876 when Dr. Julius LeMoyne built the first crematory in Washington, Pennsylvania.

In 1884 the second crematory opened in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and, as was true of many of the early crematories, it was owned and operated by a cremation society. Other forces behind early crematory openings were Protestant clergy who desired to reform burial practices and the medical profession concerned with health conditions around early cemeteries.

Crematories soon sprang up in Buffalo, New York, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Detroit and Los Angeles. By 1900, there were already 20 crematories in operation, and by the time that Dr. Hugo Erichsen founded the Cremation Association of America in 1913, there were 52 crematories in North America and over 10,000 cremations took place in that year.

In 1975, the name was changed to the Cremation Association of North America to be more indicative of the membership composition of the United States and Canada. At the time, there were over 425 crematories and nearly 150,000 cremations.

In 1994, there were 1,100 crematories and 470,915 cremations.

What is interesting in that historical account is that wherever Christianity appeared, the practice of cremation for the most part

ceased. That should cause our "Reformed antennae" to wave in the air, with the suspicion that something must be wrong (sinful) in the practice of cremation. Why was it practiced by the heathen and pagan, but not by Christians? A Christian is one who has the mind of Christ in him. The guide for his life is the Word of God. Thus it is ultimately incumbent on us to see what the Lord's will is for us as recorded in the Scriptures.

The Bible does not state specifically in so many words that cremation is wrong and burial is right. In this matter the Scriptures speak by example. Throughout the Scriptures, all things being equal, interment or burial was the norm. Most burials seem to have been in a family sepulchre. We are well acquainted with the cave of the field of Machpelah where Abraham buried Sarah. Later Abraham was buried there also, as were Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob (cf. Gen. 23:19; 25:9; 49:31; 50:13). There were also individual graves, such as for Rebekah's nurse, Deborah (Gen. 35:8), and for Rachel (Gen. 35:19, 20). Other types of burial include the cairn of Achan (Josh. 7:26), the cave of the five Canaanite kings (Josh. 10:27), the pit of Absalom (II Sam. 18:17), and the private sepulchers of the New Testament. Joseph of Arimathea had hewn out in the rock such a tomb wherein he and Nicodemus buried the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 27:60). There are many more instances of burial, but we will limit ourselves to the above as representative examples.

As far as cremation is concerned, the Scriptures give us no record of any cremation as a viable and proper alternative to burial. There are recorded instances of death by burning or the burning of bones. Harlots were to be burned by fire as fitting punishment and judgment upon their wicked life (Gen. 38:24; Lev. 21:9). Achan, the one who took of the accursed thing, and his family were burned with fire (Josh. 7:15), as were also the ungodly of II Samuel 23:7. These all were

burned in disrespect to show God's hot displeasure with them and as a warning to all of God's people.

There appears to be one case where the burning of the bodies did not involve disrespect. That was the burning of the bodies of Saul and Jonathan. In this instance the men of Jabesh-Gilead sought to protect the remains of Saul and Jonathan from further desecration by the Philistines. It should be noted also that after the burning of the bodies the bones were then given a proper and decent burial.

It would appear, then, that the burial of the living or the dead in fire was reserved for those who were especially immoral or irreligious. This puts cremation in a very bad light.

However, when we cast a negative shadow upon something, it is necessary that we also shed a little positive light. One of our early church fathers, Augustine, says, "The Gospel speaks with commendation of those who were careful to take down His body from the cross, and wrap it lovingly in costly cements, and see to its burial. These instances certainly do not prove that corpses have any feeling; but they show that God's providence extends even to the bodies of the dead, and that such pious offices are pleasing to Him, as cherishing faith in the resurrection" (*The City of God*, Chap. 13).

In that last clause we are pointed in the right direction. When the child of God lays to rest a loved one he does so with faith in the resurrection. For the child of God the grave is not the end. Even though one knows that the body in the grave is indeed dead, yet he looks upon it as sleeping, awaiting the day when there will be that sound of the awakening trumpet. Christ Himself used this kind of language. With reference to Lazarus Christ said to His disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep" (John 11:11). When He came to the house of Jairus, whose daughter was dead, He said, "Give

place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth" (Matt. 9:24). So we lay our loved ones in a cemetery, which literally means "a resting place."

Yet more to the point is the analogy between the body put into the grave and the seed planted in the ground. When one plants a seed in the ground one does so with the expectation that through the death of the seed there comes forth a new life, a new plant that bears fruit. After the death and raising to life again of Lazarus in John 11, Jesus in the next chapter instructs His disciples with respect to His own death and resurrection. He shows them that the only way that He will ultimately be exalted is through the way of death. He says in verse 24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

Later the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15 echoes the words of Christ as he gives us instruction con-

cerning the resurrection. In verses 36-38 we read, "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body." Then a few verses later he continues the picture, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (vv. 42-44).

With the above in mind it is the practice here in New Zealand for the minister to take a handful of dirt and sprinkle it upon the coffin. Members of the family are invited to do the same. The placing of the body in the grave is like unto a seed planted;

we do so in the hope of the resurrection, when the body will be raised in all its glory like unto that of Jesus Christ our Lord. The heathen can see only the wrath of God. That is why their religion is based upon grotesque shapes and fire. Certainly, the child of God does not want to emulate pagan practices. With so many cremations about us we can become insensitive to this. That, of course, is Satan's aim.

Let us, therefore, in the hope of the glorious resurrection continue to bury our loved ones as did the saints of old. With the apostle Paul may we continue to confess, "Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. 6:4, 5). □

Apples of Gold

A Sovereign Protector I Have

A sovereign Protector I have,
Unseen, yet for ever at hand:
Unchangeably faithful to save,
Almighty to rule and command!
He smiles, and my comforts abound;
His grace as the dew shall descend;
And walls of salvation surround
The soul He delights to defend.

Kind Author and ground of my hope,
Thee, Thee, for my God I avow;
My glad Ebenezer set up,
And own Thou hast helped me till now.
I muse on the years that are past,
Wherein my defence Thou hast proved;
Nor wilt Thou relinquish at last
A sinner so signally loved!

Their worship no interval knows:
Their fervor is still on the wing;
And while they protect my repose,
They chant to the praise of my King.
I, too, at the season ordained,
Their chorus for ever will join:
And love and adore, without end,
Their faithful Creator and mine.

Inspirer and Hearer of prayer,
Thou Shepherd and Guardian of Thine
My all to Thy covenant care
I, sleeping and waking, resign.
If Thou art my shield and my sun,
The night is no darkness to me:
And fast as my moments roll on,
They bring me but nearer to Thee.

Thy ministering spirits descend,
To watch while Thy saints are asleep;
By day and by night they attend,
The heirs of salvation to keep:
Bright seraphs despatched from the throne,
Repair to their stations assigned:
And angels elect are sent down
To guard the elect of mankind.

Augustus M. Toplady

Chapter 5

Paradise the First (cont.)

Forbidden under penalty of death

We must now note especially that it was in connection with the tree of knowledge of good and evil that death, the universal tyrant, began to exercise its fearful reign over mankind. For we read in Genesis 2:16, 17: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it. For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Especially in connection with that threatened death penalty, the command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is sometimes referred to as the probationary command.

This expression, we may note immediately, is not found in Scripture. It is a doctrinal term that is used rather widely to describe the nature of the command which God gave man concerning the forbidden tree. It is intended to express in some way that by means of the command not to eat of the tree Adam was put on probation, that is, he was put to the test, put on trial.

However, the expression "probationary command" is not without its dangers. First of all, let us note that the term "probationary" cannot mean that God had need of testing His own handiwork, in order to find out what was in it and in order to find out whether it could stand. It

is to be feared that some such idea is nevertheless in the minds of some in connection with this expression, even as it is frequently in the background when we speak of God trying Abraham, for example. The idea then is that God wanted to find out what was in Adam. But we must remember that every such idea is derogatory of God. God does not have to find out what is in the creature. God is *God*. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world. Not only does the Lord our God know all things beforehand, as it were, but He eternally knows all His works with a divine, determinative, sovereign knowledge of His own good pleasure. Adam's fall was not an accident as far as God was concerned, and it certainly did not take the Lord God by surprise and necessitate a change in plans on His part. From that point of view, it was true of Adam even as the Scriptures say of the cross of Christ in connection with Herod and Pontius Pilate and the people of Israel and the Gentiles: Adam did what God's hand and God's counsel determined before to be done (Acts 4:27, 28). The fall of Adam was necessary to open the way for the coming of Christ and the salvation of the elect, according to God's counsel.

Nor, in the second place, does the term properly denote that Adam was put on probation somewhat in the sense that an earthly judge puts a criminal on probation, in the sense that Adam was, so to

speak, put on his good behavior. According to this theory, which is also the presentation of the so-called covenant of works, if Adam obeyed, then after a longer or shorter period he would be rewarded with eternal life, but if before that period expired he would disobey, then the death penalty would be involved. Also of this the Bible does not breathe a word, although some such conception is often improperly deduced from the prohibition to eat of the tree and from the death penalty that was threatened upon disobedience.

In the third place, we must not conceive of Adam in Paradise as though he were morally neutral when he came from the hand of his Creator. In this sense also the command was not probationary. It was not so that the tree and God's command confronted Adam with the possibility of starting from a morally neutral position and going either in the direction of obedience or disobedience. For Adam was created positively good, created after God's image. By nature, therefore, Adam knew and willed and did the good. By nature he was, negatively speaking, able not to sin.

It is in this light that we must view the matter of God's command to Adam, and also the attached threat.

And then we must remember, first of all, that God's sovereign decree does not alter Adam's moral freedom; nor does it cancel Adam's responsibility. On the contrary, the decree of God embraces Adam ex-

The fall of Adam was necessary to open the way for the coming of Christ and the salvation of the elect, according to God's counsel.

The late Homer Hoeksema was professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

actly as a moral, rational, responsible creature. We may not be able to comprehend fully the relationship between the two; but the fact we acknowledge — unless we would change Adam's moral freedom and responsibility into sovereignty, and place man on the throne next to, or rather, instead of God Almighty.

But, in the second place, this is not the question when we speak of the probationary command. Then we confront the question: what was the moral, spiritual purpose of that command? The answer is that by means of this commandment Adam, with his positively good nature and with his ability not to sin, was morally placed before the choice of obedience or disobedience, and thus was put to the test with respect to his faithfulness to God.

In the third place, from that same moral, spiritual point of view, the purpose of that commandment was that Adam should reveal his love of and his obedience to the Lord his God *antithetically*, that is, with rejection of the evil. Morally he was confronted by the choice for or against God's Word, and his calling was to prove the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

This brings to mind, however, another facet of Adam's nature, namely, that he was lapsible: he could fall. The moral freedom which Adam possessed was indeed freedom. It was not neutrality. Adam did not come into the world morally as a blank slate. He was in his very nature positively good. He was able not to sin. But his freedom was not the highest degree of freedom. It was such that he could lose it through an act of his own will. It was not the same as the freedom which the child of God possesses in Christ Jesus. According to that freedom, which is ours by regeneration, we are absolutely victorious over sin and death: he that is born of God cannot sin. But Adam was so made that he could fall from his freedom and lose it. It was possible for him to say "No" to God and "Yes" to sin.

The meaning of the threat attached to the commandment of God was exactly that in that case he would die.

That implies, of course, also that Adam was mortal, not immortal. Again, this does not mean that Adam was created with death in him, or that there actually was any death in Paradise the First or in all the creation as it was originally. The contrary is true: Adam had life. But it does mean that Adam was capable of dying and becoming subject to death. The life which he possessed could be lost. Even as he could fall from his original knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, so he could and would by that very fall lose his life and become subject to death.

This is precisely the meaning of this Word of God: "For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

This word is simply the negative side of that fundamental principle of man's life to which we referred earlier. That principle was: man shall live by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. That was God's law for man's existence. In harmony with that law of God, man might enjoy that life which is really life. In harmony with that law of his existence, man might not only have continued mere existence: he has that whether in life or in death. But he would enjoy life in the true, biblical sense of the word, the life whose essence is the friendship and the favor of God. That life he would enjoy in body and soul, in all his earthly existence, and in all his experience, as long as he continued in the way of obedience. Man lives, truly lives, by the Word of God.

The negative expression of that same fundamental principle is in the threat of death upon disobedience. For that principle is the expression of the living will of God for His creature, man. Should man step outside of that law of God, that law will not

change. For God cannot change. He cannot deny Himself. He cannot deny His own Word. That Word He maintains: man shall live by the Word of God! When God maintains that principle of His own law upon the creature who steps outside the bounds of that law, the result is death. Or, to put it in other words, when God maintains His own holiness over against that creature who is contrary to His holiness, the result is death.

Notice that this threat is very specific as to time: the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. Notice, too, that the threat is very plain in its implications: thou shalt surely die. This is exactly what

would happen and what did happen. Adam became subject to death; death began to reign over him and over the entire race. We can make our neat distinctions between physical death and spiritual death and everlasting death. Then we can limit the concept of physical death to the moment that we breathe our last. We can philosophize long enough that we convince ourselves that Adam died the

spiritual death, but not the physical death. There are also those who proceed a little farther and try to explain God's threat as a mere prediction of what would happen if Adam ate of the tree of knowledge. Death, according to this view, would be the result of eating of the forbidden tree, just as death is the result of eating poison. Moreover, they claim, God intervened with an antidote for this poison, the antidote of common grace; and thus this result of death was prevented.

But let us notice, in the first place, that this entire presentation makes a liar out of God. Either God threatened death on the very day that Adam ate of the tree, and this threat was carried out, or God threatened death, but He was not serious about it.

Notice, in the second place, that involved here is a very shallow con-

When God maintains His own holiness over against that creature who is contrary to His holiness, the result is death.

ception of death, one which does not merely distinguish various aspects of death, but actually separates different kinds of death. But death is one. That death, the very opposite of life, came upon Adam body and soul, in his entire existence. In his physical existence the power of death reigns over him, and leads him inevitably to the grave. In his spiritual and psychical existence the same is true, so that he is by nature dead in trespasses and sins. He is so dead that unless he is born again, born for the second time, he shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. Indeed, Adam continues to exist, but he exists under the reign of death. His life, his real life, the essence of which is the friendship and favor of God, he will lose, and lose that very day. In its stead the wrath of God will be his experience, body and soul, in all of his existence; and, but for the grace of God in Christ Jesus, that wrath will lead him down to the outer darkness of everlasting desolation.

For we must remember that while it is true, in a sense, that death is the result of sin, this is not to be understood as meaning that death is the natural, automatic result of eating of the forbidden tree, as though it were some kind of poison.

Death is the wages of sin. It is the result in the sense that man could not separate himself from God and live. It is the judicatory result. It is punishment. It is the result not of eating, but of sin. It is the result because God, the Holy One, for His own Name's sake cannot live in covenant communion with him that walks in darkness. He that will not live by the Word that proceeds from the mouth of God must die; he must become the object of the wrath of God. Adam would die because in His righteous wrath God would inflict the death sentence upon him and recompense to him the wages of his own sin. If it had not been for the fact that with all his death Adam fell on Christ, he surely would have been swallowed up of death immediately after he sinned.

Precisely at this point we must be reminded again that God's counsel was back of all these things. As we said before, there were no accidents in Paradise and in the Fall. God is God, also when we speak of sin. From this viewpoint also we can speak of God's purpose in placing the tree of the knowledge of good and evil on Adam's path. No, God is not the author of Adam's sin. Yet, sin is not a sovereign power alongside our sovereign God. Sin

also serves the purpose of God. That purpose of God was from eternity the greater revelation of his own glory in and through the higher, heavenly glory of His people in Christ Jesus. For it was God's eternal purpose "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth" (Eph. 1:9-11). This purpose He would achieve along the deep way of sin and grace, death and resurrection.

Thus in Christ Jesus God maintains His covenant, and He maintains it with all who are of Christ, all His elect people. Christ it is who is the Friend-Servant of God *par excellence*. He comes to do the will of God, and to do it over against all the powers of darkness. He makes His people friends of God again, by His atoning blood and through His Spirit and irresistible grace. He perfects His people until they shall sin nevermore. Hence, in the new eternal Paradise, there shall be the tree of life. But there shall be no more the tree of knowledge of good and evil. For in Christ Jesus all His own shall have attained to that higher freedom according to which all possibility of sin shall be done away forever. □

In His Fear

Rev. Arie denHartog

The Calling of the Young Women to Marry and to Bear Children

We have several times used the occasion of infant baptism in our congregation to preach on the calling of young women. Probably all of our ministers have done this. Hopefully we give equal and bal-

anced emphasis in our preaching to give instruction regarding the calling of young men.

There is urgent reason in our day to preach on the above named subject. The evil philosophy of feminism is widespread in the church at large. We need to guard against its insidious influences even in our own midst. The philosophy of family planning and birth control is also

widespread. One sees fewer and fewer large families. Even though we live in an age of ease and luxury and great abundance, certainly in comparison to bygone days, children are considered to be a burden. The "perfect family" is supposed to be one with two children, hopefully a boy and a girl. Having more than two children is considered beyond the ability of many women to cope

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with. People in general look down their noses at large families, wondering whether couples who have them might somehow be ignorant of birth control methods, a thing certainly inexcusable in our modern day.

Furthermore, the role of mother in the home is greatly despised in our society. The career woman is glamorized. She is the liberated woman. She is the one who has insisted on her rights, which according to the spirit of our age all women must by all means do. She has made a name for herself in the world. On the other hand, the mother who stays home to give birth to and raise a family is an ignoramus. She is counted as a nothing. Her life is boring. She is wasting her time. She has submitted herself to some form of evil bondage that hopefully our world is now finally ridding itself of.

With all these ideas bombarding the Christian woman today she needs to know very clearly what her calling is before the Lord. She needs to be encouraged in our day. The godly woman who stays home to bear children and to sacrifice herself to raise them in the fear and admonition of the Lord needs to be praised. She needs to be told over and over of the great honor of her position and the great significance of her calling in the church. "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:30).

For all of these reasons we ministers must often in our congregations preach on these subjects. Scripture allows us to do this. There is no shortage of texts in the Bible to base sermons on this subject.

I preached recently on the inspired words of the apostle Paul in I Timothy 5:14: "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." One might summarize the teaching of this Word of God with the statement: "A woman's place is in the home." That state-

ment is today considered outrageous. Any public person that would dare to make it is tarred and feathered in our day. A politician who would say such a thing would be forced to resign from office by the rabid feminists of our land. Such a statement is hopelessly out of tune with our modern society. It is not "politically correct." It is considered terribly demeaning to women. It is a slur as serious as the racial epithets that are so severely condemned by modern society.

Godly women need to know that the above statement is biblical.

Paul does not speak as a male chauvinist when he gives this instruction to Timothy to be taught in the church. Paul knew what he was talking about, even though he himself was never married, because he spoke by inspiration of God. But some would immediately say that Paul was speaking only to the age and culture of his day. In his day women were uneducated and were considered to have few talents. There was no such thing as "career women" in the days of the apostle. But our society has "greatly improved" the role of women, it is claimed. The modern-day woman is better educated and much more highly gifted. She has learned better things to do with her life than stay at home and care for children.

Against all of this we boldly say that Paul speaks the Word of God. Godly women must take heed to it. Paul speaks of the will of God for young women in the church. Paul outlines for godly women a most honorable and significant role. There are few occupations in the church that can compare to the role that God has given to women. Lenski, in his commentary on this passage, makes this significant statement: "To rule the house means as wife and mother in the home, to manage the household affairs. This is the

domain and province of the woman, in which no man can compete with her. Its greatness and its importance should ever be held up as woman's divinely intended sphere, in which all her womanly qualities and gifts find full play and happiest gratification."¹ That is an excellent statement. It has biblical foundation. It is thoroughly correct and relevant for our times.

In the above quoted passage Paul summarizes the role of women in three statements. I will therefore that the younger women: 1) marry,

2) bear children, and 3) guide the house. These three are of course all related, as I want

to point out. Before we do that I must make two necessary balancing statements.

The first is that it is not the will of God that all young women marry. The Lord does not in His providence give partners to all young women in the church. For some this is a thing very difficult to accept. We are deeply sympathetic to this. The single young women in the church however must never be made to feel that if they do not marry, the purpose of their life is not fulfilled, they have no important place in the church. To give such an impression is grievously to hurt the single godly women in the church. I Corinthians 7 (another good passage to preach on in our day) has much to say about the virtues and advantages of living a single Christian life. The single Christian woman can devote herself to the service of the Lord in the church in different ways than a married woman who has the great responsibility of caring for her husband and children. The faithful, godly woman who remains single

The faithful, godly woman who remains single all her life, and serves the Lord with grace in her heart is pleasing to the Lord and can do great things in the kingdom of her Lord.

¹ *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon*, by R.D.H. Lenski, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, MN, 1961, page 676.

all her life, and serves the Lord with grace in her heart is pleasing to the Lord and can do great things in the kingdom of her Lord.

The second balancing statement that must be made is that God does not give children to every marriage. This too is in the providence of the Lord. The childless married woman must by the grace of God also accept this. This too may be very difficult for some to accept. This difficulty must be deeply sympathized with. For some this burden involves lifelong pain and anguish. Godly women in such a situation in life must be encouraged that this too is of the Lord. They also must be told over and over again that God has a significant place in His church for the childless woman. These too must serve the Lord joyfully and thankfully and with self-sacrifice. History, including Bible history, records the lives of great heroines of faith who never had children of their own to care for. We are thankful to God even today for the outstanding examples of godly women in our churches to whom God did not give children and who devote themselves entirely to the service of the Lord in His church. It would be easy to make a list of these that many of us know very well. Some are known over the whole denomination because of the place they have in the kingdom of the Lord and because of their faithfulness.

Some would object that in I Timothy 5 Paul is speaking of young widows. This is true. Apparently there were a number of young widows in the church, maybe because so many young men had died in wars. Paul does not allow these young women to be inducted into the special order of widows that apparently existed in the church that Timothy was pastoring. The young widows should be refused. Paul gives the reason for this in the preceding verses. The young widows should instead be told to marry and bear children. The woman who divorces her husband and marries another shall be called an adulteress

(see Rom. 7). But when God takes a partner out of life the marriage bond is severed by God Himself, and the man or woman who remains on earth is free to marry another.

The younger widows are by Paul even encouraged to marry if they so desire. They are to do that, however, only in the Lord, only if the Lord brings into their lives a godly man. It is better not to marry than to marry an ungodly man or anyone with whom you cannot be one in the faith. A young widow must not let the great sorrow of losing her husband drive her to marry any man that might come along and promise to fill the void in her life. An ungodly man will be a lifelong hindrance to serving the Lord and the source of great grief and sorrow over the years of married life. Though the instruction in Timothy is directed to young widows, it also very obviously applies to all young women in the church.

It is good that the young women marry. It is still necessary in our day to condemn the evil promoted in the Roman Catholic Church. I refer to the evil of encouraging young men and young women to become monks and nuns and requiring all these to make a vow of lifelong celibacy. This is contrary to nature and contrary to the purpose of God. I Timothy 5:14 is a strong statement against this practice. Paul in I Timothy 3 says that forbidding to marry is a "doctrine of devils." The Roman Catholic Church is responsible for the floods of evil that have flowed from this doctrine of devils in her midst over the centuries.

Marriage prepares the young woman for a very significant role in the church. The young woman is full of life and energy. She has strong sexual desires. Even these sexual desires are God-given and in themselves good. The young woman must use this God-given energy not in a scandalous life of fornication that is so common in our wicked world but in holiness in the sphere of marriage. She must not

practice the abominable "live-in arrangement" with a man that is common in our day, so that if she happens not to like a man she has slept with for a time they can split and each look for someone else and make another try. Such live-in arrangements are a very great evil, and God's wrath is upon them. Those who live in such a manner are living in continual fornication and refusing to take the responsibility and calling of marriage seriously. God will judge them for this, both in this life and in the life to come. God's Word exhorts the young woman to marry, not only for selfish pleasure and gratification, but to serve the Lord in marriage. She is encouraged to "make a career" out of being a godly wife and mother.

Marriage, lifelong, faithful marriage, is the necessary, stable, and protective sphere for the nurture of covenant children. We said above that the three exhortations of Paul in I Timothy 5:14 go hand in hand. They are beautifully related. The young woman is exhorted to marry, to bear children, and to guide the house. There are plenty of women today who might go along with the first but who despise the second and third exhortations of this passage of God's Word. There are couples who even before marriage vow that they will not have children. Children, in their opinion, are too much of a burden. Children limit especially the freedom of a woman to go out and get her own career. The feminist movement has militantly spread the philosophy that the only way women can be truly free is to be liberated from the bondage of having to bear children in marriage and from the responsibility of having to care for and raise children.

The big push for liberalized abortion laws is exactly this philosophy. A woman must have the right to terminate any pregnancy that she does not want. She must have the right even to kill her own unborn child if this child is in any way going to stand in the way of the woman's freely pursuing her own proud,

selfish goals in life. Young godly women in the church-world must be constantly reminded of what monsters of iniquity the advocates of this philosophy really are. Recently there has been much discussion about so-called partial-birth abortions, a procedure, we understand, that involves surgical removal of the brain of an unborn child in its mother's womb and murdering it in this way. Can anyone imagine something more evil than that? I cannot.

While others might not go as far as this great evil, they nevertheless do not want to have children. It is considered too much of a bother. It requires too much sacrifice. It involves too great a limitation of the freedom of a couple to pursue selfish ambition. But according to God's Word the bearing of children is one of the great purposes of marriage. When this statement is made it is often countered with a vehement defense by those who do not want to have children in their marriage, that having children is not the only purpose of marriage. This is a half-truth. Yes, it is true that having children in marriage is not the only purpose of marriage. In fact, it can even be said that having children is not the first purpose of marriage. The first purpose of marriage is that a man and woman live in love and companionship with each other, each assisting the other in the service of the Lord. If God does not give a

couple any children, and they do the above, they have fulfilled the God-ordained purpose of their marriage. But this does not deny that having children is still one of the main purposes of marriage. This is obvious, is it not? Of course it is! God made it that way.

Furthermore, God has wondrously joined together the act of marriage and the bringing forth of children. The act of marriage involves the most intimate expression of love and devotion of a couple to each other. The fruit of this intimate expression of love is children. In the act of marriage a husband and wife give themselves selflessly to each other. God Himself has joined to this the wonderful fruit of the generation of children. This is a beautiful thing. The husband and wife who give themselves to each other in such a manner joyfully look for and pray that their love for one another will bring forth the fruit of children in the image and likeness of both of them. Bringing forth children also involves sacrificial love. To have children one must prepare for tremendous self-sacrifice.

But is this not the great calling of the whole Christian life, to sacrifice yourself, not to seek your own selfish ambition? Do we realize how totally antithetical the philosophy of the world is to the requirements of God in every area of life, also in the area of our calling in marriage?

W.G. deVries, in his excellent book: *Marriage in Honor*, makes this statement about the philosophy we are discussing: "A married couple that decides not to have children has murdered its marriage from the beginning. Such a marriage comes to a sterile standstill; it perishes from egotism."² How true this statement is!

For young women the calling to have children is followed by the responsibility to "guide the house." Even if the first and second exhortation are acceptable to some couples, many want nothing to do with the third exhortation to "guide the house." The woman of the world must by all means and at all costs have the freedom to pursue her independent worldly career. Therefore there is so much militancy in our time for "good day-care centers." But can such day-care centers raise our covenant children? The answer to that question ought to be obvious to every true, godly, Reformed, believing woman and her husband.

I have decided to expand somewhat on these subjects, beyond what I did in my sermon in church. Therefore we will continue in our next *Standard Bearer* article, D.V. □

² *Marriage in Honor*, by W.G. deVries, Paidea Press, St. Catharines, ON, Canada, 1980. page 180.

Book Reviews

The Art of Biblical History, by V. Philips Long. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994. 247 pp. (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.]

This volume is Volume 5 in a series of seven books on biblical hermeneutics with the general title, "Foundations of Contemporary In-

terpretation," some of which we have previously reviewed. The series is edited by Moisés Silva, professor of New Testament in Westminster East. The author of this volume is associate professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary.

This is the fourth volume in this seven-volume series which I have read; and it grieves me that I have

not yet read one volume which is faithful to the historic and confessional truth of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. This volume too is quite clear evidence that these great truths have been abandoned by most of the seminaries in our country.

This book is a bad book.

It is true that there are passing references to inspiration; and the au-

thor makes it clear from time to time that he wants to be included with those who hold to Scripture as the Word of God. One can find such references on pages 28, 29, 57, 75, for example. But they are, so to speak, a mere tipping of the hat to the historic faith and, I am convinced, a dubious and not very successful effort to leave the impression with the readership that the author is orthodox. But it is deceptive.

The author is dealing with the history of the Bible and confronts in over 200 pages the question: Is the Bible, in its historical narratives, history?

Now one does not need 200 pages for that. The question can be answered, one would think, with a simple Yes or No. But the book does not answer the question with a simple Yes or No, but rather with a Yes and No. And that takes 200 pages!

Not only does it take 200 pages, but it takes 200 pages of some extremely obscure writing which requires advanced degrees to understand. One would think that a professor who claims to be orthodox in his view of Scripture and who would want to train men to teach God's people to interpret and study Scripture would be able to write clearly and simply. But instead one gets a paragraph like the following as important for understanding whether the Bible is history.

At this stage the interpreter is sharpening the question of the text's *truth claim*. The genre descriptor, historiography, already implies a basic claim to referentiality; the added nuance is to ask after the level of detail and precision intended. What kind of likeness of reality is the narrator attempting to create? When once a decision on this matter is reached, the interpreter is faced with a second question, How capable is the narrator of achieving his intention?

....

And so on, and on, and on....

One can easily get tangled in all kinds of spurious and deceptive ar-

gumentation if one loses sight of the main question. Once again, the question which has to be faced is: When Scripture narrates history, did events take place exactly as Scripture says they did? The believer in Scripture says Yes! Dr. Long says No! The believer says, as Spurgeon did: "If the Bible said Jonah swallowed a whale, I would believe it." Dr. Long says, Nonsense!

How does Dr. Long go about what amounts to a flat denial of the historicity of biblical narrative?

It is a long and tedious process and takes over 200 pages — not one single page of which will be of any help to an anxious child of God who wants help in interpreting Scripture. It is a fundamental sellout to higher criticism and higher critical methods. It is a subtle attack on the truth which requires a more detailed refutation than can be given in one book review.

But the author gives himself away in the title of the book: "The Art of Biblical History."

By speaking of "the art" of biblical history, the author means to say that the historical narratives of Scripture can be compared with a painting. A man may paint a picture of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. If one would ask: "Is the painting true to the reality?" the answer would be, "Yes and No." It depicts the Grand Canyon all right, but you must understand that the artist could not reproduce it *exactly*; and the artist retains his artistic rights to include in his painting *interpretation*. So biblical history is historical all right, but things did not necessarily happen the way the Bible says they did. After all, writing history can never be true to history anyway (pp. 68ff.).

Having committed himself to that position, the author finds himself in some strange waters.

The historical narratives of Scripture are said by the author to be *fiction*, although it must be added that he *seems* to define fiction as artistic writing of history (pp. 62ff.). How he does this is so difficult to under-

stand that I was quite at a loss to follow him.

One can, following Long's thesis, say that history is never merely history (p. 68); that faithfulness to the facts allows for freedom in dealing with the facts (p. 70) [One can imagine what would happen in a court of law if a witness tried that!]; that the historicity of a passage depends on its own truth claim, something not always so easy to determine (pp. 95ff.); that archeological evidence may cast doubt to some extent on the historicity of Scripture (p. 117); and that the mere fact that a story is realistic does not guarantee its historicity (p. 179). The tests one must apply to determine the historicity of a passage are so many, so elaborate, so complicated that no one unskilled in higher criticism could possibly apply them. And let it be understood: This leaves the ordinary child of God without any way of determining whether biblical history is truly history or not. It takes very little imagination to see what this does to his faith when his whole faith rests squarely on the historicity of Scripture!

The author applies all this to a few specific historical narratives in Scripture. One example will show us what happens. Talking about the way in which Saul became king over Israel the author says: "One may affirm the total trustworthiness of the Bible and still hold only a qualified assurance that Saul became king [as the Bible says he did]."

This kind of double-talk indeed has to take 200 pages to be made sensible. But let it be clearly understood: The Bible is destroyed in that kind of argumentation, and God's people have nothing left as the ground of their faith.

Let it be affirmed one more time. The question is: Did events happen just exactly as Scripture says they did? To this the believer says: Yes! A thousand times, Yes! My salvation depends upon it! And he says this in spite of all the "learned" efforts to destroy that faith. ■

Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification, by R. C. Sproul. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995 pp. 221. \$15.99. (hardcover). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

Recently a group of leading evangelicals (Charles Colson, James I. Packer, *et. al.*) collaborated with a group of Roman Catholic theologians to produce a document called "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (ECT). The purpose of this venture is to articulate a common basis upon which Roman Catholics and Evangelicals can cooperate together in combatting certain evils manifest in American culture. Among these evils are abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, etc.

This book provides a critique of the ECT document and the movement it represents. In *Faith Alone* Sproul argues convincingly that Rome has not changed one whit since the 16th century Reformation. Putting aside such serious departures as Rome's mariolatry, the Mass and transubstantiation, papal infallibility, and more, Rome with its false doctrines of the church and infused righteousness denies both the formal principle of the Reformation (*Sola Scriptura*, Scripture is the only authority for the faith and life of the Christian) and the material principle of the Reformation (*Sola Fide*, Justification is by grace alone through faith alone). Sproul points out that these errors do not lie on the periphery, but are radical departures from the truth of the Word of God. By maintaining these errors Rome denied the Gospel itself and was regarded, therefore, by the Reformers as a false church. Rome ought to be regarded by evangelicals today as a false church. Sproul contends, and rightly so, that, "The question in the sixteenth century remains in dispute. Is justification by faith alone a necessary and essential element of the gospel? Must a church confess *sola fide* in order to be a true church? Or can a church reject or condemn justification by faith alone and still be a true church?

The Reformers certainly did not think so. Apparently the framers and signers of ECT think otherwise.... It seems clear that ECT assumes that Rome is a true church and that whatever doctrinal differences divide her from Evangelicalism, though they may be serious, they are not essential to true Christianity or to personal salvation" (p. 30).

The conclusion must be there is no doctrinal basis for cooperation between Rome and evangelicals.

The book is well documented and contains an extensive bibliography. The book's value and usefulness are enhanced by three indices: a General Index, an Index of Persons, and an Index of Scripture. It also includes a nice, brief summary of the history of the sixteenth century Reformation and its key figures.

All who wish to say with Martin Luther over against Rome's fundamental errors concerning Scripture and justification, "Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me," will want to read this book. ■

To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the Westminster Assembly. Ed. John L. Carson and David W. Hall. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994. pp. xiv-338. \$32.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Herman Hanko.]

The Westminster Confessions of 1643 have given theological, church political, and liturgical form to Presbyterianism throughout the world. In 1993, in commemoration of the 350th anniversary of the beginning of the Westminster Assembly, a number of noted Presbyterian thinkers gathered in Westminster Abbey in London. The speeches which were delivered at that meeting have been incorporated in book form under a title which is taken from the first question and answer of the Shorter Catechism.

Although many books have been written about the Assembly and its work, this present book makes a noteworthy contribution to the literature. All who are interest-

ed in Presbyterianism ought to read it.

Several speeches were made which dealt with the history preceding the Assembly, the reasons for which it was called, and the work of the Assembly itself. Some very interesting and important aspects of this history are brought to light.

We are told that the absence of the delegates for long periods of time (the Assembly met for five years and some delegates were present for the entire period) left the churches vulnerable to sectarian influences. The assembly was under the complete control of Parliament and thus was implicitly Erastian in its constitution; all the more reason why it was significant that a firm presbyterian form of church government emerged. Various parties were represented at the Assembly, and often times difficult and divisive matters were postponed as together the men worked at a consensus on these questions.

The book is thorough. Analyses of the Westminster Confession, the Shorter and Longer Catechism, the Directory of Public Worship, and the Form of Church Government are all discussed and analyzed.

A particularly excellent chapter on the debate in the Assembly over presbyterian church government is included, and one can learn much concerning the unique character of Westminster church polity by reading it.

A helpful chapter on the Directory of Public Worship gives much insight into the regulative principle of worship as interpreted by the Westminster divines.

A delightful quote from Bishop Ussher (himself not present at the Assembly) is worth quoting. "Why [ought Catechetical instruction be given] at home? Because houses are the Nurseries of the Church."

That these speeches have been made available in book form is reason for gratitude. One cannot read the book without a sense of appreciation for the work of these notable men. □

Mission Activities

Rev. B. Gritters, representing our Hudsonville, MI PRC, the calling church for our denomination's mission work in Northern Ireland, along with Mr. Tom Bodbyl, representing the Domestic Mission Committee of our churches, returned home safely from their visit to Northern Ireland on February 12 after a 12-day absence. They believe their trip was a profitable one, and they report that our missionary, Rev. R. Hanks, and his family, are doing well. They also reported that the Covenant Reformed Fellowship is growing both numerically and in spiritual maturity. The members of the Fellowship look forward eagerly to Synod's treatment, this summer, of their request to be organized into a church.

The Consistory of the Edgerton, MN PRC approved a request from our churches' Foreign Mission Committee that would release their pastor, Rev. A. Brummel, for a possible two-week trip to the Philippines this summer.

Congregational Activities

Edgerton's Consistory approved plans for the printing and mailing of a tri-fold pamphlet which will serve to introduce their church to residents of the area.

In a recent bulletin from the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL we learn that their Building Committee has been eagerly working on plans for a building of their own, on their own church property. They hope to be able to submit a concept for a building, with costs and other details, to their council and congregation shortly.

These past winter months have also seen our Loveland, CO congrega-

tion busy with some improvements to their church property. They approved plans back in December to complete repair to their church basement by adding a handicapped restroom and a new boiler.

Young Adult Activities

The Post-High Young Adults of our PR churches in West Michigan met together on January 28 at the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI to discuss the topic, "Visiting the Sick and the Elderly."

Minister Activities

The congregation of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI extended a call to Rev. M. Dick to serve as their first pastor. Rev. Dick is presently serving our churches as pastor of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada.

Young People's Activities

The 1996 Young People's Convention is now only about four months away. A lot of work has yet to be done by the host societies. And a lot of money has yet to be raised. Just how much is staggering. In a recent convention-news up-date from the South Holland, IL PRC, it was reported that this year's convention will cost right around \$93,000.00. A quick look at the '96 convention budget shows that housing is the largest item, followed by activities and transportation.

This report also shows that the two main areas of income will be registration and fundraising. Obviously the Young People's Societies of our churches need our support. So when you get an opportunity to join them for a pancake breakfast or a dinner of sloppy joes and hot dogs or a car wash or sub sale, please consider helping these young people out. Our conventions are expensive, and they will continue to be — but they are worth every penny.

The Young People's Society of the Hull, IA PRC invited the young

people and young adults, along with their friends from the neighboring PR congregations of Doon, IA and Edgerton, MN, to an evening of fun and fellowship on February 2 at the Rouwenhort Center in Orange City, IA. The young people were to be locked in at the Center from 10:00 P.M. until 3:00 A.M. the next morning.

On Sunday afternoon, February 18, the young people of our West Michigan churches met together for a combined mass meeting hosted by the Young People's Society of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. The Young people heard Mr. Richard Smit, a student in our churches' seminary and a member at Southeast, speak on the story of Gideon, as found in Judges 7. Mr. Smit's message for the young people dealt with how Gideon was tested, how he was strengthened, and how he was victorious. Also, the program included a piano and flute duet by Alissa Ophoff and Amanda Hekstra.

Food For Thought

"Discipleship is not dynamic until it is willing to be despised by the world. Furthermore, discipleship is not dynamic until it is despised by the world. And the converse is equally true. Discipleship is not despised by the world until it is dynamic." □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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 the Stated Clerk:

Mr. Don Doezeema
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418

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

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 16, 1996 our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. WILLIAM BUITER, will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to our covenant God for God-fearing parents who taught us in His way. May God continue to bless and keep them in His care.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- * Jim and Laurie Jabaay
David, Michael, Matthew,
Katie
- * William Buiters
- * Bob and Kris Buiters
Thomas, Michael, Molly
- * Dave and Joan Hanko
Andrew, Kurt, Travis
- * Wayne and Michelle Buiters
Brian, Rachel
- * Chuck and Heidi Doezeema
Rose, Sara, Nathan
- * Rachel Buiters

Randolph, Wisconsin

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids expresses its heartfelt sympathy to its fellow officebearer Mr. Kenneth Doezeema, in the death of his mother,

MRS. MARTIN (TENA) DOEZEEMA.

"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Psalm 146:5).

Rev. James Slopsema, President
Dr. Ronald VanPutten, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Randolph Protestant Reformed Church express their Christian sympathy to James Fisher and Jeanne (Gary) Buteyn and family in the death of their mother and grandmother,

GRACE FISHER.

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

Rev. Steven Key, President
Berwyn Huizenga, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On March 9, 1996 our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. VIRGIL WARNER, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

We thank our heavenly Father for both of them, for their Christian upbringing, and their godly example. May God continue to be with them.

"For the Lord is good; his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- * Rev. Steve and Ginny Steenstra
Philip, Joel, Rebecca, and
Paula
- * Paul and Bev Neerhof
Carissa, Julie, and Michael
- * Jack and Kim Warner
Chad, Kevin, Justin, Jayna,
and Kara
- * Barry and Mary Warner
Kristin, Rachel, David, Lauren,
and Kelly

South Holland, Illinois

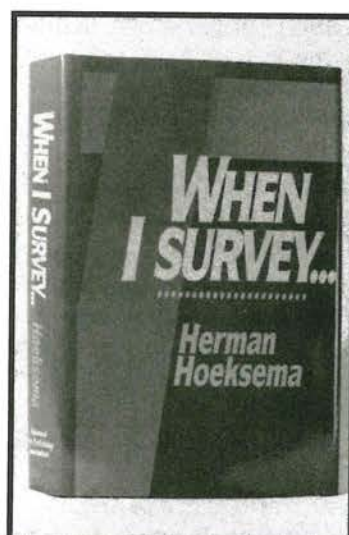
RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Hope PRC (Walker, MI) expresses its sincere Christian sympathy to its fellow officebearer Vernon Klammer and his family, in the death of his mother,

MINNIE KLAMMER.

May they find comfort in the words of II Corinthians 5:1, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Rev. Russell Dykstra, President
Harry Langerak, Clerk



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