



# *THE* **STANDARD BEARER**

**A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine**

Those who in any sense of the word — I do not hesitate to say it — build on the foundation of man, on the foundation of Arminian grace or any other common grace, do not build on the foundation of the church. They do not. Only the foundation that has this seal, “God knows those that are his,” has the sign of authority.

See “A Sure Foundation of God” — page 387

Vol. 72, No. 17  
June 1, 1996





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Meditation — Herman Hoeksema	
<b>The Sure Foundation of God</b> .....	387
Editorials — Prof. David J. Engelsma	
<b>A Weighty Agenda</b> .....	392
<b>"Liberating" the Covenant from Election</b> .....	393
Letters .....	397
All Around Us — Rev. Gise J. VanBaren .....	400
Guest Article — Rev. Steven R. Key	
<b>Trying the Spirits (2)</b> .....	403
Church and State — Mr. James Lanting	
<b>Court Rejects Layman Taxpayer's Claim for Religious Exemption from Self-employment Social Security Taxes</b> .....	405
News From Our Churches — Mr. Benjamin Wigger .....	406

In This Issue ...

The letter from Dr. George M. Ella, author of the recent book on the life and theology of John Gill, is significant. It raises the issue of the propriety and nature of the external call of the gospel against the backdrop of Calvinism's insistence on particular election, redemption, regeneration, and grace.

This was the issue that lay at the heart of the controversy of 1924 in the Christian Reformed Church that resulted in the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

This is still a live issue today in many Calvinistic circles.

Witness the article by Roger Nicole in the latest issue of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (September 1995, pp. 403-411). Dr. Nicole is professor of theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. His article is entitled, "Covenant, Universal Call and Definite Atonement."

Nicole defends the proposition that a call to all who hear the gospel to believe on Jesus Christ is in harmony with the doctrine of definite (limited) atonement.

With this, we have no problem. Indeed, we agree, as, I trust, my response to Dr. Ella's letter shows.

Our problem is that Dr. Nicole alleges that, among those who have concluded from the doctrine of limited atonement that there can be no universal gospel call, is Herman Hoeksema.

This is a factual error.

An egregious error.

Hoeksema taught that the external call in the preaching is and must be "general," that is, it is and must be given to all who hear the preaching. Dr. Nicole may read this in Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics* (RFP, 1966, pp. 470, 471). Further evidence and explanation of Hoeksema's doctrine of the call of the gospel may be found in my *Hyper-Calvinism & the Call of the Gospel* (RFP, repr. 1994, pp. 29-42).

I respectfully ask Dr. Nicole to correct his mistake both in his thinking and in his article.

We do appreciate open discussion of the issue.

For this reason, among others, Dr. Ella's letter is welcome.

— DJE



# The Sure Foundation of God\*

*"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."*

II Timothy 2:19

This is usually, according to the context, understood as a word of comfort. A word of comfort it undoubtedly is and is meant to be. The text is introduced by the little word "howbeit, nevertheless" — in Dutch, "*evenwel*." Therefore, it depicts a certain contrast, and at the same time a concession, in the context.

The context of these words is very plain. In the immediately preceding two verses the apostle speaks of those who lead the church astray: vain babblers, heretics, who always lead the church into ways of ungodliness. He continues to say that, as always, many are seduced by these vain babblings, are led astray from the faith. Like the word of Hymenaeus and Philetus, their heresy eats like a gangrene, like a canker. Such is the context.

We can easily understand that

the text, therefore, is meant also as a word of comfort to the faithful. If the church forevermore departs from the truth, if the church on earth is forevermore led astray from the true faith, is it not discouraging for the faithful in Christ Jesus? Would they not lose their faith, their very hope, and their very courage as a church of Jesus Christ in the world? But, the apostle says in the words of our text, as a word of comfort: Never mind; do not be afraid. Things do not depend on you. They do not depend on men. No matter what men may do, no matter what men may teach, no matter how far men may apparently lead the church astray, "nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Such is the comfort.

I think we need that comfort always. I do. I do tonight. So do you. The church of Jesus Christ is forevermore in need of this word of comfort: "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure." For it is God's foundation. Always in the history of the church, the church departs. There are but very few periods in history in which the church really stands foursquare on the foundation of which I intend to speak tonight — very few periods.

I can say this too: the more firmly the church stands on that foundation, the more narrowly those who stand on that founda-

tion will adhere to it. In other words, it is often thus, that according as the church increases in numbers, she decreases in strength. That is history too. For that very reason, especially we, as Protestant Reformed Churches, may well take this comfort to heart: Nevertheless, no matter what may take place, the sure foundation of God standeth; and the gates of hell can never overwhelm it.

But although it is true that this is a word of comfort, the text, to my mind, also contains a word of exhortation and admonition to you, as a church, especially to the officebearers that are gathered with us tonight. The foundation of God standeth sure, no question about that. But the exhortation is implied very plainly: Build, therefore, on that foundation and on that foundation only. For only when we build on the foundation of God, other than which no man can possibly lay, can we be confident that we are really building the church, and not a human institution.

## The foundation

That is very important, beloved. A foundation, of course, is always important, important for the building. For the foundation in many respects determines the superstructure that must be built on it. It stands to reason that the foundation already determines the size and the strength and the shape of the superstructure. You cannot build a palatial edifice on a flimsy foundation, say, of twenty-by-

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*Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of the Standard Bearer.*

\* Pre-synodical sermon preached by Herman Hoeksema on June 5, 1951. The synod of 1951 was to adopt the "Declaration of Principles." I have edited the text that appears in the "Acts of Synod, Protestant Reformed Churches of America, 1951," pp. 7-19. —Ed.



twenty. You cannot build a perfectly square edifice on an oblong foundation. You cannot build a skyscraper on a foundation that is intended for a garage. The strength and the size and the shape of the foundation already determine the superstructure. For that reason, when the superstructure is planned, the foundation must be planned.

Therefore, the question is, when the apostle Paul here speaks of the sure foundation of God, what is the superstructure that is built on that sure foundation? What building is put upon, what building is supposed to be construed upon that foundation of which the apostle Paul speaks here? The apostle does not mention the superstructure. He does not say what building is presupposed here. But we can easily conjecture what must be the building which he has in mind, namely, the church of Jesus Christ. That is very plain from all Scripture. Only of the church as a building does the Bible ever speak. Scripture never speaks of any other building than the church of Jesus Christ — sometimes as a temple, sometimes as a simple building, sometimes as a house, etc. But when Scripture speaks of a house or a building or a temple, the Bible always means the church of Jesus Christ. Besides, that this is true is also plain from the next verse of my chapter. There the apostle speaks of a house, a house with many vessels. There is no question about it, that the superstructure that is supposed to be built on this foundation is the church of Jesus Christ our Lord.

But naturally the question arises: the church from what aspect? You can speak of the church from more than one point of view, of course. Especially is the distinction well-known between the

church as *organism* and the church as *institute*. That distinction is well-known to all that have attended catechism among us.

*For only when we build on the foundation of God, other than which no man can possibly lay, can we be confident that we are really building the church, and not a human institution.*

When we speak of the church as an organism, we simply mean the individual members of the church from the point of view of their organic relation to Christ Jesus as members in His body, as branches of the vine or of the olive tree. That is the church as an organism. But the apostle in the words of our text certainly does not refer to the church as such. That also is very evident from the next verse, where the apostle makes the distinction between the house and the vessels in that house. The vessels in that house are undoubtedly the individual members, maybe also the officebearers. But at any rate, the house is the church itself, in distinction from its individual members.

Therefore I maintain that when the apostle here speaks of the foundation of God that standeth sure, he had in mind the superstructure of the church as a well-established institution, a well-built house. He has in mind the church with its offices, the church with its ministry of the Word, the church with its overseers, with its offices of mercy, the church with its sacraments of baptism and holy communion, the church with its exercise of Christian discipline, the church with its keys of the kingdom of heaven. That aspect of the church, the church as an institute, well-established, well organized, is meant by the superstructure which must be built on the foundation of which the apostle speaks in the words of my text.

The question is, however: what is meant by the foundation? Also that, the apostle does not further define. Very many answers

have been given to this question as to the foundation of God that standeth sure, of which the apostle speaks in the words of my text. In the first place, there are those who say that the foundation of which the apostle speaks is the faithfulness of God, or the promise of God. Or, even more generally still, the foundation, according to some, is simply the Christian religion. Still others, like Calvin, for instance, claim that the foundation is God's eternal election, on which the church is founded and based. Many commentators claim that the foundation and the church are identical: by the foundation the apostle means simply the church, and nothing else. By the church he means the foundation, and by the foundation he means the church.

Now we can rule out many of these interpretations, because they have nothing to do with Scripture. When people say that the Christian religion is the foundation, for instance, it is very evident that that is a mere conjecture, very vague and very general, rather modern, and that certainly the church cannot be based on a vague idea as the Christian religion whatsoever. Nor can the promise of God or the faithfulness of God be the simple foundation on which the church is built, because the Scriptures teach us otherwise. Surely, the promise of God is very important, and the faithfulness of God is very important. But never is the promise of God and never is the faithfulness of God presented in the Bible as the foundation on which the church stands. That is also impossible, as we shall see presently. Besides, beloved, when Calvin says that the election of God is the foundation, namely, the truth that God from all eternity has known and chosen His people unto salvation, then also that is evidently a mistake, because that election is not the foundation but is one of the seals attached to the foundation: "having this seal, The Lord



knows them that are his." That is election, of course. But that is not the foundation, but only one of the seals of the foundation. Besides, that the foundation is not the church ought to be self-evident: the church is not the same as the foundation.

Therefore, when we give an answer to the question, what is the foundation of which the apostle here speaks, we must turn to Scripture. Scripture speaks very clearly as to this foundation, in many places, of which I will mention only one, namely, the text in Ephesians 2:20: "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; In whom all the building (that is, evidently, according to the context, the building of the church) fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

Therefore, according to Scripture, it is very plain that the foundation — to speak in general — is the truth as it is in Christ. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the foundation that is laid by the apostles and prophets, that is, Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the truth that has been delivered, proclaimed, revealed through the instrumentality of prophets and apostles. Therefore, we may certainly say that the foundation is the truth as it is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus Christ, the incarnated Son of God, who revealed to us the fullness of the Father, first of all, throughout the whole dispensation that preceded Him; then, centrally, during His entire sojourn in the world; and finally, more fully, through the apostles and prophets of the new dispensation; Jesus Christ, who died on the cross, who was delivered for our transgressions, who was raised the third day for our justification, who was exalted at the right hand of God — that Jesus

Christ, that fullness of the revelation of Jesus Christ, who revealed Himself in all His fullness to us, particularly during the years one to thirty-three A.D., in the world. That Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the foundation that is laid, that is, that is revealed by the prophets and apostles of Holy Scripture.

One more element, otherwise we can never, never understand the foundation, nor ever have anything to do with that foundation. That same Jesus Christ, who so objectively revealed the Father, and who objectively became the chief cornerstone of the foundation of the house of God — that same Jesus Christ became Christ *subjectively* through the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. That also belongs to the foundation revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. Without that Spirit there is nothing. Without that Spirit the stone is not even laid. Without the Spirit of Jesus Christ we can not be cemented on that stone — there is no building, nor is there really a foundation. But the Spirit is the Lord. The Lord is the Spirit. The Lord became the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Through that Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, through Christ Himself, as He now returned to us and dwells in His church, through that Christ-subjective the Christ-objective became the foundation on which the church is built forever.

That is the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, of which Jesus Christ is the true cornerstone.

The only foundation!  
Nothing else will ever do!

That foundation of God standeth sure, because it is the foundation of God. On that foundation of God, of which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone, revealed by the apostles and the prophets, as we have it in the

Scriptures — on that foundation (on that foundation that is not dubious in outline, so that no one knows anymore what is what), on that clear and strong and well-defined foundation we must build.

That is your calling. That is your calling as a church. That is your calling especially as officebearers. That is your calling as synod in these days that lie before us. That is all. You have no other calling. You must build on that foundation.

That foundation we do not have to define anew. That foundation is defined for us already by the church in the past. That well-defined foundation we have, according to our sure conviction — or, what must be our conviction — in our Reformed confessions. We must build not in general on the Scriptures. That is all right, to build on the Scriptures, but we do not have to ask anymore, God be thanked, we do not have to ask what, according to Scripture, is that foundation. That has been defined in the faith which we confess.

Still more, we cannot even say that it is sufficient for us that we build on the foundation of our confessions. Even those confessions have been defined by our Protestant Reformed Churches in very clear outline. We do not believe in the Three Forms of Unity, for instance, as the Christian Reformed Church believes in them. We do not! Nor do we believe in the Three Forms of Unity as they are interpreted in the old country. We do not! We believe — and that is the basis on which the synod must stand throughout its session — we believe in the Three Forms of Unity as they are accepted and explained and interpreted by the Protestant Reformed Churches in distinction from those that have departed

*We do not have to ask anymore what, according to Scripture, is that foundation. That has been defined in the faith which we confess.*



therefrom. That is our calling. Well-defined.

If I may make a declaration, beloved, (I do not mean the "Declaration of Principles," I mean if I may make a personal declaration), I do not hesitate to confess — such is my conviction — that the truth which has been defined and expressed by the Protestant Reformed Churches is the purest delineation of the sure foundation of God that standeth! No other truth can even be compared with it. If we do not dare to say that, we are not Protestant Reformed. On that basis we must stand, definitely.

### Its Determining Firmness

For that foundation of God is first of all the foundation that delineates and defines and establishes the whole superstructure. The whole superstructure is defined by the foundation. The ministry of the Word in our churches, which is the church (the purest manifestation of the church of Christ in the world is by far the Protestant Reformed Churches) — I say, the ministry of the Word in the Protestant Reformed Churches must be based on that foundation. Whatever is not built, in the ministry of the Word, upon that foundation builds not on the foundation at all, but builds something else, builds next to the foundation. So it is with the whole institution of the church in our midst. So it is with the office of elders and deacons. So it is with the office of admonition and exhortation. So it is with the administration of the sacraments, about which there is so much ado in our day (and, let me emphasize, about which always there was much ado in the church of Jesus Christ, always; it is nothing new, there is nothing new in the phenomenon that we are again talking about the sacraments, that

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has been a bone of contention for many centuries). But also regarding the sacrament of baptism, as well as the sacrament of communion, we must build foursquare on the foundation of God, of which we confess that it is present for us in the Protestant Reformed truth, nothing less.

The same is true, of course, of the question of membership, the question of the keys, the question of discipline, the question, "whom shall we draw into the walls of our churches and who shall be excluded?" We must not be afraid of that. Of course, we must not. We must stand and decide and determine that all those who are within the walls of Zion within which we live shall stand on that same foundation of God that standeth sure, and which is according to our deepest conviction the Protestant Reformed truth, or it is nothing.

So it is with the whole church.

That foundation of God standeth sure.

I say once more, beloved, what a comfort! What a comfort that the text here says that that foundation standeth sure, that that foundation has nothing to do with us. Notice that the text establishes and expresses and defines and emphasizes the firmness of that foundation three times really. The text says: The foundation of God standeth. It standeth. It emphasizes that standing by saying also in the original: The foundation of God standeth *sure*. Principally it emphasizes that whole certainty and surety and firmness of the foundation by expressing that it is the foundation of God. That is why it

standeth, and that is why it is sure — because the foundation is the foundation of God. God has laid that foundation, beloved, not we. God laid that foundation, of

which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone, from before the foundation of the world, that is, He laid that foundation even before He conceived of the world: Christ is the first thought of God. Oh, I know, that is "supra." But let it be "supra," then; that is all right; I'm not ashamed of it; that is Scripture. Before the foundation of the world, before God conceived of the foundation of the world, He established Jesus Christ. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. He laid the foundation of the church. Can there be any doubt? Can there be any uncertainty? Is there any question about it? God laid that foundation not only in eternity, but He laid it in time. He laid it when He sent His only-begotten Son into our flesh. That was God's work; it had nothing to do with us. He laid it when He reconciled the world unto Himself in Christ, in the cross. That had nothing to do with us. God did it all without us. Absolutely without us! Almost two thousand years ago He laid the foundation, beloved, when you and I were not there, when you and I did not even know anything about Christ or about the foundation whatsoever. He laid the foundation. The stone rejected and despised by the builders, He made the chief cornerstone. God did that. That foundation is of God!

Still more. God raised Jesus from the dead. In His resurrection He justified and He glorified the whole church. God did that. The foundation of God standeth. When He took His resurrected Son into glory at His right hand, He took His whole church into heaven. We are sitting in heavenly places with Jesus Christ our Lord forever and ever. God laid the foundation.

God laid the foundation of the Spirit. God laid the foundation when Christ became the quickening Spirit, not we. And therefore, because it is the foundation of God, that foundation standeth



sure. And, the gates of hell can never overwhelm the superstructure that is built on that foundation. Beware! Beware! Oh, it is a great word of comfort to know that that is true. But nevertheless, beware that you build on nothing beside that one foundation of God that standeth sure.

#### Its Characteristics

Do you know that foundation? Can we know it? Can we know it all? Or is it possibly so vague and so indistinct that we do not know where to build, or that we build in the dark, so that we cannot find the lines of that foundation? Oh, no, beloved.

The foundation of God that standeth sure has this seal — these seals really: "The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Just a brief word about that.

Of course, I do not have to say that when the Bible here speaks of the Lord knowing His own, it means the elect. No question about that. We do not believe, as do the Arminians, in a foreknowledge of God, do we? Not at all. We do not only not believe in a foreknowledge of God as to faith; we do not believe in any foreknowledge of God in the human sense of the word. We do not. Oh, the Bible speaks of foreknown and foreknowledge. That is all right. Nevertheless, we claim as Reformed people that the Bible never speaks of foreknowledge of God in the sense that things are first, and then God knows. It is not so, that God knows because things are. But it is thus, that things are because God knows. God's knowledge is first, the things follow. That is Scripture. God does not know the world because the world is there, and He beholds it, and He finds it, and He studies it, and He investigates it. But that world

is there because God knew it.

*The Bible never speaks of foreknowledge of God in the sense that things are first, and then God knows.*

From before the foundation of the world He knew it in His own counsel. God knows things before they are. The same is true of God's election. Certainly, God does not know His people because He sees them beforehand, because He beholds them as willing to believe, perhaps. But they are His people in His everlasting and causative foreknowledge. They are His people because He knows them. They are the realization of the people He knew from before the foundation of the world, His church.

In the second place, when we read in our text that one of the seals is that God knows them that are His, that knowledge is at the same time a knowledge of love. Therefore: "Whom he has foreknown (in that knowledge of His determined counsel, and in the knowledge, therefore, of everlasting love) He also did predestinate to be conformed according to the image of his Son.... And whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." It is finished in the counsel of God. He knows His people forever and ever, engraved in the palms of His hands.

That is the first seal.

A seal, as you well know, is both a sign of authority and a sign of distinction. This seal is certainly both. Only the foundation which has that seal of God is recognized by God. Only the foundation that has the seal of election, of sovereign election, is recognized as the foundation of the church. None other foundation has God's mark of authority. God will not build anything on any foundation of man, on any other foundation than that which has the seal of His everlasting election. He will not! God does not build the church on

an Arminian foundation. God will not build His church, which is to be His handiwork and which is to be the expression and the manifestation of His glorious grace in Christ Jesus, on any other foundation than that of Himself, that has the seal, "I know those that are mine." The Arminian is not working at the foundation of God. He is not. Those who in any sense of the word — I do not hesitate to say it — build on the foundation of man, on the foundation of Arminian grace or any other common grace, do not build on the foundation of the church. They do not. Only the foundation that has this seal, "God knows those that are his," has the sign of authority. Therefore, that seal, that truth, is the foundation-truth which in all our labors and building of the church of Jesus Christ we must bear in mind, so that we do not build on any other foundation.

But there is another seal. The other seal is: "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." You know what that seal means, of course. Really this seal is only mentioned in a negative way, a negative way because we are still in the body of this death. We are still in the world. That is why this seal is mentioned in this light: "Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Of course. That is inevitable. That seal must assume the form, "Depart from iniquity." Positively, of course, this seal means simply sanctification. Positively, this seal means our whole part (not: parties) of the covenant, namely, that we love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life. That is the other seal: Walk in sanctification of life.

But be careful, beloved. Do not say, "but," between the two seals. Do not say: I believe in election, *but* I also believe in man's



responsibility, I also believe in sanctification. Then you are on the wrong track. That is not true. You must not say: "but." You must say: "and." You must not say: "God knows those who are His, and they are God's elect; but ... but ... but I also believe that man must believe certain conditions." You must not say that. Then you are on the wrong track. You must say: "and ... and ... and." That is Reformed. You must say: "I believe in election, *and therefore* I believe in sanctification." That is what you must say. Just exactly that. Nothing else. You must say: "I believe in election, and therefore I believe in the fulfillment of man's responsibility in the highest sense of the word." That is Reformed. Not: "but ... but ... but." But: "and ... and ... and." "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: (not: but ... but ... but) *for* it is God that worketh within you to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Or, if you want the language of the Heidelberg Catechism: "But

doth not this doctrine (the whole doctrine of sovereign free grace, but the Catechism means that part of it which refers to justification) make men careless and profane?" What does the Catechism say? Does it say: "Oh, no, but, but, but there is another side to this truth?" Oh, no, no, no, no. The Catechism says this, beloved: "By no means: for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness." That is Reformed. That is the only Reformed truth there is.

There you are, beloved. There you are, church of Jesus Christ, gathered here tonight with the delegates of synod. You heard me. You heard the Word of God. You are responsible to build very carefully on that foundation, on that sure foundation of God, than which there is no other.

Even that you cannot do. You understand that, do you not? You cannot do anything at this synod, nothing at all — not as far as the foundation of God is concerned — except by God's own grace and

power. That is all. You cannot do anything at all. You cannot destroy the foundation. That stands. I'm sure of that. You cannot build on the foundation, unless — not, you are co-workers with God — but unless you co-work with one another through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, I say once more: By all means, discern very clearly the foundation. By all means, have the determination of faith to build on that foundation.

For that reason, when you get home, get on your knees, and ask the Lord for grace to build on that one sure foundation of God that standeth and that hath this seal: "The Lord knows them that are his. And (not: *but*; but: *and*), Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

I'm sure that if we are instruments of God to build His church in that clearly defined way of the truth of the apostles and the prophets, He will bless us! Otherwise He will not. May He bless us.

Amen. □

## Editorials

# A Weighty Agenda

Such is the agenda of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) that convenes at the Southwest PRC in Grandville, Michigan on June 11, 1996.

Not in size.

The published agenda, already sent out to all the officebearers in the PRC, is only 120 pages.

But in significance of the matters pertaining to the churches in common and of the proposals made by the denominational committees that must be dealt with by synod.

A graduating senior seminarian, Mr. Richard Smit, is to be examined before synod with a view to entering the ministry in the PRC. Another seminary student will graduate at the public ceremony scheduled for Monday, June 17, at the Southwest church, at 8:00 PM. Mr. Cheah Fook Meng has completed a special three-year course and will return to the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore, eventually to be ordained in one of the churches there.

Another weighty matter concerning the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary is synod's appointment of a new professor to replace Prof. Herman Hanko. The rule is that "a new professor shall be appointed when any of the active professors reaches the age of 65." The Theological School Committee is presenting a nomination of Rev. Russell Dykstra, Rev. Barrett Gritters, and Rev. Charles Terpstra.

In the area of missions, the council of the Hudsonville, Michi-



gan PRC and the Domestic Mission Committee recommend the organization of the mission group in Northern Ireland, the Covenant Reformed Fellowship, as a church. If synod approves, the group will be organized this summer as the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church on the basis of the "Three Forms of Unity" and the Church Order of Dordt.

The Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) is proposing to call a missionary to Ghana, Africa. The missionary is to be assisted by "volunteer lay persons." The FMC is also requesting that synod approve sending a delegation to the Philippines to investigate contacts.

Synod will consider recommendations from the Committee

for Contact with Other Churches that this committee send two delegates to the meeting of the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC) in Seoul, South Korea in 1997 and that the committee send three delegates to a proposed conference in Australia of the PRC and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia in January, 1997.

First PRC of Grand Rapids, Michigan has an overture that synod schedule and begin preparing for a denominational commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the PRC in A.D. 2000.

Classis East presents the request from Rev. Bernard Woudenberg, pastor of the Kalamazoo, Michigan PRC, that he be granted

emeritation as of October 1, 1996 because of age and failing eyesight. Rev. Woudenberg will have served as a pastor in the PRC for 40 years.

Rev. Woudenberg's emeritation, the appointment of a new professor, and the recommendation to call a missionary to Ghana imply three more vacancies in the churches.

The other matters coming before synod are not unimportant. The matters and proposals mentioned above are weighty.

May the King of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ, give grace to the churches in this assembly to deal with all matters of the weighty agenda wisely.

— DJE

## "Liberating" the Covenant from Election

In the context of vigorous controversy within Reformed churches over the covenant of God with the children of believers, Dr. J. Van Genderen defends that covenant conception which refuses to allow election to "dominate" the covenant. Dr. Van Genderen, *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* (Christian Reformed Churches) professor at Apeldoorn, the Netherlands, holds that God establishes His covenant by promise equally with all physical children of believers. He addresses the promise at baptism alike to all: "I will be your God, and you will be my child." The promise, however, is conditional, depending for its fulfillment upon the faith of the child. The demand for faith as the condition accompanies the promise.

Van Genderen promotes this

view of the covenant in a recent book, *Covenant and Election* (Inheritance Publications, 1995).

### Election must not Dominate

The Dutch Reformed theologian is critical of the covenant conception that permits God's eternal election to govern the covenant. According to this view, the electing God addresses the promise of the covenant to the elect children only. The power of the promise brings the elect children, and them only, into the fellowship of the covenant. "The danger is that by letting eternal election dominate everything, the significance of the covenant of grace is greatly diminished" (p. 53).

Van Genderen criticizes the covenant views of Reformed theologians G. H. Kersten and Herman

Hoeksema. Kersten, of the *Gereformeerde Gemeenten* (Reformed Congregations), influenced the Reformed Congregations to make six pronouncements on the covenant in 1931. The first was that "the covenant of grace is dominated by election to salvation; that therefore the essence of the covenant concerns only the elect of God and not the natural seed" (cited by Van Genderen, pp. 10, 11).

Hoeksema's theology produced the doctrine of the covenant that the Protestant Reformed Churches set forth as that of the Reformed creeds in their *Declaration of Principles* in 1951.

The covenant, for Hoeksema, is not an agreement, but a living relationship of friendship between God and those whom He has chosen in Jesus Christ our Lord. The



children of the congregation must receive baptism as a sign of the covenant, but the covenant promises are only meant for the elect, for they are the children of the promise. Whereas the sign and seal of the covenant is a savour of life unto life for the children of the promise, it is at the same time a savour of death unto death for the reprobate who tread upon the covenant of Jehovah.... Theology here is so dominated by the idea of election that we have to speak of an election-system whereby the doctrine of the covenant is seriously deformed (p. 24).

### The Will of the Child Dominates

Van Genderen's doctrine of the covenant makes plain that the only alternative to "domination" of the covenant by the electing God is "domination" of the covenant by the will of the covenant child. God makes His gracious promise to all the children alike; the promise is sealed to all equally by baptism; God is even "willing to give" all the children the faith that He demands (p. 70). The fulfillment of the promise, however, the actual union of the child with God by the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart, depends not upon the electing, promising God but upon the child's performance of the condition of faith.

This implies, first, that no infant is ever brought into living union with Christ in his or her infancy, since infants cannot fulfill the condition. Whereas Canons I/17 assures believing parents that they have no reason to doubt the election and salvation of their children who die in infancy, Van Genderen's covenant doctrine casts doubt on the salvation and, presumably, the election of every child of believers who dies in infancy.

In addition, Van Genderen's

doctrine makes the child's work of faith decisive for the efficacy of the promise and, thus, for the child's own salvation.

As far as the mediation of salvation in a covenantal way is concerned, it is the Lord our God who takes the initiative as the One Who establishes the covenant of grace. But there is also the appropriation of the covenant by us. This is an essential part! To say it with Van der Schuit, "In the way of the covenant of grace the Holy Spirit reveals the Mediator to the heart that seeks God. It finds the way upward because it is drawn from above" (p. 67).

Van Genderen will acknowledge that the Lord God takes the initiative in establishing the covenant. He will not say that it is the Lord God who also realizes the covenant in the heart of every child who is united to Christ by a true faith. Rather, "there is the appropriation of the covenant by us" (my emphasis — DJE). This "appropriation of the covenant by us" is "essential." God takes the initiative in making the promise to all the baptized babies.

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But this promise accomplishes and makes certain absolutely nothing as regards salvation. The salvation of the baby depends on the baby's "appropriation of the covenant." This is precisely the heresy that the Canons of Dordt condemned as Pelagianism:

The Synod rejects the errors of those ... who use the difference between meriting and appropriating, to the end that they may instill into the minds of the imprudent and inexperienced this teaching that God, as far as He is concerned, has been minded of applying to all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ; but that, while some obtain the pardon of sin and eternal life, and others do not, this difference de-

pends on their own free will, which joins itself to the grace that is offered without exception, and that it is not dependent on the special gift of mercy, which powerfully works in them, that they rather than others should appropriate unto themselves this grace. For these, while they feign that they present this distinction, in a sound sense, seek to instill into the people the destructive poison of the Pelagian errors (II, Rejection of Errors/6).

Van Genderen's quotation from Van der Schuit, another minister in the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*, is damning to Van Genderen's covenant doctrine. God merely takes the initiative to establish the covenant with the child, whereas the child must appropriate the covenant, so that "the Holy Spirit reveals the Mediator to the heart that seeks God."

Is this indeed the "mediation of salvation" in the covenant, that the Holy Spirit "reveals the Mediator to the heart that seeks God"? Where is the heart of a child, or of anyone else, that seeks God before the Holy Spirit reveals the Mediator to that heart? Where did this heart that seeks God come from? For "there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11).

The truth is that the Holy Spirit reveals the Mediator to the naturally ignorant, idolatrous, rebellious hearts of some children of believers, thus regenerating these hearts, in distinction from the hearts of other children that are no worse. There is one reason for the discrimination. This reason is the covenant promise realizing the gracious purpose of sovereign, eternal election. The grand truth that Jesus confessed before the face of His Father in Matthew 11:25-27 applies to the children of believers. None of them knows the Father save the Son and the child to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him, and the Father reveals Himself savingly to certain children through His Son, hiding Himself



from others, according to His eternal good pleasure.

G. H. Kersten was right when he wrote that

those who say that the covenant of grace is not governed by election teach a new doctrine which emasculates the covenant. All that is left of the covenant, in this view, is an offer of salvation on condition of faith and repentance. "But," says Kersten, "faith and repentance are not conditions of the covenant; rather, they are benefits which flow out of the covenant" (cited by Van Genderen, p. 12).

### Fear of Election in the Reformed Churches!

Although he is still constrained to confess election, Van Genderen does not wholeheartedly love the doctrine. Deep-down he is afraid of it. Election is a dangerous element in theology. It must be watched closely and guarded carefully, lest it work evil on the gospel, especially the precious truth of the responsibility of man. It is so often "abstract." It "easily tends to a false passiveness.... It can also lead to carelessness ..." (p. 62). If election is allowed to have a prominent place in the gospel of the covenant, it will detract from "the full validity of the promise and the reality of the covenant" (p. 34).

Fear of the doctrine of election characterizes much that comes out of the Reformed Netherlands of late. Berkouwer's *Divine Election* (Eerdmans, 1960) was an extended warning about the dark shadow cast over the gospel by the doctrine of the decree of predestination as taught by the Canons of Dordt. Election accompanied by reprobation threatens assurance. H. Venema, theologian of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"), was so impressed by the dangers of eternal election that he transformed the divine decree into a mere historical event (see his *Uitverkiezing? Jazeker! Maar hoe?*, Kampen:

Uitgeverij Van den Berg, 1992; the English translation of the title would be, *Election? Certainly! But How?*). Now the theologian of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* chimes in.

Where in the Netherlands is there any longer the heartfelt, bold love of sovereign, eternal predestination so evident in the Canons of Dordt? Ah, where in the *world* is there any longer heartfelt, bold love of the decree of election and reprobation confessed once by the Reformed churches in the Canons? Perfect love of election would cast out fear.

### The Headless Covenant of Grace

Rejection of election as governing the covenant requires Van Genderen to deny that Jesus Christ is Head of the covenant of grace (pp. 19-21, 56). Here he acknowledges disagreement with the Westminster Larger Catechism. In Question 31 the Larger Catechism confesses that "the covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed." The sole reason for denying that Jesus Christ is Head of the covenant of grace is that this necessarily implies that the covenant is established only with those who are in Christ, that is, the elect.

The price paid for the privilege of extending the covenant more widely than the elect is high. Christ is no longer the representative of all the members of the covenant of grace, obtaining for them the right to belong to the covenant of grace and, on this basis, uniting them to Himself by His regenerating Spirit.

The covenant of grace is headless!

In the covenant of grace, it is every man for himself and by himself. This is the implication of Van Genderen's explanation of the actual realization of the covenant in the hearts of the children. It is not the Head of the covenant who

both initiates the establishment of the covenant and consummates the covenant in all the children who are His by divine election. Rather, each individual child "appropriates" the covenant for himself or herself.

Denial that Jesus Christ is Head of the covenant of grace violently conflicts with the teaching of Romans 5:12-21. There is, according to this passage, similarity between the position of Adam and the position of Christ in that just as Adam was "federal," or covenant, head of the entire human race in the covenant given with creation before the fall so Christ is "federal," or covenant, Head of the new, elect race in the covenant of grace. Christ is legal representative of "many." This is His relation to them in the covenant of grace. And this is Headship. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (v. 19). Such is the fundamental importance of this truth that to deny it, whether as regards Adam or as regards Christ, is to destroy the Christian gospel.

Reformed believers must take note of this: Denial that election governs the covenant of grace as regards membership in the covenant means the denial of Christ's covenantal Headship as taught in the critically important fifth chapter of Romans.

Van Genderen is unable to find the Headship of Christ in the covenant of grace in the Canons of Dordt, II, 8:

For this was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he



confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father; that he should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he purchased for them by his death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in his own presence forever.

The Dutch Reformed theologian cannot find in this article the teaching that Jesus Christ is Head of the covenant of grace. Nor can he see in this article that the Reformed faith limits membership in the covenant of grace to the elect. Writes Van Genderen:

It is remarkable that this forceful upholding of the covenant as a covenant of grace has not led to a system limiting it to the elect. Christ is referred to as Surety and Mediator of the covenant rather than Head of the covenant. Covenant and election are not the same thing (p. 56).

What is truly remarkable is that the Dutch theologian cannot see Christ's covenant Headship in the article. Remarkable? It is nothing less than astounding.

This is one of the few articles in the "Three Forms of Unity" that explicitly mention the covenant of grace. The article describes the substitutionary death of Christ that redeemed the elect, earned for them the gift of faith, and made certain their fellowship with Christ as "confirmation of the covenant." The cross was covenant business conducted by the representative Head of the members of the covenant of grace in their stead and on their behalf. In keeping with

the whole of the second head of doctrine of the Canons, the article determines the members of the new covenant by election: "... all those and those only who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to him by the Father."

Significantly, in the rejection of errors attached to this second head, there is sharp warning against a view of the covenant that makes faith a "condition" to membership in the covenant (Canons, II, Rejection of Errors/3, 4).

How is it possible that anyone, much more a Reformed theologian, can fail to see in the Canons II/8 that Jesus' death was confirmation of the covenant of grace, that Jesus died as Head of the covenant, and that the covenant has only the elect as members, just as the death that confirmed it was only for the elect? No doubt, fear of election has blinded the Dutch theologian's eyes.

#### **"... that the purpose of God according to election might stand"**

The issue at stake in the controversy in the Reformed churches between a covenant governed by the electing God and a covenant governed by the appropriating child is not whether covenant and election are "the same thing" (p. 56). No one thinks that covenant and election are the same thing.

Election is the eternal decree of God in Christ appointing some to salvation in distinction from others. The covenant of grace is the relationship of love and friendship between God and His people begun in this world and perfected in the new world. But the issue is whether membership in the covenant of grace as living communion with God is determined by election, yes or no. With this, the issue is whether election determines who they are to whom God promises covenant fellowship and blessings

and who they are in whose hearts God fulfills the covenant promise.

Every conception of the covenant that cuts covenant loose from election is dashed on the rock of Romans 9. The very purpose of the Holy Spirit in this chapter is to distinguish children of the flesh from children of promise among the physical children of believers according to God's eternal predestination (vv. 6ff.). By promise, God establishes His covenant with the elect children of Abraham, and with no others.

(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated (vv. 11-13).

With this agrees Galatians 3, which addresses the covenant promise to Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ, and to those who are Christ's (vv. 16, 29).

#### **Making the Promise of None Effect**

Refusal to view the covenant as governed by election results in grievous injury to the promise of God, that is, to the promising God Himself. For on this view the promise is addressed by

God to all children of believers without exception. God promises every child, the one who eventually perishes as well as the one who finally inherits glory, that He will be the child's God and that the child will be God's son and heir. Van Genderen readily acknowledges that God makes this promise to every child "in mercy."

One implication is that the promise of God is the oddest promise that ever was. For it does not include the good that is prom-

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ised. Whereas the value of men's promises is that they guarantee and bestow the good that is promised, e.g., the lifelong fidelity vowed at a wedding, God's covenant promise does not include the covenant communion with Himself and salvation that it speaks of. Obviously not! For many receive the promise who never enjoy the good that is promised! The good spoken of is not included in the promise but is rather produced from the demanded condition of faith.

Another implication is that the promise does not include the means by which the promised good is received, namely, faith. Obviously not! For many receive the promise who never have faith. Van Genderen goes so far as to say that God "is willing" to give faith to all. To this, the question at once is, "Why then does He not give faith to all?" Van Genderen leaves this question unanswered. Fact is, for Van Genderen, faith is the condition that the child himself must provide in order that the promise may be fulfilled in the actual bestowal of salvation.

Yet another implication is that Van Genderen is dead wrong when he surprisingly affirms that "on the

basis of God's promise we may expect that He will also do what He says" (p. 69). The truth is that on Van Genderen's doctrine of the covenant we can expect that God will *not* do what He says. He promises to be Esau's God and to have Esau for His son, and, lo, Esau is eternally damned. In reality, God's promise assures *nothing*. That which assures something is the child's fulfilling the condition of faith.

If the covenant is not governed by election, Reformed theologians feel free to say about the promise of God what Van Genderen does indeed daringly say: "Where faith is lacking, the promise is useless" (p. 65). The promise of God is "useless"! Is this not blasphemy? To use the comparable language of Romans 9:6, where man does not fulfill the condition of faith, the Word of God is of none effect.

#### The Reformed Tradition

Despite Van Genderen's strong objection to a doctrine of the covenant that is "dominated" by election, he admits that this has been a prominent view in the Reformed tradition. This was the view of Herman Bavinck and of Abraham Kuyper (pp. 25-29). The second

part of *Covenant and Election*, "Covenant Theology — Past and Present," which gives a brief history of the dogma of the covenant, acknowledges that "the doctrine of election has greatly influenced the doctrine of the covenants" (p. 92). Van Genderen suggests that this was "a result of the ... attempt to prevent Arminian ideas from corrupting the covenant doctrine" (p. 92).

Yes.

And Van Genderen's book proves the Reformed tradition right.

To "liberate" the covenant from divine election is to bring the covenant into bondage to the will of man.

There is, alas, reason to think that the doctrine of the covenant advocated by Van Genderen is the majority opinion among Reformed churches today.

This makes it urgent that the Protestant Reformed Churches bear fervent witness to the doctrine of the covenant that extols sovereign grace and honors the Headship of Christ, *in the covenant*.

A witness that is not afraid of divine election. □

— DJE

## Letters

### ■ John Gill: Hyper-Calvinist? No!

My publisher kindly sent me a copy of your recent review of *John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth* (*Standard Bearer*, April 15, 1996, "John Gill: Hyper-Calvinist?"). It was a most encouraging surprise to find a magazine of such good reputation and testimony taking interest in my work and welcoming a sympathetic account of this much maligned man's life and works.

So successful has been the criti-

cisms of Hyper-Fullerites and free-will preachers against Gill that much of their argumentation has been absorbed by those who otherwise hold to the doctrines of grace, showing that my task of clearing Gill's name is not yet over. You suggest that I see Gill on these issues through "murky" glasses, but permit me to suggest that my glasses seem murky from your point of view only because you are using lenses which are less well-focused. You give faultfinders the benefit of the doubt concerning their reproach that Gill rejects an external call, as opposed to an in-

ternal, effectual call, and rejects human responsibility in matter of salvation, yet your final paragraph beginning, "If Gill hesitated to affirm the serious external call..." suggests you are not quite sure of your position. Your title, too, *John Gill: Hyper-Calvinist?* underlies this uncertainty. Actually there is no doubt at all about the matter. Gill's works, contemporary witness, earlier biographers, and my own research all stress that which you have missed, i.e., Gill's belief in an external call and in man's full responsibility for his spiritual state and rejection of Christ. If you



would care to read my chapter *A Saint is Slandered* again, you will see that I take up both these issues in a way which provides you with what you have failed to find. It may be that I have not stressed them enough, so I shall thankfully take the hint and do so in a subsequent edition. An article of mine in the current issue of *Focus* (Christian Ministries Trust) entitled *John Gill and his Successors* meets in detail the same criticisms which came from quite a different theological corner.

Though you write, "That Gill denied what Reformed theology teaches as the 'external call of the gospel' is plain enough..." I show in the above mentioned chapter, quoting extensively and verbatim from Gill's works, that Gill distinguished between an external and an internal call and believed firmly that both were part of gospel preaching. See also *The Cause of God and Truth*, Section X. Gill also believed that even the elect could reject the external call until God put a new spirit in them in His own good time.

Where the completely erroneous idea that Gill rejected "full responsibility," as you term it, came from, I cannot imagine. Certainly there is no basis whatsoever for this presumption in Gill's works. Even Andrew Fuller came admirably to Gill's rescue here, pointing out in his *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* that Gill "established the principle" of man's responsibility when he says that the "perverseness of their wills was blameworthy, being owing to the corruption and vitiosity of their nature; which being blameworthy in them, that which follows upon it must be so too." Fuller does not give the reference, but it is from *The Cause of God and Truth*, Section XXX, point 3. John Rippon, Gill's successor, in his *Life and Writings of Dr. John Gill*, speaks of the former pastor of his church with great enthusiasm, stressing his preaching, soul-winning, and

evangelistic capacities. He defends Gill at length against charges of Hyper-Calvinism and Antinomianism, arguing in particular, that Gill stressed man's responsibility regarding both law and gospel. Though Rippon seems to have accepted Fuller's Grotian view of sin, and strives to thrust it on Gill, he yet claims correctly that Gill's exposition of John 5:40 clearly teaches human responsibility and, furthermore, he refers to Gill's distinction between the external and internal ministry of the gospel.

I sympathize with your strictures concerning the expressions "legal repentance" and "evangelical repentance" though they are hardly helpful here as this was a common semantic distinction of the time, used by Christians on both sides of the duty-faith/free-offer debate. Remember that Fuller says that "the former leads to rebellious despair and the latter leads to a holy submission to God." Here Fuller is in complete agreement with both Gill and Huntington!

Lastly, thank you for correcting my Gerlish (German-English) the *sic*-word should read "spurred on."

(Dr.) George M. Ella  
Mülheim, Germany

#### Response:

I would gladly be corrected by Dr. Ella, or by anyone else, in my judgment that John Gill was a hyper-Calvinist.

The issue is this: Did Gill teach that God, in the preaching of the gospel, commands every sinner in the audience, unregenerated reprobate as well as regenerated elect, to repent of his sins and to believe on Jesus Christ? Did Gill teach that God commands every sinner to repent *with genuine, heartfelt repentance* and to believe on Jesus Christ *with true (saving) faith*?

The issue is whether Gill taught *the* external call of the gospel. The issue is not whether Gill taught and practiced *"an* external

call." It is clear that he taught *"an* external call." As I pointed out in my review of Dr. Ella's book on Gill, Gill called on unregenerate persons in his audience to perform the natural duties of religion, exercise a natural faith, believe the external report of the gospel, and the like. Gill's external call was merely a command to unregenerated persons to do certain things that supposedly lay within their natural powers. This was *"an* external call." But it was not *the* external call of Matthew 22:14 and of the Canons of Dordt, II/5.

If Gill taught that *the* external call of Matthew 22:14 and of the Canons of Dordt, II/5 should not be extended to unregenerated persons, and if his reason was that doing so would compromise the truth of sovereign grace — Calvinism — Gill was a hyper-Calvinist.

The issue is easily and clearly decided by what Gill himself wrote about the external call of the gospel in his dogmatics, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: or a System of Evangelical Truths Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1978):

... or this external call may be considered, as a call of sinners in a state of nature and unregeneracy; but then it is not a call to them to regenerate and convert themselves, of which there is no instance; and which is the pure work of the Spirit of God: nor to make their peace with God, which they cannot make by any thing they can do; and which is only made by the blood of Christ: nor to get an interest in Christ, which is not got, but given: nor to the exercise of evangelical grace, which they have not, and therefore can never exercise: nor to any spiritual vital acts, which they are incapable of, being natural men and dead in trespasses and sins. Nor is the gospel ministry an offer of Christ, and of his grace and salvation by him, which are not in the power of the ministers of it to give, nor of carnal men to



receive; the gospel is not an offer, but a preaching of Christ crucified, a proclamation of the unsearchable riches of his grace, of peace, pardon, righteousness, and life, and salvation, by him. Yet there is something in which the ministry of the word, and the call by it, have to do with unregenerate sinners: they may be, and should be called upon, to perform the natural duties of religion; to a natural faith, to give credit to divine revelation, to believe the external report of the gospel, which not to do, is the sin of the deists; to repent of sin committed, which even the light of nature dictates: and God, in his word, commands all men every where to repent; to pray to God for forgiveness, as Simon Magus was directed by the apostle: and to pray to God for daily mercies that are needed, is a natural and moral duty; as well as to give him praise, and return thanks for mercies received, which all men that have breath are under obligation to do. They may, and should be called upon to attend the outward means of grace, and to make use of them; to read the holy Scriptures, which have been the means of the conversion of some; to hear the word, and wait on the ministry of it, which may be blessed unto them, for the effectual calling of them.

It is the doctrine of John Gill that there may be no "external call" to "sinners in a state of nature and unregeneracy ... to the exercise of evangelical grace ... nor to any spiritual vital acts." This rules out an "external call" to repent and believe, for repentance and faith are assuredly "evangelical graces" and "spiritual vital acts." The reason given by Gill, why there may be no such call to unregenerate sinners, is that they are "natural men and dead in trespasses and sins."

For Gill, the Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity rules out the external call of the gospel. Only those are to be summoned to genuine repentance and true faith who are already born again.

This is not the Reformed tradition. The confessional Reformed position is that the imperative of the preaching of the gospel, "Repent!" "Believe on Jesus Christ!" is seriously addressed by God, to every man, woman, and child in the audience. It is addressed to those who have not the least ability to obey the summons and who may even have been appointed by God to remain in their unregenerated condition and perish. This is the Reformed confession in the Canons of Dordt, II/5 and in the Westminster Confession of Faith, 10.4.

The chapter, "A Saint Slandered," in Dr. Ella's book, *John Gill*, does not, in fact, provide any evidence that contradicts what Gill wrote in his dogmatics and that I have quoted at length above. The pertinent section is headed, "The gospel call and duty faith" (pp. 168-174). It is glaringly evident that Gill would not affirm that the gospel commands every sinner to whom it comes to repent with what Gill called "evangelical repentance" and what in reality is simply genuine, heartfelt repentance toward God.

Although Ella's phrasing is not as precise as could be wished, Gill's position is made plain when Ella writes, "The sinner is not required to exercise this faith (earlier referred to as 'evangelical repentance' — DJE) as a feeling of duty but he is drawn to the Saviour by the Saviour's love who gives the sinner faith to accept him" (p. 171).

In this line, Gill is guilty of the hyper-Calvinistic error: The sinner is not required to exercise faith because he lacks the ability. The truth is that the totally unable sinner is required to believe on Jesus Christ presented in the gospel. He knows it. If the external call is not accompanied by the internal call — particular grace in the preaching! — he willingly refuses to do what he knows he ought to do. He will one day be damned

into deeper hell for disobeying the gospel-call.

In this same line, Ella is guilty of a false disjunction: The gospel does not command every sinner to repent, but repentance is a gift of God. The truth is that repentance is a gift of God in sovereign grace to the elect sinners only, *and* (note well: "*and*"!) the gospel commands every sinner to repent of his sins with true, heartfelt repentance.

May I add, as an urgent plea, that defenders of sovereign grace today not defend the hyper-Calvinistic errors that appeared in some Calvinistic worthies of the past. For one thing, our love for the truth must outstrip our devotion, warm as it is, to their names and persons. Great and good men of God could err, greatly. Augustine did. So did Luther.

For another thing, defending hyper-Calvinistic errors in the teaching of some Calvinists weakens our hand in our struggle with the Arminian heresy now making deep inroads into the Reformed churches. I refer to the corrupting of the doctrine of the external call by the teaching of the "well-meant offer of the gospel." This pernicious teaching of a love of God in Christ for everyone who hears the gospel and of a sincere desire, or will, of God to save everyone who hears the gospel makes the external call universal, ineffectual grace. If the defenders of the "well-meant offer" can charge that those who deny this offer themselves restrict the external call to the regenerated elect, our worthy cause is hurt — "the cause of God and truth" that Gill loved.

— Ed.

#### ■ *The Banner of Truth* against Itself

I have recently read the book *Hyper-Calvinism & the Call of the Gospel*.

The position presented and defended seems unassailable. I es-



pecially found the chapters on Calvin, Turretin, and Kuyper to be very helpful. What eye-openers! It made me wonder how many other older Reformed writers had similar views. I went into my library and looked up references to the call in Owen, Witsius, and à Brakel and found they all seemed to support the view set forth in *Hyper-Calvinism*. And one of those authors is published by *The Banner of Truth*, the very publisher which seems to be now taking a stand against this view (see the *Standard Bearer*, Jan. 15 and April 15, 1996). How odd.

It seems to me the PRCs, the RFPA, the PRC Seminary, or maybe even a PRC high school(?) would do well to translate and publish Kuyper's book on particular grace. The references to that work in *Hyper-Calvinism* seem fairly clear and compelling. I

would love to be able to read it. I wonder why there isn't more English translation of some of these Dutch theologians. Kuyper, Bavinck, and Schilder are referenced by many authors, but it seems we English-only readers are consigned to interacting with their works on a second-hand or hearsay basis.

Chris Passerello  
APO, AE

#### Response:

The important book by Abraham Kuyper to which you refer is *Dat de Genade Particulier is (That Grace is Particular)*. Would there be any interest in nominally Calvinistic circles anywhere today in a book defending *particular* grace?

There is an organization that is working at making Dutch Reformed theological works available in English translation. It welcomes

suggestions and needs financial support:

Dutch Reformed  
Translation Society  
P.O. Box 7083  
Grand Rapids, MI 49510

— Ed.

#### ■ The Form of Sound Words

My I take this opportunity of conveying my sincere thanks for the blessings that I have received throughout my subscription to the *Standard Bearer*. There are few, if any, Reformed publications that match your devotion to Christ and His cause, and which also "hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13) in defending the Protestant and Reformed faith as expressed in her great confessions such as the Westminster standards and the Three Forms of Unity.

(Rev.) Steven Watters  
Carrickfergus, N. Ireland

### All Around Us

### Rev. Gise VanBaren

#### ■ Down the Slippery Slope

*A word of appreciation:* A number of readers kindly send information which they think helpful and useful for this column. That is deeply appreciated. Please continue to do so. If the articles are not always used, it is not because they are considered unimportant or irrelevant. It is rather a matter of choosing and selecting what appears to this writer to be of greatest interest.

Two of our western Michigan readers sent an article which appeared in the Holland *Sentinel* recently in response to the action of the Muskegon Classis of the Reformed Church in the case of Rev. Richard Rhem — reported earlier in this rubric. This article was

written by the Rev. Don Van Hoeven of Montague, minister in the Reformed Church in America. Because of its seriousness, and because of the implications of the arguments, I quote the article in its entirety.

Recently the Reformed Church in America's Muskegon Classis has acted to censor and separate the Rev. Richard Rhem, the pastor of the Christ Community Church in Spring Lake, from the Reformed Church in America. The controversy is focused on two basic issues. The first is the Rev. Rhem's belief that sexual orientation is a consequence of one's birth, and that there is no reason to call either heterosexual or homosexual persons to repentance for their sexual orientation. While the scriptures do not address the issue of orientation, they do call for covenant faithfulness. As the Rev. Rhem stated in a recent pastoral letter, "Since our sexuality is so intrinsic to our humanness, to require the person of homo-

sexual orientation to deny his/her sexuality would seem oppressive. Celibacy is a calling; it ought not to be made a demand."

The Rev. Rhem's position is biblically correct, and I agree with him. The oppressiveness of the church's stand regarding homosexuality is a clear violation of God's graceful and inclusive love. But this area of the controversy leads to the second and maybe even more challenging issue: Must all Christians believe that God's saving grace is available only through Jesus Christ, consciously embraced by the believer? Or may I, as a Christian, believe that God is truly known in a saving way by others in their own respective religious traditions?

The current controversy in the Reformed Church in America has arisen because one of its ordained ministers has had the courage to say publicly what many clergy and laity believe in their hearts and speak of privately. For ministers in most denominations to preach or write such inclusive be-

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Rev. VanBaren is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.



liefs about the nature of God's grace is to invite a similar censor or removal. The result is that the clergy are tragically silent about this issue, and this communicates the message that the laity are incapable of participating in the continuing struggle to integrate faith and experience.

The issues in the Spring Lake Church controversy are of great significance. That is why a pastor must be silenced. There are massive divisions between peoples all over the world. Some of the worst, most horrible crimes against humanity are committed because some persons still believe that the majority of the world's non-Christian population is of lesser value in the eyes of God. While being human, they must be "saved" to be made acceptable before God.

It is a small step to regard such persons as second-class, not quite as important or cherished by God as were we Christians. Throughout my life in the institutional church I have seen how this exclusivistic understanding of God's grace and love has resulted in the Church's accommodation to such inhumanity.

Can we as Christians hold on to this exclusiveness and still say, "These are my brothers and my sisters"? Who does belong to God? Is God equally grieved at the suffering of a child in the Bedouin tent of Iraq as with our children's or grandchildren's suffering? How can we support a nationalism that is grounded in the idolatry of "God and Country"? Will the denomination silence me if I preach that together, Muslim, Buddhist, Jew, or Hindu, we are one before God whose Spirit leads us all into truth?

I am a Christian. I, with the Rev. Rhem, can say, "I trust in, worship and serve God as God has been revealed to me by God's Spirit in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). However, I do not believe exclusivity to be the message of Scripture nor the essence of the life of Jesus. I believe God's grace is greater than our creeds. I do not believe that non-Christians are "condemned to hell," second-class. We all fall

short of the glory of God; we are all judged, we are all dependent on God's gracious love.

Nurturing exclusivity and superiority is not just a religious practice. It has always been in the interest of the principalities and powers, the leaders of the nation-state to seek to co-opt exclusive, arrogant religious beliefs. It was as true at the time of Jesus as it is for us. We need only to remember our history and how the funding for the U.S.-sponsored terrorism of the Contras in Nicaragua was much easier when their mission was to destroy the "godless Communists."

It is essential that we openly debate these issues, and that the church allow for a variety of hues and colors as it develops its tapestry of faith and life. Exclusivity (salvation only through Jesus) in the church has become not only a scandal, but a stumbling block, set before us to protect the claimed uniqueness of the identity of the institutional church. Ministers and laity who see Jesus' authority as being a life of removing barriers to God's love must refuse to be silenced. I thank God for the Rev. Rhem and for this large congregation of witnesses to the inclusive love of God.

It is appalling to read an article as the above, written by one who is a pastor and teacher in a Reformed congregation. How can he call himself "Reformed"? How can he label himself a "Calvinist"? In fact, can he even rightly claim the beautiful name "Christian"? What is the man's definition of those terms? Is he not one of whom the apostle Paul warns in Acts 20:28-33?

Is this man not bound by the confessions of his own church and denomination (the Three Forms of Unity)? Paging through the confessions, one finds many, many instances where his teachings blatantly contradict what the Reformed churches have ever taught. Note just a few instances.

*Heidelberg Catechism*, Question 29: "Why is the Son of God called

Jesus, that is, a Savior? A. Because he saveth us, and delivereth us from our sins; and likewise, because we ought not to seek, neither can find salvation in any other."

*Heidelberg Catechism*, Question 67: "Are both word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, as the only ground of our salvation? A. Yes, indeed: for the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which he offered for us on the cross."

*Belgic Confession*, Article 21: "... Neither is it necessary to seek or invent any other means of being reconciled to God, than this only sacrifice, once offered, by which believers are made perfect forever. This is also the reason why he was called by the angel of God, Jesus, that is to say, Savior, because he should save his people from their sins."

*Belgic Confession*, Article 26: "We believe that we have no access unto God, but alone through the only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous...."

*Belgic Confession*, Article 28: "We believe, since this holy congregation [the church] is an assembly of those who are saved, and that out of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself, to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it...."

*Canons II-8*: "For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation...."



Canons III-IV-6: "What therefore neither the light of nature, nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the word or ministry of reconciliation: which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof, it hath pleased God to save such as believe, as well under the Old, as under the New Testament."

Can all of this simply be dismissed with the claim: "I believe God's grace is greater than our creeds"?

But a man who calls himself "Christian" would presumably surely be bound by the Word of Christ revealed infallibly in holy Scripture. Does not the Word clearly state, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12)?

Did not Jesus clearly state, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"? Where does that leave the Muslim, Buddhist, Jew, or Hindu — except these repent and believe?

Did not Jesus insist that "life eternal is to know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent" (John 17:3)? If that is true, and it is, where does that leave those of other religions?

Must not all who call themselves "Christian" heed Christ's own missionary command: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost..."? To state, scornfully, of the mission work of the church, "While being human, they must be 'saved' to be made acceptable before God" is willful neglect of Christ's own command.

But you know Scripture as well as I. None can maintain what Van Hoesen does without necessarily denying the infallibility of Scripture itself.

Van Hoesen makes the claim,

"I believe God's grace is greater than our creeds. I do not believe that non-Christians are 'condemned to hell,' second-class." Admittedly, he makes the claim that the creeds are in error in this regard — for "God's grace is greater...." Is God's "grace" greater also than infallible Scripture which declares in Matthew 8:12, "But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"? To make all these claims in the name of the "inclusive love of God" is wicked. Where was that "inclusive love of God" at the flood? Where was it in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? Where was that "inclusive love" when Jesus addressed the Pharisees and scribes as "hypocrites" (Matt. 23)?

Van Hoesen also expresses agreement with a pastoral letter of Rev. Rhem, who stated, "Since our sexuality is so intrinsic to our humanness, to require the person of homosexual orientation to deny his/her sexuality would seem oppressive. Celibacy is a calling; it ought not to be made a demand." The statement was to explain "Rev. Rhem's belief that sexual orientation is a consequence of one's birth, and that there is no reason to call either heterosexual or homosexual persons to repentance for their sexual orientation. While the scriptures do not address the issue of orientation, they do call for covenant faithfulness."

So ... homosexuality is a "consequence of one's birth." Let's admit, once, that such is true. Equally valid would be the claim that kleptomania (the irresistible urge to steal) or pyromania (irresistible urge to set destructive fires) are also a "consequence of one's birth." Is this a matter of the genes with which one is born? And does this therefore give such people the right to steal without hindrance — or set fires at will?

No matter what the "consequence of one's birth," the law of God must be maintained. And no one who maintains the infallible Scriptures can deny that all of the above violates the law and Word of God.

I labeled this article: "A Slippery Slope." I recall many years ago when there was quite a stir in the Reformed churches because some in the east coast churches were teaching that Genesis 1-11 should not be understood literally. Many years later the same was being taught in the Christian Reformed Church. Then there was the matter of women serving in office — and some in the Reformed Church simply ordained women into the office — in spite of the official position of the church against this. Some years later the Christian Reformed Church went through the same struggle. Though for 2000 years there seemed to be no question about

Is  
God's  
"grace"  
greater  
also than  
infallible  
Scripture  
...?

the interpretation of Scripture on this score, some in the CRC insisted that their last 20 years of disagreement shows that there are, after all, two legitimate ways of interpreting Scripture in this regard. Now in the Reformed Church there is the struggle not only with regard to homosexuality, but even whether Christ is truly the only way unto salvation. It is indeed a "slippery slope," and once the slide begins, there seems no way of stopping it. Paul correctly foresaw: "After my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." May God have mercy on His people that they remain faithful to the end! □





# Trying the Spirits(2)

We are considering the general theme of I John 4:1. It is our calling to be *discerning* Christians. Discernment is a calling that is critically important for all of us. We are constantly confronted with false teachings and practices that are contrary to the standard of God's Holy Word. And error in either doctrine or life is destruction of our fellowship with God. So we are called to "try the spirits."

## What Are These "Spirits"?

It is a common interpretation of I John 4:1 that the term "spirits" is a figure of speech, a metonymy, for "teachers." That was John Calvin's interpretation, and it has been the interpretation of many others since. The basis for that interpretation is the immediate reference to "false prophets." The "spirits," then, may either be true prophets of God, who faithfully proclaim His Word; or they may be false prophets.

And although that interpretation certainly lays hold of the idea of the text, I look at the figure not giving reference so much to the teachers as such, but to their teachings. The idea then is this: The "spirits" are those influences which would move us in one way or another.

The idea is the same as what we read in Ephesians 4:16 with its reference to being tossed about by every wind of doctrine. Many of our readers will remember that the term "spirit" is essentially "breath" or "wind." That is *not* the term, however, in Ephesians 4:16. There the reference to "winds" of doctrine is the word *anemos*, which refers to a strong, tempestuous wind, that which brings great upheaval. The term "spirit," in I John 4:1, does not speak of a fierce or violent wind, but of an operation which is measured.

The difference, it seems to me, is this: Ephesians 4:16 warns us against being like children, who in a violent storm may be tossed about. It speaks of the tremendous, destructive effects of false doctrine, the *results* of error.

The idea of these "spirits," and particularly the "spirit of error" as John speaks of it in verse 6, is that these influences are very measured, oftentimes seemingly minor and insignificant. They often involve matters that perhaps would not be of major concern to us. Rather than the tempestuous wind of a full-blown storm, these are the measured breaths of certain teachings or perspectives that we hear, certain perspectives that would influence us and our loved ones and church members. These influences may belong to "the spirit of truth," again, as John refers to it in verse 6. But they may also belong to the "spirit of error."

And exactly because of the danger of those spirits of error, the

dangers of all the influences of the many false prophets that are gone out into the world, you and I must try the spirits, and teach our children and our people to be discerning Christians.

## The Forms of These Spirits of Error

Such false teaching can appear in many different forms. But generally speaking we can divide error into two main divisions.

Sometimes it takes the form of a blatant denial of the truth, a rejection of the Scriptures and the cardinal principles of the faith. So you have those who deny the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God, who reject such cardinal truths as the Trinity, the virgin birth, the resurrection of our Lord, the creation, the fall into sin, and so on. Not only is that blatant denial of biblical truth found in the cults and the various sects and pagan religions. But there are those who call themselves Christian, but who in fact deny the fundamental teachings of Christianity. That number is certainly growing worldwide in our day in the nominal Christian church.

But false teaching does not always take that form.

There is another form of error that in many ways is even more dangerous than that of a blatant rejection of Scripture and denial of the principles of the faith. I refer to the teachings, of various sorts, which *corrupt* the Scriptures. It is these teachings to which our young people are subjected every

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day in their schools and in their colleges. And I speak of every place where we do not have our own high schools.

But those teachings which *corrupt* the truth of Scripture are again distinguished by two general errors. There is either an insistence that something else is required *in addition to* that revealed in Scripture, or there are teachings which *omit* certain things revealed in Scripture. There is the error of adding to, and there is the error of watering down the truth of the Scriptures.

Let me give just a few examples of those spirits of false doctrine which would *add* to the truth.

In Galatia it was the insistence that circumcision was necessary. Certain teachers said, "Yes, we believe the gospel and we agree with Paul's preaching. But he did not go far enough. He left out something that is vital to your salvation, and that is circumcision. If you want to be a true Christian, you must be circumcised."

So there are those who insist that they build upon the foundation of the Scriptures, but *add* to it their own works and their own conceptions.

That error is inherent in the whole Roman Catholic system of so-called authoritative teaching by the church *apart from* the Scriptures.

The same error is seen in the charismatic movement, which insists that we must have the special gifts — tongue speaking, healing, prophecy, and in some instances even holy laughter. Or, we must have special revelation, God speaking in a still small voice within us.

There is the insistence today, in the Reconstructionist movement and among theonomists, that true Christianity necessitates a return to the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. Rather than believing that the ceremonies and figures of the law remain with us *in Jesus Christ*, in whom they have their

*completion*, as the Belgic Confession states in Article 25, there are those who would subject us once again to the beggarly elements of the law, adding to that which has been fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

Those are just a handful of examples.

But there are also spirits of falsehood that would water down the Scriptures. Many Christians today are misled by teachers who are guilty of leaving out certain truths taught by God.

That spirit of falsehood which would water down the Scriptures may take such a form as denying the truths of sovereign election and sovereign reprobation.

It may involve denying at some point the work of Christ. It may deny the truth that God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Instead of teaching Christ's death as an atonement for the sins of His people, it may speak of His death as nothing more than an example of love. It may deny the effectiveness of Christ's death and satisfaction for sin, by teaching that He died for everybody.

Such are but a few examples of watering down the truth, leaving out certain truths revealed by God in His Word.

But the same error can also be a problem when it comes to the Christian life and practice. Some who claim to be Christian want to overlook the truth that faith without works is *dead, is no faith*. They shrug off the rebukes and exhortations and admonitions of the Scriptures. They show little regard for the application of biblical truth to their daily lives. That is the terrible error of antinomianism. And examples could be multiplied when it comes to this error of watering down the truth of Scripture, either doctrinally or as that truth applies to our daily walk as Christians.

It is necessary, therefore, to try the spirits. To try the spirits

means to test them. There is a certain standard alongside of which they must be placed. They must either fall within the parameters of that standard, or they must be rejected. That standard is the Bible, God's Word of truth.

### How Are We to Try the Spirits?

We may not reject something simply because "we've never done it that way before." I refer, for example, to such things as mid-week prayer meetings, or group prayer, such as has been a long-standing practice in our sister churches in Singapore. Just because such activities have not belonged to our custom does not make them wrong!

We may not reject practices either, because those connected with a certain teaching or practice are "too religious, too zealous, too excited." The work of the Spirit of Christ often causes open change in a person's life and in the life of the church. Let us not forget that people said of the apostles (Acts 17:6) that they turned the world upside down. As Protestant Reformed officebearers we could often desire that some of our members would show more of a zeal for God's truth and for the Christian life.

At the same time, we must warn that a spirit of truth can never be confirmed simply by outward show. It would be a tragic mistake to measure a teaching or practice that way. The Pharisees, after all, were noted for their religious appearance.

So appearances may not in themselves be the ground of rejecting a certain teaching or practice. And appearances certainly may not be the ground of *accepting* a certain teaching or practice.

False teaching can make people very happy. Make no mistake about that. The rapid growth of the Mormons in the State of Wisconsin and elsewhere would not be happening if their teachings



made people unhappy. The masses that are going to the Promise Keepers conventions come back with reports of great excitement and happiness. If we are going to try the spirits by what makes us "feel good," we will be able to justify virtually every cult and heresy the world has ever seen.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in one of his books, wrote of a woman who came to him in much distress over the teaching that certain unbelieving people who live good lives *are not Christian*. She said to him: "I cannot see how you can say that

they are not Christians; look at their lives." Dr. Lloyd-Jones said to her: Wait a minute. Don't you see what you are saying? You are really saying that those people are so good and their works so honorable, that they don't need Christ, that the coming of the Son of God from heaven was unnecessary for them. He didn't need to die on the cross; they can reconcile themselves to God by their good living. Can't you see that such an argument is to deny the faith?<sup>1</sup>

She did not realize the implications of her argument. But

Martyn Lloyd-Jones led her to the truth by exposing the implications of her argument.

So these perplexities and problems that we face, the spirits that we observe, to use the words of the text, are not to be judged by results of feelings or experience. But we must return to the one authoritative and sufficient standard of trying the spirits, and that is Holy Scripture. □

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, p. 185.

## Court Rejects Layman Taxpayer's Claim for Religious Exemption from Self-employment Social Security Taxes

Droz does not belong to any religious organization that provides for its dependent members. Thus, permitting him to get out of the Social Security system would not only threaten the integrity of the system, but would threaten Congress's goal of ensuring that persons who opt out are provided for and will not burden the public welfare system.

*Droz v. Commissioner of I.R.S.*,  
48 F.3d 1120, 1123 (9th Cir. 1995)

Taxpayers who earn self-employment income must pay a self-employment tax into the Social Security system. The Internal Revenue Code does provide, however, for two exemptions: (1) "ministers and members of certain religious orders" and (2) laymen who are "members of certain religious faiths."

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

### Minister Exemption to Social Security Tax

Ordained clergymen are considered "self-employed" and thus subject to self-employment Social Security tax. However, § 1402(e) of the Code permits an exemption for ministers who elect to opt out of the system. To do so, the objecting minister must meet certain requirements. First, he must inform the "ordaining, commissioning, or licensing body" of the church that he is "conscientiously opposed to" or "because of religious principles he is opposed to"

the acceptance of any public insurance payable upon death, disability, old age, or retirement. Secondly, he must file with the IRS (within two years of his ordination and installation) an Application of Exemption from Self-Employment Tax (IRS Form 4361).

### Layman Exemption

But the Code also provides an exemption for non-ministers (26 USC §1402(g)). The layman exemption, however, is much more restrictive. It requires the consci-



entious objector to be a member of a "religious sect" that (1) espouses tenets or teachings opposed to the Social Security system; (2) has for a substantial period of time made a practice of providing for its dependent members; and (3) has been in existence since December 31, 1950.

### Constitutional Challenge

In the federal case quoted above, Martin Croz was denied an exemption by the IRS, because although he embraced sincerely-held religious objections to the Social Security system, he was not a member of a church or denomination which taught these beliefs. Droz argued that his exclusion from the exemption on the ground that he was not a member of a religious sect (a) violated his constitutional "free exercise" rights under the First Amendment; (b) required the government to choose between individuals who share identical religious beliefs in violation of the Establishment Clause; and (c) allowed the government to discriminate against persons with religious beliefs who do not belong to a church or religious sect.

### Free Exercise Challenge

The federal appellate court rejected Droz's "free exercise" argument and cited an earlier case (*U.S. v. Lee*) where the U.S. Supreme Court had upheld the imposition of Social Security taxes on an Amish employer who failed to pay his own and his employee's taxes:

The Court determined that participating in the Social Security system interfered with Lee's [the Amish employer's] free exercise rights. It held, however, that the government had a compelling interest in enforcing participating in the Social Security system in order to insure the "fiscal vitality" of a system designed to serve the social welfare. This compelling interest outweighed the burden on Lee's religious beliefs.

The Droz court remarked that the Droz case was even less compelling than the Amish case (*U.S. v. Lee*) because the Amish do provide for their dependent members, while Droz did not belong to any such religious organization (see lead quote above).

### Establishment Clause Challenge

The court also rejected Droz's

discrimination argument stating:

This is not a promotion of some religions over others. It is a religious exemption narrowly drawn to maintain a fiscally sound [sic] Social Security system and to ensure that all persons are provided for, either by the Social Security system or by their church.

The court also rejected Droz's equal protection arguments and reiterated that the purpose of the layman exemption is secular — "to preserve the integrity of the Social Security system and to ensure that all persons are covered by a welfare plan."

### Conclusion

It appears that although all ministers are free to opt out of the Social Security system on the sole basis of their *personal* religious beliefs, laymen regrettably do not enjoy this freedom. Non-ministers can be legal conscientious objectors only if they belong to a church or sect that espouses teachings and beliefs opposed to the Social Security system and has a "practice of providing for its dependant members." □

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Evangelism Activities

From the Evangelism Society of our Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI we learn that, together, our PR churches have well over 200 different pamphlets available to them. And the material in them continues to be requested by people who are looking for answers to questions about God, doctrine, the PR churches, and life in general. But how many of these pamphlets have we, that is, members of PR church, actually read?

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

Southeast's Evangelism Committee wants to encourage their congregation to utilize this valuable and extensive resource. And they are attempting to do this by handing out two pamphlets each month to their congregation. The aim of the first pamphlet will be for reading as a family, and the second pamphlet will be one with more basic ideas for use in outreach.

The Church Extension Committee of the Lynden, WA PRC sponsored a Spring Lecture on May 3 with their pastor, Rev. M. Joostens, speaking on "Trying the Spirits."

South Holland, IL PRC re-

ceived a letter from the managing editor of *Pelejjo*, a Christian publication in Denmark. The letter included this request: "Regarding your ad in *World*, March 2, 1996, we would like to receive your latest book catalog, and if possible, we would like to be added to your mailing list."

The annual Spring Lecture sponsored by the Peace PRC in Lynwood, IL was held on April 25. Rev. R. VanOverloop spoke on "Christian Discipleship."

The congregation of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, through efforts of their Evangelism Committee, invited the residents of Georgetown Township to



meet with them in worship on Sunday, April 28. That morning Rev. R. VanOverloop, pastor at Georgetown, preached a sermon entitled "Great is our God." According to Rev. VanOverloop, there were over 40 visitors in attendance that morning, and the vast majority of them came, not because of a flyer in their mail box, but because of a personal invitation from a Georgetown member.

#### **Congregational Activities**

The Consistory of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, with the help of Hudsonville's Christian Fellowship Society, sponsored a timely and interesting speech and discussion at the close of their catechism and society season. The consistory decided that this meeting would be the last catechism class for all Monday night catechism students (young people). Parents were also asked to come and sit with their children. Rev. Bruinsma, pastor of the First PRC in Holland, MI, spoke to an overflow crowd on the subject, "Finding a Godly Spouse." Discussion and refreshments followed, providing some additional Christian fellowship.

The Adult Bible Study of the South Holland, IL PRC invited the adult members from Peace PRC to a special combined meeting. Their

topic for that discussion was "Promise Keepers."

The Doon, IA PRC was the site of the annual Spring Ladies' League meeting this year. The ladies from Doon, along with those of our Hull, IA and Edgerton, MN PRCs, were invited to come and hear Rev. C. Terpstra speak.

In early April the adults of the Edgerton, MN PRC were invited to a "Spring Social." The topic for the evening was "Promise Keepers: What Should be our Response?" Edgerton's choir was also planning some special numbers for the program.

Spring continues to be a good time to hear one of our church choirs perform. Since our last issue, we find that Choral Societies in our Edgerton, MN; Doon & Hull, IA (combined); and the Lynden, WA churches have also given their spring concerts. What a beautiful way to close out a Lord's Day, with songs which magnify our Lord Jesus Christ and also celebrate at this time of the year His resurrection.

We also want to echo the sentiments of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI, when they extended a note of thanks to Rev. Peter Breen, one of our churches' emeriti ministers. Resurrection Sunday, April 7, was the last time that Rev. Breen preached for them on a

regular schedule. Grace expressed their sincere appreciation to him for his faithfulness in bringing them the Word of God for nearly 20 months during the time of their separate services and since their organization. We include this here, not to promote Rev. Breen, but to use it as a reminder to all of us to thank our emeriti ministers. Some still preach on a regular basis, some still write for this and other of our publications, and all, without exception, continue to witness of God's faithfulness.

On April 23, the congregation of the Grace PRC met together to extend officially a welcome to their first pastor, Rev. M. Dick, his wife, Grace Kay, and their four children. The Dicks' new address is 3653 O'Brien Rd., Grand Rapids, MI 49544. Phone — (616) 791-4204.

#### **Minister Activities**

Rev. W. Bekkering, pastor at the Pella, IA PRC, has declined the call he was considering from the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada. Immanuel has since formed a new trio consisting of the Revs. A. denHartog (Redlands, CA), R. Miersma (PRC of New Zealand), and R. Moore (Hull, IA).

Rev. K. Koole, pastor at the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, has declined the call he was considering from the Doon, IA PRC. □

## **1996 Young People's Convention**

### *"Godly Friendships"*

Hosted by:  
**South Holland Protestant Reformed  
Young People's Society**

#### **Speakers:**

**Rev. Bruinsma:**

*Church Friendships*

**Rev. VanOverloop:**

*Personal Friendships*

**Rev. Gritters:**

*Friendships in*

*Dating and Marriage*

**July 29-August 2**

on the campus of  
Wheaton College

Plan now to attend  
Anyone interested in being a  
chaperone, please contact:

**Jann Bruinsma (708) 672-5634**

This is not a function of  
Wheaton College

## **REMEMBER!**

The  
*Standard Bearer*  
is published  
only once  
in the months of  
June, July,  
and August.



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and the congregation of the Grace Protestant Reformed Church express their Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer, Elder John Kuiper and his wife, Delores, in the loss of his mother,  
**MRS. BERNICE KUIPER.**

May they find comfort in the Word of God, Romans 8:28a, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose."

Rev. M. Dick, President  
Don Lotterman, Clerk

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and the congregation of the Grace Protestant Reformed Church express their Christian sympathy to Deacon Gerald Dykstra, his wife Theresa, and family in the death of their mother and grandmother,

**MRS. CLARICE HOVING.**

May they find comfort in the Word, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. M. Dick, President  
Don Lotterman, Clerk

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Study Society of Southwest PR Church expresses its sincere sympathy to David and Beverly Reitsma, whose infant son,

**DALE RICHARD,**

the Lord called to Himself.

May they find comfort in the words of Psalm 121:1, 2, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth."

Rev. Ron Cammenga, President  
Lisa Langerak, Secretary

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Ladies' Aid Society of the Hull Protestant Reformed Church expresses their sincere Christian sympathy to their fellow member, Mrs. Reka Andringa, in the loss of her brother,

**MR. JOHN VAN DYKE.**

Our prayer is that she and her family be comforted with the Word of God in I Corinthians 2:9: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Rev. R. Moore, President  
Judy Brummel, Secretary

### 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 father,

**MR. MARTIN DOEZEEMA.**

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you" (John 14:2).

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

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Study of Southwest PR Church expresses its heartfelt sympathy to fellow members Stephen and Sheryl Hoving, in the passing to glory of his mother,

**MRS. CLARICE HOVING.**

May they rejoice in Romans 8:23: "But ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

Rev. Ron Cammenga, President  
Lisa Langerak, Secretary

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Young Adults Society of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA expresses its heartfelt sympathy to Marlin and Sarah Feenstra in the death of Sarah's mother,

**CLARICE HOVING.**

May they find comfort in these words from I Corinthians 2:9, "But as it is written: Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Pastor Arie denHartog, President  
Dawn VanUffelen, Secretary

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary-Martha Society of Hope PRC in Redlands expresses its sincere sympathy to Sarah Feenstra in the loss of her mother,

**MRS. CLARICE HOVING.**

May she and her family be comforted with the blessed words found in Isaiah 51:11, "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

Pastor A. denHartog, Pres.  
Beth VanUffelen, Sec.

### NOTICE!

Reminder of the Pre-Synodical Prayer Service to be held on Monday evening, June 10, at 7:30 P.M., in Southwest PR Church. Rev. G. VanBaren, president of the 1995 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Synod 1996 will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 11, 1996, at 9:00 A.M. in Southwest PR Church.