



**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

The Standard Bearer

For the theological school? Oh, yes, indeed, here is my donation! Give the professors and the students my best regards! But my son? No, no, no! My son is going to be a bricklayer, a carpenter, an industrialist, a great business man. You can get my money, but not my son. It never entered my mind, or ... *my heart!*

See "Returned to the Lord" — p. 387

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In This Issue ...

The date of the original publication in the *Standard Bearer* of Gerrit Vos' meditation brings back memories. The date was May 15, 1963. On that date, I was preparing for examination before synod as a graduate from the seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches. I was the only graduate. For the first two years, I was the only student in seminary. This meant that there was no graduate in 1961 or in 1962. Only one had graduated in 1960.

After 1963, there would not be another graduate and candidate for the ministry in the PRC until 1965.

One graduate and one minister added to the churches between 1960 and 1965!

But in 1963 there were seven vacant churches. Seven of the nineteen churches in the denomination were without a minister of the gospel. More than one third.

The Theological School Committee was reporting that no new student had enrolled for the 1963/1964 school year.

This is what the Rev. Gerrit Vos had in mind when he began his devotional on Hannah's gift of Samuel to the LORD as he did: "There is a grievous shortage of ministers in our churches."

The situation at present is by no means this severe.

Nevertheless, there will be only three men in the seminary this fall who aspire to the ministry in the PRC. There will be no first-year student. When one begins work in the seminary, graduation resulting in a candidate for the ministry is four years off.

Vos' unique, memorable appeal to godly parents and God-fearing young men, therefore, is timely.

Read "Returned to the Lord."

— DJE



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Returned to the Lord

For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there.

I Samuel 1:27, 28

There is a grievous shortage of ministers in our churches. And, as I learn from various church papers, this shortage is universal.

This shortage is "grievous." That is correct. As long as I have lived, and that is sixty-eight years, it never was this way before. There were always plenty of ministers in the churches where I worshiped: in Holland, Germany, England, and here in the States. Sometimes it was even said, also in our own churches, that there were too many young men seeking the holy ministry.

But those days seem to be past.

There are plenty of young men in the church of Christ. There are plenty of young men with bright and clear heads. God also regenerates many young men, and gives conversion and faith, so that they confess the name of their Savior.

But no, they do not give themselves to the holy ministry.

Results? Many vacant churches. Reading services, sometimes weeks on end.

Is it not grievous?

♦♦♦ ♦♦♦ ♦♦♦

I know, I know, there is an easy way out. I have heard it said many times. "God is not calling ministers today."

Do I deny that God must call a minister? Of course not. I would say that the man who becomes a minister without the divine call is the worst kind of wretch imaginable. When these wretches come before the great judgment seat in the day of judgment they will hear God say to them: "The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their hearts" (Jer. 14:14).

And Jesus said: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:22, 23).

Some of these wretches were even called by Jesus, and they also prophesied; but, nevertheless, they were cast out. Take, for example Judas, and tremble. Jesus called him, knowing that he was a reprobate, to be an apostle of the Lord, in order to show to the whole world that when a reprobate comes very close to Jesus and the gospel, he reveals all the filth of his natural heart. Remember the sign, the devilish sign: Whom I shall kiss, He it is: take Him!

No, I certainly would not rule out the divine calling to the ministry.

But there is much more to the story of a prophet, of a minister of the Word. God works through means.

Listen again to Jesus: "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:37, 38).

Did not Jesus know that a true minister of the Word must be called by God, both internally and externally? Of course He did. He knows everything. But Jesus knew that His God and Father works through means.

The general means is certainly that the whole church prays the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.

Evidently this has not been done. And evidently this has not been done for a long time. For the call of God starts very early.

And that leads us to our text.

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O, beloved reader, Samuel was a splendid example of what a prophet, a minister, should be.

His beginning, as far as the means are concerned, was his God-fearing mother, Hannah.

Here is Hannah: "For this child I prayed!"

It has been said that behind every great man stands a great woman. Looking at Hannah, I would almost believe it. For great she was and is.

When young girls marry, how

*Gerrit Vos (1894-1968) was a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches and a long-time contributor to the **Standard Bearer**. He wrote this meditation for the May 15, 1963 issue of the **Standard Bearer**.*

many can say with Hannah: for this child I prayed? On good authority I have heard that there is sometime the very opposite: "We will not have any children until we pay for our furniture!" A far cry!

In Hannah you see how God works through the means He ordained. We are to pray for His blessings.

The Lord gave Hannah her petition: the child was born. And, publicly confessing her struggle, she named him Samuel. That name means: "Asked of God."

But that is not all. Listen to Hannah: "He shall be lent to the Lord," or, literally: "he whom I have obtained by petition shall be returned to the Lord."

That is the great thing about Hannah with respect to her petition and the gift of the child. He shall be returned to the Lord!

What does that mean? It means that he shall be dedicated to the service of God in the most intimate way possible: he shall stand in the house of God and serve Him in the Word of God!

Oh, it is a great thing to pray for children from the Lord. It is also a great thing if the Lord hears you and fills your hearts and arms with children. It is inexpressibly sweet when you hear your flesh and blood confess the name of God in His house. When and if they do, there is singing in your hearts.

But what is sweeter to the taste than to sit in church and hear your son preach the wondrous gospel of the promise?

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How long shall Samuel stand in the house of his God? Listen again to the God-fearing Hannah. She will tell you: "as long as he liveth."

Yes, I know, that is a dogma of the church, of the true church. The calling of God is without repentance. Once a minister, always a minister. But the point is that this truth of all the ages lived in the heart of this mother. It was not Samuel that said it; it was his

mother. And it belonged to the means which God employed.

Can you imagine how Hannah educated little Samuel? I can. Oh, often, very often, she told him in childlike language how she had struggled with the Lord to obtain this son; and how she had vowed a vow unto the Almighty. Often she would tell him: I promised the Lord God of Israel that you would stand in the house of God all the days of your life!

Beloved mothers, Hannah prepared her son Samuel to live in Shiloh. You can tell. When he heard the call of the Lord time and again and did not know it, he listened obediently to the advice of Eli, and when God called again, he said: "Speak; for thy servant heareth!"

Now listen, beloved reader: That first speech to God Almighty became his whole life's program. How he listened to the speech of God! And Israel was blessed through this *Verbi Dei minister*.

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And the mother was blessed. If you wish to know the extent of her blessedness, just read her song of praise in I Samuel 2:1-10.

This mother of one of the most glorious ministers of all time continues her singing in the Paradise of God.

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And Samuel?

Well, the text says of him: "And he worshipped the Lord there." To worship is to enumerate all the beauties of the Lord God, to tell of His majesty, to sing of His wonders all the day long. It is to do so before the face of all Israel, so that they also may learn the praises of the Lord.

To worship is to begin our everlasting work in heaven here on earth.

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Mothers! Daughters of Jerusalem! Are you not jealous of Hannah?

Elkanahs! Ye men of Israel! Do you look for such brides as

Hannah? And when you have found her, do you join with her to approach the throne of grace together in order to petition our Father in heaven for a Samuel?

If and when you do, you shall be blessed in such a deed.

Only eternity shall reveal how many blessed ministers were born from the struggles of a mother in Israel.

Always remember: God uses and blesses the means.

It is sad to say, but there are many mothers and fathers who are duly concerned about their offspring, but it is a concern about their carnal advancement. My boy or boys must have a good education, the best education.

In the meantime, while he is studying and struggling to become thoroughly prepared for his life's task, someone comes to the door and asks for a gift for God. Sure, sure, sure, here is a ten dollar bill. You can even have twenty dollars! The Chinese and the Africans must have missionaries and ministers. For the theological school? Oh, yes, indeed, here is my donation! Give the professors and the students my best regards! But my son? No, no, no! My son is going to be a bricklayer, a carpenter, an industrialist, a great business man. You can get my money, but not my son. It never entered my mind, or ... *my heart!*

Yes, that is right. It never entered my heart. There is the trouble.

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Are there any God-fearing young men who read this?

Yes, it is late on the calendar. It is *very* late. It should have begun with your mom. But how about the holy ministry in your church? Are you not concerned about the fact that we are woefully short of ministers?

Would it not be heaven for you to say: "Speak, for Thy servant heareth"?

And heaven, with its joyful angels, would say, Amen! □

1997 Synod of the PRC: Ecclesiastical Matters

Article 30 of the Church Order of Dordt requires of all the church assemblies that they transact "ecclesiastical matters only." The work of the major assemblies is further restricted to matters "as could not be finished in minor assemblies, or such as pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common."

Such is the agenda of the 1997 synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) that will convene on June 10 at Grandville PRC in Grandville, MI.

Much of synod's time—more than 15 hours—will be devoted to the examination of three graduating seniors from the Protestant Reformed Seminary. The seminarians will be examined before synod in dogmatics; church history; church polity; Old and New Testament history; and matters of their own life and calling to the ministry. They will present written exegesis of assigned Hebrew and Greek passages of Holy Scripture. In addition, each will preach a sermon before the synod.

The students are Daniel Kleyn, James Laning, and Martin Vander Wal.

These sessions of synod are open to the public.

Besides the three who aspire to the ministry in the PRC, Darren Thole graduates from the seminary this year. Mr. Thole, a member of that church, intends to be a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The report by the Theological

School Committee informs synod that, subject to synod's decision, four men will begin full-time studies at the seminary in August, 1997. Two come from Northern Ireland; one, from Australia; and another, from the Netherlands. A goodly contingent from the Heritage Netherlands Reformed denomination will again take selected courses at the seminary.

No man from the PRC is enrolled in the first year.

Missions will also command synod's attention. Synod will receive reports on the work of Rev. Ron Hanko, who is stationed in Northern Ireland, and of Rev. Thomas Miersma, who is stationed in Alamosa, CO.

As an independent congregation, the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (CPRC) in Northern Ireland proposes that "the CPRC, when necessary, seek the counsel of the Hudsonville (MI) consistory." Hudsonville approves "the proposed relationship." The Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) express their opinion "that this relationship does not need the approval of the Mission Committee or the synod, since the CPRC is an autonomous congregation that is seeking the assistance of a 'neighboring consistory.'"

From the British Reformed Fellowship in the British Isles, the PRC receive a request that "consideration be given to the sending of a second missionary to the UK." The DMC judge that a "second full-time missionary in the UK at this time

is not feasible. This is due to the fact that there is not a concentration of contacts or interested persons in one area where a missionary could establish a base."

The DMC are recommending that synod approve calling a second home missionary, who will concentrate his labors initially in the eastern part of the United States. The man would begin his work in Pittsburgh, PA. For a year, the DMC have been providing preaching for a small group in Pittsburgh, one Sunday a month.

Although Rev. Jay Kortering's title is minister-on-loan, he is increasingly active in the work of missions of the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore (ERCS), as Christ gives these sister churches of the PRC an open door in all that area. In addition to the work in Singapore itself, the ERCS are working in Myanmar and India. They are also establishing a Bible School in Singapore. One purpose, closely tied to missions, is the instruction of pastors and others in Myanmar, India, and the Philippines, in the Reformed faith.

The ERCS have asked the PRC to help in their work of missions and of the Bible School. One proposal coming from the Committee for Contact with Other Churches of the PRC (CC) is that the PRC contribute financially to the support of foreign students who will attend the ERCS Bible School in Singapore.

The Foreign Mission Committee of the PRC (FMC) report that

Rev. and Mrs. Kortering will visit a number of contacts that the FMC have in the Philippines.

The CC recommend that synod again send observers to the annual meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). The Council will hold its 1997 meeting in Atlanta, GA.

The CC report on their conference with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPC) earlier this year. The conference discussed theological differences between the two denominations. The subjects were marriage and divorce; the "establishment principle"; the regulative principle of worship; and eternal justification. The CC are advising synod to declare that the PRC have a relationship with the EPC which "can be described as a less complete fra-

tional relationship as referred to in the Constitution of the Contact Committee."

Synod 1996 appointed a committee to plan a 75th anniversary celebration of the PRC for A.D. 2000. This committee is recommending that the celebration be held at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI, June 19-23, 2000.

Southwest PRC overtures synod "to appoint a committee to study the advisability of investing a portion of the Emeritation Fund in mutual funds, which, though uninsured, have historically provided long-term yields significantly higher than can be obtained through CDs." The ground is that "good stewardship requires attention to possibilities for legitimately maximizing return on investment."

Since the agenda is free of any case of doctrinal controversy and

of appeal against the minor assembly, the work of the synod promises to be positive and pleasant.

In keeping with the condition of the denomination indicated by the agenda, under God's blessing, the churches continue to grow numerically. Larger than ever before in their 72-year history, they now number some 6,390.

The pre-synodical worship service will be held in the Grandville church building on Monday, June 9, at 7:30 PM, God willing. Rev. James Slopsema, president of the 1996 synod, will preach. Let our people assemble in gratitude for God's favor on the churches and in prayer for His presence with us in the future.

May the Spirit of Jesus Christ give wisdom and faithfulness to the synod of the PRC. □

— DJE

Letters

■ A Radical Stand

I am writing concerning your editorial, "Free-Willism: Another Gospel" (*Standard Bearer*, May 1, 1997). Your article caught my attention since I am a recent convert to the Reformed faith. I have been a Christian for approximately eleven years, and Reformed for the last two. Would you please reply to a couple of questions.

It seems by the title of the article that you consider free-willism another gospel, opposed to the gospel of grace. On pages 343 and 344 it seems that you contradict yourself by stating that it is not another gospel. I do not understand your point, and I would ask you to clarify your statements, specifically those dealing with Packer, Wesley, and Dordt.

I have been to several Promise Keepers events over the last couple of years. I will admit that I am very uncomfortable with the influence of the Vineyard on the leadership and with the emphasis on tearing down denomination walls

in the name of unity, especially when it comes to Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. But to what extent do you suppose Reformed Christians and Arminians should separate? Should there be no relationship at all? Do we share nothing in common?

It seems that your stand here is radical. Obviously, you are driven by deep convictions. I want to understand what and why you wrote what you did.

Jim Suttinger
Sunbury, Ohio

RESPONSE:

The lines on pages 343, 344, "Free-willism is not 'another gospel,'" express the opinions of James I. Packer and John M. Frame, whom I had just quoted. The lines are not intended to express my own judgment. My judgment of free-willism is expressed in the title of the editorial.

The Methodist preacher John Wesley taught the "gospel" of free-will: the salvation of the sinner de-

pends upon his choosing Christ with a will that is supposed to have the natural ability to do so. Packer refuses to condemn this free-willism as "another gospel." He defends it as a somewhat deficient form of the one, true gospel. This defense of free-willism brings Packer into conflict with the official creed of the Reformed churches, the Canons of Dordt. This creed repudiates free-willism — free-willism *as such!* free-willism *in any form!* free-willism *in every form!* — as another gospel in the sense of the apostle in Galatians 1:6-9.

This is my stand, and for this reason.

It is a radical stand, not in the sense of being extremist but in the sense of arising out of and giving expression to the roots of spiritual and theological reality. These roots are: 1) God saves elect sinners by sovereign grace alone; 2) the sinner cannot save himself by his free-will because he has no free-will — his will is enslaved to sin; and 3)

the false gospel of free-willism, like the false gospel of works-righteousness, renders Christ and His cross vain and robs God of His glory in His greatest work.

About these truths, I do indeed have "deep convictions." Can anyone who lives before the face of God not have these "deep convictions"? Is it possible to know oneself as the sinner and to know the

grace of God in Jesus Christ that delivers from sin, death, and hell without having these "deep convictions"?

Arminianism is another gospel.

The Reformed faith is the one, true gospel of the Holy Scriptures.

Arminians and Reformed believers, therefore, do not have the gospel in common. Not having the

gospel in common, neither do they have in common the pure worship of God; spiritual fellowship; the true church; and the task of preaching and confessing the gospel.

My question is this: why are confessing Reformed Christians behaving as though they and the free-willists *do* have the gospel in common? □

— Ed.

George Martin Ophoff: Humble Servant of the Truth (2)

Ophoff's Pastoral Work

George Ophoff was ordained into the ministry of the Word and sacraments on January 26, 1922 in the Hope Christian Reformed Church during the evening worship service. The congregation had been in existence since 1916, though it had never had a pastor. It belonged to Classis Grand Rapids West, and was supplied by ministers from the Classis and by students and professors from the seminary. It was a rural congregation numbering between thirty and thirty-five families, most of whom farmed.

In many ways and from many viewpoints, Ophoff's strengths were not best utilized in the pastoral aspects of the ministry. It is always a marvel that God gives sovereignly to each man his gifts and abilities, that the particular place of each man within the church is sovereignly determined

by God, and that (and here is the wonder) the two so perfectly match. It soon became evident that Ophoff's gifts and abilities lay in teaching.

He was a forceful teacher in catechism classes, although he did not usually succeed in remembering all the names of his catechumens, and they could easily "pull the wool over his eyes" by reading the answers to the questions they were supposed to memorize, without his being aware of it.

He was, however, extremely interested in the spiritual welfare of the children, a welfare rooted, he was convinced, in their thorough understanding of the Reformed faith. After Ophoff was deposed from the ministry in the Christian Reformed Church (though he continued to be a minister in the Hope Protestant Reformed Church), it came to his attention that a nearby local Christian Reformed minister was attempting to persuade some of Ophoff's catechumens to attend catechism in the Christian Reformed Church. Ophoff's solution to this problem was to take his entire catechism class to the home of

the "proselytizing" minister and proceed, in the presence of his class, to instruct the local minister in the error of common grace and in the necessity of the children's learning the Reformed faith over against this pernicious error.

The same strength of Ophoff appeared in his preaching. His preaching, especially on the Old Testament, was powerful, Reformed, unique, gripping. He could bring the whole congregation, including the children, into the lives and history of the saints described in Scripture. And he could unfold in an unforgettable way the riches of Christ crucified as the salvation of God's people in every age.

But he was rarely on time for anything — a weakness that plagued him all his life. In concern for the congregation, the elders would often start the service, and the minister would appear sometime during the preliminary acts of worship.

Ophoff's life was, especially after 1924, unbelievably difficult as he attempted to combine the full-time care of a congregation with

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

the heavy responsibilities of seminary instruction — when the full curriculum fell on just two men. The result was that his sermons were not always as carefully prepared as they would have been if he had sufficient time to spend on them; he often failed to finish a sermon in the allotted time, and it was not unusual that he would complete a sermon in the afternoon worship service which he had begun in the morning. He sometimes would reprimand from the pulpit individual members of the congregation who had sinned; and his condemnation of sin, though stern and unbending, was not always touched by a shepherd's love for the sheep. Because bulletins were unheard of and the minister was required to read the announcements, Ophoff often became entangled in the difficult task of finding the correct piece of paper containing the current announcements among a welter of slips of paper found in every pocket of his coat.

Jacob was his favorite Bible character — what Ophoff himself would call "his favorite personage." He himself admitted that this was true because he saw himself in Jacob, who illustrated so vividly that sovereign election and grace makes a saint from a very miserable character. Because his sermons were filled with illustrations and expressions which were down-to-earth, homely, and taken from everyday life, even today those who heard him preach remember many of his sermons and the points he was making in them.

After the controversy over common grace which was the occasion for the beginning of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Rev. Ophoff was pastor for sixteen years in Byron Center, Michigan. But, partly because of controversy in the congregation, the congregation was dissolved and Ophoff was able to devote all his time to his work in the Seminary. His work in a congregation after that was limited to faithful and dedicated

service in the office of elder in First Protestant Reformed Church.

Ophoff's Deposition

George Ophoff was involved early in the events which led up to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Although the PRC were not formally established until January of 1925, Rev. Ophoff joined the staff of the *Standard Bearer* in October of 1924 and wrote his first article in the November issue. It was entitled, "A Declaration," and was intended to explain his action:

And thus it happens that I, the undersigned, am of the group editing this periodical. The fact that I agree to serve upon the editorial staff of the "Standard Bearer" amounts to an admission on my part that I too reject the views and conception of things which the term common grace stands for. For me it is quite impossible to adhere to the principles embedded in the term common grace and remain on friendly terms with Scripture.

To write for the *Standard Bearer* and to write this kind of language was an act of courage born out of faith. The times were troubled and dangerous. A few months before, in June, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church had adopted a statement concerning common grace which made the doctrine official dogma in the church. And, while the Synod had not required the discipline of those who disagreed with Synod's decision, many had started movements to rid the church of all those who dared express disagreement with what Synod said. Ophoff must have known that such writing would eventually lead to trouble for him.

And so it did. Rev. Herman Hoeksema was disciplined in December of 1924 by Classis Grand Rapids East. Classis Grand Rapids West followed in January. A reading of the minutes of both

Classes will show that the same men who had sought the ouster of Hoeksema would not rest until also Ophoff was put out of the church. The material presented to Classis West was much the same as that which had appeared in Classis East. From the first day of the meeting it was obvious that the Classis had not come together as a deliberative body to discuss the issues; it had one purpose in mind, namely to rid the church once and for all of anyone who disagreed with the synodical pronouncements. It had one question to ask Ophoff: Will you sign the three points of common grace or not?

The demand came to Ophoff via the insistence of the Classis that Ophoff's consistory confront its pastor with these demands. The missive read:

Dear Brethren,

The Classis Grand Rapids West hereby requires you to require of your minister:

1) That he declare himself unequivocally whether he is in full agreement, yes or no, with the three points [of common grace] of the Synod of Kalamazoo.

2) An unconditional promise that in the matter of the three points, he will submit (with the right of appeal) to the Confessional Standards of the Church as interpreted by the Synod of 1924 i.e. neither publicly nor privately propose, teach or defend either by preaching or writing any sentiment contrary to the Confessional Standards of the Church as interpreted by the Synod of 1924 and in case of an appeal that he in the interim will acquiesce in the judgment already passed by the Synod of 1924.

The Classis further requests you to furnish the Classis by 10:00 A.M., Wednesday morning, Jan. 21, 1925, with a definite written answer of your pastor to the two-fold requirement of the Consistory.

The Classis brushed aside the detailed answer of Hope's Consistory and proceeded to de-

pose from office Rev. Ophoff himself and his elders. One deacon also was deposed while another agreed to common grace.

From an earthly point of view the results were disastrous. Ophoff was stripped of his office, as were his elders; the congregation was reduced to a small group of about seven or eight families; the whole movement numbered only three ministers and three congregations; Ophoff's relatives all remained in the CRC, and what had been a close-knit family was torn apart by the split.

Nevertheless, God used this seemingly hopeless situation to bring reformation to His church. Common grace is an unwarranted departure from Scripture and the Reformed confessions and an introduction of deadly heresy into the church. The deposition of faithful ministers was a terrible sin. Yet Ophoff was determined to remain true to Scripture and to his God. Nothing else mattered. At the time of his deposition the *Grand Rapids Press* published an edition with the headlines: "OPHOFF PREFERS DEATH." The reference was to a

statement which Ophoff had made on the floor of the Classis during the course of proceedings. He had informed the Classis that he would rather be shot than to sign the three points. The paragraph from the *Press* reads:

Mr. President, if you were to place me before a gun to be shot or set before me the three points to adhere to, I would choose the former. I cannot sign the three points. If I did I would be tearing the Bible into shreds. I would be stamping the Word under foot. I would be slapping God in the face.

It was not a vain and empty boast. The truth was more important to him than life itself. And the courage to stand alone, as saints before him had so often done, was a courage born in an unshakable faith that Christ's cause always has the victory.

Such was, in part, the beginning of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Ophoff As Professor

From the beginning of the Protestant Reformed Churches, a semi-

nary was established and operated under the firm conviction that the survival of the fledgling denomination depended upon the training of its own ministers. And so, in addition to his pastoral work, Ophoff began teaching Church History and Old Testament subjects in the seminary. Although the seminary could not begin to compare with other seminaries in facilities, organization, size of student body, and prestige, the simple fact is that the seminary turned out ministers who in ability to preach and shepherd the church of Christ were head and shoulders above every seminary in the land. While the academic aspect of the training was good, the success of the seminary was, without doubt, due to the deep spirituality of its teachers.

I consider it one of the great privileges which the Lord gave me in life, that I could study under Profs. Ophoff and Hoeksema. It was a part of a seminary education which was better than anything obtainable elsewhere. I look back on those years with gratitude. □

... to be continued.

Contribution

Prof. Robert Decker

In Christ, No East or West

So wrote one of the sisters, a member of First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, in a farewell card given to us just before we left Singapore to return to the States. "In Christ," she

wrote, "there is no East or West, in Him no South or North; but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide world."

My wife and I, together with Elder and Mrs. Harry Langerak, experienced the truth of this on our recent trip to Singapore. There on the other side of the globe from North America we found over three hundred saints in Christ Jesus, members of the First and Covenant Evangelical Reformed

Churches of Singapore (ERCS), who are one with us in the faith, hope, and love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The story of our trip to these churches really begins with the 1996 Synod of our Churches. That synod decided to send a delegation to visit Rev. Kortering (a minister of the Protestant Reformed Churches on loan to the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore since 1992). This delegation

Prof. Decker is professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, and a member of the PRC Committee for Contact with other Churches.

was to consist of a member of the Hope PRC Council and a member of the Committee for Contact with other Churches. The mandate for the delegation reads, "1) To be in Singapore a minimum of three Sundays. 2) To inquire into the physical and spiritual well-being of Rev. and Mrs. Kortering, giving direction and encouragement as needed. 3) To discuss with Rev. Kortering the development and progress of his work as mandated by Synod as well as goals for the future. 4) To assist Rev. Kortering in his work as opportunity arises. Grounds: 1) This belongs to the proper supervision of the work of our minister-on-loan. 2) Rev. Kortering's minister-on-loan status is up for review



ERCS Contact Committee and PRC delegates

That evening we attended the service in Covenant Church. Cheah Fook Meng led this service. On Tuesday, April 1, Elder Langerak and I attended the meeting of the Denominational Contact Commit-

tee of the ERCS. Present at this meeting were representatives of the Theological Training and Joint Mission Committees of the ERCS as well.

On Friday, April 4, I gave a public lecture on the subject, "Thematic Preaching." On Saturday, April 5, I conducted a seminar/workshop on the same subject. Both sessions were well attended. On Sunday, April 6, I preached at the morning worship of First Church. We attended the second service in Covenant Church and heard Pastor Lau preach. We met with both sessions (councils) on Tuesday, April 8. At this meeting Elder Langerak spoke with the brothers regarding the work of the elders and deacons in the church. Elder Langerak answered many questions put to him by the men as well.

I gave a lecture on the subject, "Reformed Christian Education," on Friday April 11. Mrs. Decker showed a video of her First Grade Class at Heritage Christian School, and a panel discussion on the subject of Christian Education was conducted by the delegates and their wives on Saturday, April 12. Both sessions were well attended and a great deal of interest was expressed in this important subject by the young parents of the two



Ladies' Fellowship and PRC visitors

at the 1997 Synod" (*Acts of Synod 1996*, Articles 31, 32; pp. 23-24).

Elder Langerak of Hope's Council and I of the Contact Committee, together with our wives, left for Singapore on March 26. At 1:45 AM we arrived in Changi Airport in Singapore where we were warmly greeted by Rev. and Mrs. Kortering, Pastor and Mrs. Lau, Candidate and Mrs. Cheah, and a number of the members of the two churches. Pastor Lau led us in a prayer of thanksgiving to God for our safe arrival.

On Sunday, March 30, we attended the morning worship service conducted by Rev. Kortering at First Church. After the service the catechism classes were taught and the Sunday School met. We enjoyed a delicious lunch at church.

tee of the ERCS. Present at this meeting were representatives of the Theological Training and Joint Mission Committees of the ERCS as well.

On Friday, April 4, I gave a public lecture on the subject, "Thematic Preaching." On Saturday,



Catechism class, First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore

churches. It is our fervent prayer that we were able to "plant some seeds" which under God's blessing bear fruit in a Reformed Christian school in Singapore some day.

On Sunday, April 13, I preached at the morning worship service of the Covenant Church. We attended the evening service at Covenant and heard Rev. Kortering preach. At 6:15 the following morning, after Dr. Daniel Kwek led us and a small group from the two churches in prayer, we boarded the plane for the trip back to Grand Rapids.

We were impressed by many things during our nearly three-week stay in Singapore. Among these were the enthusiastic singing of the saints, the commitment to the Reformed Faith, the heartfelt concern on the part of the elders, deacons, and pastors for the people of God. We were also impressed with the active role assumed by the elders of the church. They teach, for example, most of the catechism classes. But what impressed us the most was the wonderful Christian hospitality and love of Christ shown to us by the saints there. This will make our trip unforgettable.

During the two and a half

weeks we were in Singapore we met with Rev. Kortering on several occasions and for several hours each time. Both he and his wife are enjoying good health. They also enjoy their work very much (Mrs. Kortering's advice and counsel is sought by many of the sisters of the churches). They are both spiritually strong and testify of the Lord's all-sufficient grace which enables them to do their work. They are thankful to God for their places in His church in Singapore. From the unsolicited testimony of many of the saints it became obvious that both Rev. and Mrs. Kortering are much appreciated and loved.

Rev. Kortering strongly believes that there is much work to be done in the following areas:

1) In the development of the two congregations as a Reformed denomination.

2) Theological training of future ministers for the ERCS as well as other Reformed churches (United Reformed Churches of Myanmar, for example).

3) Assisting the ERCS in their mission work.

For these reasons Rev. Kortering desires that his term as minister-on-loan in Singapore be extended another five years as re-

quested by the ERCS. Our Contact Committee concurs and is recommending that Synod 1997 extend his term another five years.

Finally, we strongly believe that Rev. Kortering ought to be commended for the excellent work he is doing, with his wife's help, in the ERCS. The crisis which he initially encountered, especially in Covenant Church, is over. There are unity and peace in the two congregations, and the work is going forward both within the two congregations and in missions. This is due to no little degree to the hard work and wise counsel of Rev. Kortering. We thank God for enabling the brother so to labor among our sister churches in Singapore, and we commend him to the gracious care of our Lord.

We urge all of our people and readers to join us in praying daily for the officebearers, for the members of the ERCS, and for Pastor and Mrs. Kortering. May those churches hold to the traditions they have been taught and in this way stand fast in the Reformed Faith in Singapore.

To God be the glory for the wonderful work He has accomplished in Singapore through our churches. □

Guest Article

Rev. Doug Kuiper

Language: 1) God's Gift

We use language every day. Speaking and writing, reading and hearing — all are instances of our use of language. Without language, we could not communicate.

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan.

That we use language every day indicates that language is important. Not just how we use language is important, but language itself is important. Its importance is that by it we have fellowship with God and with fellow saints, and by it we manifest our separation from the ungodly and the powers of darkness. Or, to rephrase this last sentence with dis-

tinctly Reformed terminology, the importance of language is that it is one way in which we live both covenantally and antithetically.

Understanding that this is the importance of language, we must be concerned with how we use language. We must use it to defend the truth and oppose the lie. We must use it to show love for God and our neighbor. We must use it

to worship God as He has commanded us in His Word, in obedience to the second and third commandments. We must use it to defend our neighbor's reputation, in obedience to the ninth commandment. In fact, the keeping of every commandment of God's law will in some way involve the proper use of language.

If language is a part of our everyday life, if it is important, and if we must be concerned with how we use it, then we should have a Reformed view of what language is. The purpose of this series of articles is to set forth the foundation for such a view. I say the "foundation" of such a view because much more can be said about a Reformed view of language than will be said in these articles.

The Reformed view of language is that it is the gift of God to the human race, and that this gift can be properly used (covenantally and antithetically) by those for whom Christ died.

In the first two articles I will answer the question, "From where did language come?" We will see that it came from God.

Two general remarks are in order at the outset.

First, by the word "language" I mean the manner in which we express our thoughts so that others know and understand those thoughts. Language is the means of communication. It does not matter whether this communication takes place by speech, by writing, or by sign language.

Second, if this is what language is, then only rational, moral beings can use it. The use of language to express thoughts in an understandable way requires that both the one communicating and the one to whom the communication is directed be rational, moral beings. God is, of course, a rational, moral being; He can communicate. So can angels and men. However, animals do not. The "moo" of a cow and the "neigh" of a horse are not language, because they do not ex-

press the intelligent thoughts of rational, moral creatures.



From where did men get the ability to express their thoughts to each other? The answer is that language is a created gift given to us from God.

We must *believe* that language is a created gift from God. There is no creed, or article of our faith, which says in so many words that God created language and gave it to us. But this fact is implied in our confession when we say, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

Linguists have offered many theories which do not proceed from this starting point that God is the creator and giver of language. Each of these theories the Reformed person must reject.

One such theory is that language has always existed. One cannot determine an origin of language; it has no origin. Man simply *discovered* language. Holding to this theory, A.W. Schlegel said: "We do not view the origin of language as something that can be placed at a particular point in time; rather we consider it in the sense in which language always arises...."¹ Perhaps this last statement is not clearly understood. The idea is that "language lives and acts by its own independent rules and dynamics, almost as though language would exist even if there were no speakers of it."² Language is above time and space, as it were. It did not evolve, and was not created; it is simply there.

A second theory is that language evolved. This view has been widely held since its development in the 1860s, after the 1859 publication of Charles Darwin's book *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*.³ One writer says:

Unfortunately, the real origins of language are as completely unknown as its evolution preceding

the last four or five millennia. Assuming we can reject the idea that language was a gift of the gods, we have to ask how it was possible for a hominid that presumably communicated not too much differently from our present primate relatives to evolve into a creature who can do what you and I are now doing.⁴

The writer goes on to speak of the biological differences between man and ape which allowed for human language to evolve from the communication system which apes use. Language as we have it is a product of evolution from lower forms of "communication," according to this view; and these lower forms of "communication" are animal sounds.

A third theory is that language is an invention and creation of man. To say that it was an invention does not mean that language was invented all at once. Rather, it means that the invention of language took place over a period of time, and in various stages. This invention came about when men realized the need to live with each other in a community, and therefore the need to communicate with each other. This theory was held more widely before Darwin's book was published than after, but some still hold to this theory today.⁵

The three theories mentioned above are very broad. Within the broad lines of these theories are many others.⁶ Those who promote such theories defend them against the view that language is of divine origin, created by God. One man gives three reasons for not believing that God created language: "the large number of different languages, the gradual change to which all languages seem subject, and the fact that children do not inherit their language."⁷ Other arguments against the divine origin of language could be listed in addition to these three, but I will not spend any more time on this aspect of the subject. The point is that those who set forth the above

mentioned theories of language feel compelled to explain why they think that language could not have been created by God. That God might have created language is simply not an option to them.

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Our fundamental evaluation of these theories is that they do not proceed from a standpoint of faith in the revealed Word of God. They are instances of unbelief. They deny that language is a created gift of God. They deny the need for God at all. They imply that man is sufficiently able to care for himself without God's help. If man does not need God, then he does not need to fellowship with God through language! He does not need to pray to God, sing to God, or worship God! Furthermore, if man does not need God but nevertheless desires to pray, sing, or worship anyway, then man does so on man's own terms and in man's manner. Man approaches God through language, which man has

invented or discovered. Such worship would not be pleasing to God. It would not be according to God's command (indeed it would ignore God's command), and it would be the worship of a god whom man has invented, not Jehovah who reveals Himself in His Word.

Furthermore, because such theories are instances of unbelief, they do two things. First, they attempt to prove scientifically what is outside the scope of science. As Arthur C. Constance says, in answering the question "Who taught Adam to speak?": "It may be stated simply, then, that scientifically the question is beyond our reach. About all that scientific investigations can do is to demonstrate what *cannot* be the origin."⁸ Second, they deny God's revelation, which is the only possible source for answering the question of the origin of language. If science is ruled out as a source for finding the answer to this question, then revelation is the only other source to which we can turn.

Revelation tells us that language is God's gift, and God's creation. In the next article we will see how revelation shows us that. □

1 A.W. Schlegel, quoted in James H. Stam, *Inquiries into the Origin of Language: the Fate of a Question*, New York (Harper and Row, 1976), pages 244, 245.

2 Stam, *op. cit.*, page 185.

3 *Ibid.*, pages 244, 245.

4 Joseph M. Williams, *Origins of the English Language: A Social and Linguistic History*, New York (The Free Press, 1975), page 12.

5 G. A. Wells, *The Origin of Language*, LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1987.

6 For a more complete discussion, cf. G. Revesz, *The Origins and Prehistory of Language*, translated from the German by J. Butler, New York (Philosophical Library, 1956), pages 17-87.

7 Wells, *op. cit.*, page 7.

8 Arthur C. Constance, "Who Taught Adam to Speak?" *The Doorway Papers*, vol. 2: "Genesis and Early Man," Grand Rapids (Zondervan, 1975), page 254.

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ "Salvation by UFO?"

Most of our readers have heard of the shocking multiple suicides of the 39 members of "Heaven's Gate" sect. One could almost with certainty predict that the unbeliever would use those deaths as an occasion to scoff at all of Christianity and equate its faith with the foolishness of a sect. That quickly became evident in articles written in the press. It was the occasion to mock Scripture, the church, and God Himself. Doubtless, Satan uses all these things likewise to persuade many to believe him — not God. An instance of this was printed in the *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1997:

The suicides of 39 members of the Heaven's Gate sect, motivated by the belief that their deaths would result in their salvation by a spaceship trailing a comet, has prompted condemnation by followers of conventional religions. Christian ministers warn that salvation is possible only through Jesus and not through astrally hitching a ride on a flying saucer. It is important, however, to take a rational look at all supernatural belief systems and to retain critical thinking even when one's own beliefs come under scrutiny.

The essential belief of Christian fundamentalism is that regardless of how good a person you are, you will go to hell forever if you don't believe in Jesus. This means that my mother, a Hungarian Jewish Auschwitz survivor who did not believe in Jesus, is now in hell. Yet, if Hitler, before he died, had made a sincere decision that Jesus

was his savior, he would now be in heaven.

With all due respect to my Christian friends, the notion that good people who reject Jesus are damned but evil people who finally accept Jesus are saved is much more pernicious and much more of an affront to basic principles of justice and fair play than the idea that some UFO is waiting to whisk us away to a better life after we die....

The writer continues by emphasizing that "when a follower of one religion condemns the differing spiritual practices of another, that person is saying, 'My unprovable beliefs are superior to your unprovable beliefs.'" The unbeliever will use every opportunity to mock faith and the testimony of Scripture. It is not difficult to see the direction in which all this will

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surely lead. Here is an individual who calls the Christian belief "far more pernicious and much more of an affront to basic principles of justice and fair play than the idea that some UFO is waiting to whisk us away to a better life after we die." Follow through on what this man is writing. If sects such as "Heaven's Gate" cult ought not to exist, then what of Christianity which is called, "far more pernicious and much more of an affront to basic principles of justice and fair play"? Those who sincerely hold to Scripture as infallible and inspired will soon find no place for themselves here in this society. But it is another reminder too of the very things Christ foretold concerning the end of the age.

■ The "Cruelty" of "Mother Nature"

You have doubtless heard that and similar expressions the past months and even years. "Mother Nature," an inanimate and impersonal entity, seems to be handing out disasters freely and frequently lately. You have read similar reports to those which follow:

"Nature lambastes farmers, ranchers"

Francis and Rosalia Fergel saw a coyote devour one of their fallen cows during a winter blizzard. A couple of months later, they watched 32 cows swim from an island of manure through 7-foot floodwaters that already had swallowed four calves....

...The Fergels, like many farmers and ranchers in the upper Midwest, have lived through six of the worst months they can remember, marked by record snowfall, record flooding and now record-cold spring temperatures... (Denver *Post*, April 11, 1997).

And the accounts of what occurred in Fargo and Grand Forks, ND are familiar to most. The Denver *Post* reported: "Earthen dikes meant to protect North Dakota's largest city from the worst flood

imaginable weren't high enough Thursday as the Red River climbed to its highest level ever." Concerning Grand Forks, the Mayor stated, "We were better prepared at this time than at any time in the history of Grand Forks, and that isn't enough."

It was called the flood that could occur once every 500 years (others claimed it was once every 1,000 years). Clearly it has been a disaster of devastating proportions.

Another report of a different sort appeared also in many newspapers, including the *Loveland Reporter-Herald*, April 19, 1997:

"Worst drought in centuries strikes Britain"

So much for Britain's reputation as a foggy, soggy little isle.

The past two years have been the driest in London in 200 years, leaving some tourist boats high and dry on the River Thames while water reservoirs fall around the nation....

The past years we have heard of several terrible hurricanes which struck the same area within one season—which normally does not occur, it is said, more often than once every 500 years or so.

And "Mother Nature" is blamed — although part of the blame is placed upon man, who, it is said, is responsible for the "global warming" which is bringing too much moisture in some areas but not enough in others. This will, reportedly, bring additional and awful disasters to the world through the coming years.

Yet, interestingly, a recent report on volcanoes stated that it is not a question of "if" but "when" a whole series of volcanoes erupt in the Pacific rim (and possibly elsewhere) at the same time. This will, it is said, create a cloud of dust particles which will encircle the globe, cooling the climate to such a degree that we will enter an "ice-age" in which the raising of crops will become almost impossible, famines will affect the whole

earth, and diseases will take the lives of many.

Other reports speak of diseases which are now or will in the future affect all of mankind. Again, statements are made that it is not a question of "if" but "when" a killer virus, against which there is no known defense, will spread over the earth. Many will die. One newspaper, *The Record*, May 20, 1996, stated:

Overuse of medicine, human settlement of uninhabited areas, international travel, and poverty have combined to produce a devastating spread of infectious diseases, a new report says.

The report by the World Health Organization, which is based in Geneva, Switzerland, warns that the spread of untreatable forms of malaria and tuberculosis and the emergence of killers such as AIDS and Ebola threaten to undermine recent advances in health care.

"We are standing on the brink of a global crisis in infectious diseases," said Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima, a director-general of WHO.

"The optimism of a relatively few years ago that many of these diseases could be brought under control has led to a fatal complacency. This complacency is now costing millions of lives."

Or there is the report from the Denver *Post*, April 17, 1997,

Millions of fish in North Carolina's marshlands have turned up dead with ugly, open sores caused by a microorganism that feeds on their blood. Now some scientists suspect the organism preys on humans, too.

...The organism killing the fish is known as pfiesteria, and biologists call it "the cell from hell."

Pfiesteria has been likened to the piranha of the microbial world. Yet a piranha wouldn't stand a chance against this blood-thirsty menace....

These and many similar reports tell us something, I trust. The message is not the "cruelty" of "Mother nature." Unusual things are tak-

ing place. "Natural" explanations are given for them all. But is not the ultimate explanation given by Scripture itself? Revelation 8 and 9 speak of the sounding of the

trumpets, an increase over the "average" of disasters on the earth. It is a reminder from God Himself of the nearness of the end of the age.

And in Matthew 24 Christ gives detailed pictures of the events of the last days. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. □

The Covenant View of Herman Bavinck

They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

Romans 9:8

As I mentioned a few months ago, Mr. Roelof Janssen from Inheritance Publications sent me a copy of their new book, *American Secession Theologians on Covenant and Baptism & Extra-Scriptural Binding – A New Danger*, evidently with the intention that I should comment on it. The second part of this book consists of Dr. Klaas Schilder's reflections on our "Declaration of Principles," written originally as a series in *De Reformatie* following its formulation at our synod of 1950. Historically these articles are of significance, inasmuch as they contain Schilder's only substantial reflections on our churches; and in their own way they do bring out some of the most basic differences between us. It was only after reading them, and in order to do the book justice, that I turned to the essay of Dr. Jelle Faber which

opens the book. Interestingly, I found Faber's essay to be even more significant than the articles of Schilder.

In this paper Dr. Faber examines the positions of seven early professors of Calvin Seminary, at least six of whom, he claims, formed a consistent line of theological thought — essentially the same as that now held by the Liberated Churches (suggesting, no doubt, that those who would remain loyal to the historical teachings of the Christian Reformed can now best ally themselves with the Canadian Reformed). As I read this, however, something struck me as extremely strange. Faber deals with the last two of these men, William Heyns and Foppe M. tenHoor, as though they were of one theological cut, while I recall distinctly how Herman Hoeksema, who studied under both of them, took strong exception to the teachings of Heyns, while he was quite fond of tenHoor and in a certain way looked upon him as his own theological mentor. I do not have ready access to the extant writings of tenHoor, but Faber points out that tenHoor had been a classmate of the great Dutch theologian, Dr. Herman Bavinck, and a correspondent with him in later life, leading to the likelihood that their theological positions were essentially similar. This sent me quickly to the

shelf for Bavinck's great book, *Our Reasonable Faith*,¹ and in it to the chapter on "The Covenant." I was amazed. Here, in most concise form are all of the essential elements of Herman Hoeksema's covenant view — at almost every point precisely opposite to that of Heyns, Schilder, and the Liberated Churches.

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Bavinck begins this study with an extended treatment of the universal desire of man to escape his inborn sense of guilt, and the futility of every human effort to do so — no common grace here. With this he lays the foundation for that principle which runs throughout his work, "In the whole work of redemption it is God and God alone who manifests Himself as the seeking and calling One, and as the speaking and acting One. The whole of redemption begins and ends in Him."²

Bavinck goes on to state "the fact that the whole of that redemptive work depends upon an eternal counsel,"³ which he approaches from an essentially supralapsarian point of view by proposing that, of its decrees, "the first is election"⁴ — placing it thereby at the beginning of the divine decrees, which is precisely the principal point underlying Supralapsarianism.

He proceeds to deal with the

Rev. Woudenberg is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

three primary decrees. Of the first he says, "Election is not the whole counsel of redemption, but is a part, the first and principal part, of it. Included and established in that counsel is also the way in which the election is to be actualized — in short, the whole accomplishment and application of redemption."⁵ Secondly he adds, "The Mediator who will prepare this salvation for them is also pointed out. To this extent Christ Himself can be called the object of God's election" (implying, in effect, a kind of justification in eternity).⁶ And so "in the third place ... redemption or re-creation takes place only through the applicatory activity of the Holy Spirit."⁷ And with that he is ready to focus on the covenant of grace itself.

In this there are three things which he immediately sets forth — placing him in direct conflict with the Heyns/Schilder covenant position.

1. The first is an emphatic identification of the covenant with election:

After all, when the covenant of grace is separated from election, it ceases to be a covenant of grace and becomes again a covenant of works. Election implies that God grants man freely and out of grace the salvation which man has forfeited and which he can never again achieve in his own strength.... So far from election and the covenant of grace forming a contrast of opposites, the election is the basis and guarantee, the heart and core, of the covenant of grace. And it is so indispensably important to cling to this close relationship because the least weakening of it not merely robs one of the true insight into the achieving and application of salvation, but also robs the believers of their only and sure comfort in the practice of their spiritual life.⁸

Clearly, in Bavinck's mind a separating of the covenant from election, as Schilder insists must be done, destroys the idea of the cov-

enant completely, and makes it a covenant of works.

2. Accordingly, Bavinck has absolutely no place for a conditional covenant, as he says:

if this salvation is not the sheer gift of grace but in some way depends upon the conduct of men, then the covenant of grace is converted into a covenant of works. Man must then satisfy some condition in order to inherit eternal life. In this, grace and works stand at opposite poles from each other and are mutually exclusive. If salvation is by grace it is no longer by works, or otherwise grace is no longer grace. And if it is by works, it is not by grace, or otherwise works are not works (Rom. 11:6). The Christian religion has this unique characteristic, that is *the* religion of redemption, sheer grace, pure religion. But it can be recognized and maintained as such only if it is a free gift coming up out of the counsel of God alone.⁹

3. Bavinck then comes to what the Liberated so often present as the heart of the whole matter, the promise given centrally to Abraham, and which they are most insistent must be conditional in order to maintain the responsibility of man; but Bavinck writes:

The one, great, all-inclusive promise of the covenant of grace is: I will be thy God, and the God of thy people. ...this promise is not conditional, but is as positive and certain as anything can be. God does not say that He will be our God if we do this or that thing. But He says that He will *put* enmity, that He *will* be our God, and that in Christ He *will* grant us all things. The covenant of grace can throughout the centuries remain the same because it depends entirely upon God and because God is the Immutable One and the Faithful One.¹⁰

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This, however, is not all. As Bavinck goes on, he lays down a series of principles, all of which were to reappear in Hoeksema's

view of the covenant, and in fact underlie his entire theology.

1. It begins with the fact, as Hoeksema often stressed, that there is essentially only one covenant. So Bavinck writes:

In the first place, the covenant of grace is everywhere and at all times one in essence, but always manifests itself in new forms and goes through differing dispensations. Essentially and materially it remains one.¹¹

2. This covenant, being a covenant of grace and not of works, cannot be broken:

The covenant of grace can throughout the centuries remain the same because it depends entirely upon God and because God is the Immutable One and the Faithful One. The covenant of works which was concluded with man before the fall was violable and it was violated, for it depended upon changeable man. But the covenant of grace is fixed and established solely in the compassion of God. People can become unfaithful, but God does not forget His promise. He cannot and may not break His covenant; He has committed Himself to maintaining it with a freely given and precious oath: His name, His honor, and His reputation depends on it. It is for His own sake that He obliterates the transgressions of His people and remembers their sins no more. Therefore the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but His kindness will not depart from us, nor shall the covenant of His peace be removed, says the Lord who has mercy on us (Is. 54:10).¹²

3. Possibly most significant of all, Bavinck presents the covenant as being organic in nature:

The second peculiarity or remarkable characteristic of the covenant of grace is that in all of its dispensations it has an organic character.... The elect, accordingly, do not stand loosely alongside of each other, but are one in Christ....

It is one communion or fellowship, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.¹³

This perhaps more basically than anything separates his view from that of Schilder, who, like Abraham Kuyper before him,

had a preference for judicial categories and for terms like statute, obligation and legal status, defined by the *speaking God*, the God of the *Word*, both for those who will respond positively, and for those whose response will be negative.¹⁴

Meanwhile, however, the Revs. H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema had followed Bavinck's suggestion and focused on the organic relationship of friendship as the heart of their covenantal thought. To them the idea of the covenant as a living relationship was far more biblical and far richer in thought than that of a legal right to something that might not even be realized in the end.

4. Seeing the covenant as related so closely with election, Bavinck saw, as Hoeksema did after him, this election following often, if not usually, in the line of believing generations:

Grace is not a legacy which is transferred by natural birth, but does flow on in the river-bed which has been dug out in the natural relationships of the human race. The covenant of grace does not ramble about at random, but perpetuates itself, historically and organically, in families, generations, nations.¹⁵

5. The works of the covenant then follow as a result of covenant grace, rather than as a condition to its fulfillment:

the covenant of grace ... realizes itself in a way which fully honors man's rational and moral nature. It is based on the counsel of God, yes, and nothing may be subtracted from that fact.... But that

will is not a necessity, a destiny, which imposes itself on man from without, but is, rather, the will of the Creator of heaven and earth, One who cannot repudiate His own work in creation or providence, and who cannot treat the human being He has created as though it were a stock or stone.... This accounts for the fact that the covenant of grace, which really makes no demands and lays down no conditions, nevertheless comes to us in the form of a commandment, admonishing us to faith and repentance. ...the covenant of grace is pure grace, and nothing else, and excludes all works. It gives what it demands, and fulfills what it prescribes. The Gospel is sheer good tidings, not demand but promise, not duty but gift.¹⁶

6. Moreover, such covenant life flows from the will, which is directed by reason, rather than from a blind faith in what appears to be contradictory:

The will of God realizes itself in no other way than through our reason and our will. That is why it is rightly said that a person, by the grace He receives, himself believes and himself turns from sin to God.¹⁷

7. And, finally, the presence of unbelievers in the covenant is only in appearance, as in the biblical figure of the chaff among the wheat:

But there can also be persons who are taken up into the covenant of grace as it manifests itself to our eyes and who nevertheless on account of their unbelieving and unrepentant heart are devoid of all the spiritual benefits of the covenant. ... In the days of the Old Testament by no means all were Israel which were of Israel (Rom. 9:6), for it is not the children of the flesh but the children of the promise that are counted for the seed (Rom. 9:8 and 2:29). And in the New Testament church there is chaff in the grain, evil branches on the vine, and earthen as well as golden vessels.¹⁸ There are people who display a form of god-

liness, but who deny the power thereof.... even though there are no two covenants standing loosely alongside of each other, it can be said that there are two sides to the one covenant of grace. One of these is visible to us; the other also is perfectly visible to God, and to Him alone.... But in the final analysis it is not our judgment, but God's that determines. He is the Knower of hearts and the Trier of the reins. With Him there is no respecting of persons. Man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart.... Let everyone, therefore, examine himself, whether he be in the faith, whether Jesus Christ be in him.¹⁹

From all of this it would seem apparent that among Secession theologians there arose at least four different strains of covenant theology:

1. The presupposed unregeneration of the Netherlands Reformed.

2. The presupposed regeneration of Abraham Kuyper.

3. The conditional covenant of Heyns and Schilder.

4. And that of Herman Bavinck, who, few would doubt, represented the mainstream of Dutch Reformed theology.

It was in this latter, it would seem, that Herman Hoeksema was taught by Prof. tenHoor. And, although Hoeksema has often been dismissed lightly as rationalistic and one-sided, as it becomes so apparent that he was simply following in the footsteps of Herman Bavinck, possibly the greatest of all Dutch Reformed theologians, there is great reason to give his teachings more serious study and concern than they have generally received thus far.

(Inasmuch as *Our Reasonable Faith* is no longer in print, the Eerdmans Publishing Co. has granted me permission to reproduce this chapter on "The Covenant of Grace" in limited numbers. Anyone desiring to have a copy of it, in order to read this

treatment through in complete context, may contact me:
616-345-4556; BWoudenber@CompuServe.com; or 1355 Bretton Drive, Kalamazoo, MI 49006.) □

1 Bavinck, Herman, This book was published in Dutch under the beautiful name *Magnalia Dei* ("The Magnificent Works of God") and was translated into English with the lucidity which only Dr. Henry Zylstra could

provide, but was published in English with the rather bland title *Our Reasonable Faith*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956, and I believe was republished by Baker in 1984, but is now out of print.

- 2 *Ibid.* p. 265
- 3 *Ibid.* p. 266
- 4 *Ibid.* p. 266
- 5 *Ibid.* p. 273
- 6 *Ibid.* p. 267
- 7 *Ibid.* p. 268
- 8 *Ibid.* pp. 272, 273
- 9 *Ibid.* pp. 272, 273

- 10 *Ibid.* p. 274
- 11 *Ibid.* p. 274
- 12 *Ibid.* pp. 274, 275
- 13 *Ibid.* p. 275
- 14 VanGenderen, Dr. J., *Covenant and Election*, Inheritance Publications, Neerlandia, 1995.
- 15 *Op. cit.* p. 276
- 16 *Ibid.* p. 277, 278
- 17 *Ibid.* p. 278
- 18 Matt. 3:12; 13:29; John 15:2; and 2 Tim. 2:20.
- 19 *Ibid.* p. 278, 279

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Steven Key

Our Only Mediator

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ."

I Timothy 2:5

Such is the gospel proclamation of salvation to all who believe.

It is the only way of salvation.

There is one Mediator, one Savior.

There is one God, who alone determines the who and the how of salvation.

We have received grace to see ourselves as we stand before the great and holy God, who is perfectly righteous in all His judgments. None can escape the punishment of His wrath against sin. He will have His justice satisfied.

We understand the impossibility of making that satisfaction ourselves. Far from making even a single payment toward the decrease of the debt we have incurred toward God, we daily *increase* our debt.

And should we turn to any other mere creature to make payment for us, we shall find that God

will not punish any other creature for the sin which you and I have committed.

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4).

Further, no mere creature can possibly sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against our sin. As our sins brought an offense against the infinite majesty and holiness of God, they incurred an infinite measure of His wrath. That wrath is a consuming fire!

But the gospel which we proclaim reveals something incomparably wonderful!

God Himself has provided a way out for us who are hopelessly lost in sin and death. That way out is a Substitute who alone is able to make satisfaction for us. He is the one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

The Man

The Mediator must be true man.

That means that He must be like us, flesh and blood, with a real human body. It means that in the body our Mediator must live in contact with the same world in which you and I live. He must face the same temptations, being

tempted in all things like as we are, as we read in Hebrews 4:15.

He must also have a real human soul, for the soul and body of man are one and inseparable. In His thinking and willing, in His entire being, He must be a man like we are men.

Why is that necessary?

In the first place, the One who is to save us must fulfill the very law of God which we could not keep.

God created man in His own image and gave him life within a certain sphere. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

Just as the fish has life in the sphere of the water, and dies as soon as it jumps or is taken out of that sphere, you and I have life within the sphere of obedience to God's law.

And the fact that we did not keep God's law does not cause God to change. He is the unchangeable One. He will never retract His law. Therefore, the Mediator must also be One who bears the same human nature, whose life is to live within the sphere of God's law, obeying God with body and soul.

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In the second place, the Mediator must be a man as we are men because God, pointing to the forbidden tree, said to Adam, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The Just One requires that the human nature which has sinned shall either make satisfaction in full, and so be restored to favor, or else that the sinner be made to bear the consequences of his sin both now and forever.

Man, human nature, sinned and contracted the debt. Man must now pay that debt in order to satisfy God's justice. There is no alternative.

When you understand that, then you can also understand the joy of the church as expressed in the song of rejoicing (Is. 9:6), "For unto *us* a child is born, unto *us* a Son is given."

This child that must be born, this Son of man, brings great joy to all those who look for Him, because He is the fulfillment of that which was promised the church in the Old Testament. Israel was shown that her Redeemer must also be the *kinsman* of His people.

In Leviticus 25 we read in the law which was the schoolmaster to lead God's people to Christ, that one who had become a poverty stricken servant could be redeemed by his *kinsman*. When Naomi said to Ruth concerning Boaz in Ruth 2:20, "This man is near of kin to us, one of our next kinsman," she was pointing to a picture of the wonder of our redemption in Christ Jesus.

We who are redeemed must be able to look to our Mediator and say, "He is *our* flesh and blood, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh."

Finally, our Mediator must be very man in order that He might serve as our High Priest and our sacrifice. The Book of Hebrews has much to say about Christ as our High Priest and sacrifice. The One who is our Mediator must be very man, like unto us in all things, sin

excepted. He must be true man, in order that He may be the fulfillment of the typical priesthood of old, "that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way" (Heb. 5:1,2), and who may offer up the sacrifice of His *body* once for all.

The one Mediator between God and man is the *man* Christ Jesus.

The Righteous Man

But it is not enough merely to say that the Mediator must be a man. He must also be a *perfectly righteous* man.

He must be a man; but He must be a man without guilt — without original guilt and without actual guilt.

Original guilt is that which is imputed to us from Adam. Actual guilt is that guilt which we pile up day after day with our own sins.

Guilt is imputed to every man from Adam on. But the Man who will serve as our Mediator must be a man without guilt.

It stands to reason. Can one who is already bankrupt himself pay the debt for someone else?

All mankind has sinned in Adam our head and father. We have seen that truth from Romans 5 and other passages. One who is himself a sinner cannot possibly appear before God to satisfy for others.

Our Mediator must be indeed the Righteous Branch, prophesied by Jeremiah; a man, but a perfectly righteous man.

How then can we be saved?

Where shall we find such a man?

God Himself must provide that Mediator.

God Himself must become flesh!

Very God

Our Mediator, the *only* Mediator, is Jehovah-salvation.

His name is *Jesus*.

He is very God.

For one thing, that is the only possibility of Him serving as our Mediator. Our Mediator must not inherit the guilt of Adam. He must not come under the imputation of Adam's guilt. He must be righteous, perfectly righteous.

We must remember that our Lord Jesus Christ is a *divine person*. If Christ were a *human* person, He could not escape the imputation of Adam's guilt.

Guilt is imputed to the person — not to the nature, but to the person. And if the guilt of Adam should be imputed to Christ, He could not save us. But Christ is a *divine person*.

He is God, God in the flesh, Immanuel.

No other Christ can save us.

Christ did not inherit our guilt. He did not.

He took it upon Himself.

Christ did not merely come forth from the human race, as we do.

Our Lord Jesus Christ *entered* the human race. The human and divine natures were united in the one person of Christ Jesus, as He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary.

That our Mediator is very God is also necessary if He is to sustain the eternal and infinite burden of God's wrath against us.

How terrible is that wrath of God!

We really have little conception of that wrath. We can sing with Moses in Psalm 90, "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath." But even when we sing that from the heart, that song is evidence of the truth that we have experienced God's mercy.

We cannot conceive of the wrath which our Mediator had to bear.

It was God's *infinite* wrath.

If we had to bear that wrath of God, we would be crushed in a moment, as a moth underfoot. Or, to use a biblical expression, we would be consumed as stubble in the fire.

Some years back, in a conver-

sation I had with an impenitent sinner who had sunk into the deep mire of sin, that individual made the comment, "I think I have come near the bottom." To my sorrow, the statement was not made in sorrow of repentance, but as a simple statement of fact from a hard heart.

I said, "If only you were saying that while seeing your situation through spiritual eyes of faith, eyes enlightened by the living Spirit of Christ through the Word. For then you would see that what you think is bottom has been nothing compared to the infinite and eternal wrath of the living God. Oh, that you would see your sin for what it is."

That wrath of God is what you and I would also face, except that the one Mediator is *God* in the flesh.

One more thing. Our Mediator must be God, in order to merit for us and apply to us the everlasting life of fellowship with the blessed covenant God.

He must obtain our righteousness.

He must obtain that kingly

robe, that white robe of righteousness which must cover every man, woman, and child of His entire elect family.

He must clothe us in such a way that God declares of us in time as well as in eternity, "I see no sin in my Jacob, and no iniquity in my Israel."

But the only way in which that Mediator can so clothe us is by living a perfectly holy life in all obedience to the law of the holy and righteous God, loving Him perfectly with heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Do you see how absolutely impossible this task is for a mere man?

He must live *sinlessly* in this wicked world which is full of deceit. A sinless life must characterize our Mediator.

He must indeed be very God.

He must also defeat the powers of this world.

We confess of the Christ that He obtained the victory. But we don't see that complete victory yet. We live in the valley of the shadow

of death, afflicted, tempted on every side, and moving steadily closer to death.

Our Mediator must defeat the powers of Satan and the sting of death.

And accomplishing that victory, He must apply the salvation which He has merited. He must apply it to our lives and consciousness, that God might receive the praise and glory that is due to Him. The Christ must mold us as His workmanship, as those who show forth the praise of our Redeemer.

For this work our Mediator must be very God.

We must believe in Him, put our trust in Him, rely upon Him for time and eternity. We must pray through Him, love and praise and glorify and thank God through Him.

We cannot do this, if He is a mere man.

God and man in unity of divine Person — He is the one Mediator who gave Himself a ransom for us and all His own.

And as we must see: Apart from Him there is no salvation. □

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

The Covenant of Marriage

1. Its Mystery (cont.)

Sin-weary saint! Have you ever become so burdened with your sin that you despaired? Have you ever fallen so deeply into sin that you wondered whether God would accept you again into His presence and favor? Does your daily battle against sin at times weary you to the point of

despondency? It is at these times in our lives that we hardly dare lift our prayers to heaven to plead with God for forgiveness. We feel so guilty and unworthy. Yet, with shame and sorrow we confess our sin before God. We flee into His loving arms and hear Him say to us, "I love you. And for the sake of Christ I have forgiven you! You need not worry or despair, for I will not leave or forsake you in your sin! You belong to Me! You

were mine from eternity! Fear not, for I have saved you and will preserve you!"

Burdened saint! Is it not good for us to know that when the troubles and cares of this present life overwhelm our souls we have a place to run? When we are forsaken and alone, when we face perilous ways, when we struggle with burdens in the home and at work, we hear the word of God to us: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee:

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be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Is. 41:10). When these words of God's covenant are whispered in our ears then we find blessed peace!

Suffering saint! Is the pain so great that it is hard to bear? Is the affliction God has sent you in body or soul so extreme that you pray that God will soon deliver you from this misery? Sickness and disease can be so hard to deal with — especially if it is something we are called to bear every day with no end in sight. Yet, each day anew we are given strength to bear it, even with cheerfulness, because every day we in faith cling to what Paul expresses in Romans 8, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life ... nor things present, nor things to come ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus!" In our pains and fears we run into the open arms of our God and He holds us tightly there and soothes our weariness and pain!

Mourning saint! We weep bitterly at the death of our loved one who was so dear to us in this life. At the grave we are harshly reminded that the earthly relationship that tied us with him is severed, ended. Yet, in the midst of our tears we are reminded, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4)! We walk away from the grave comforted to know that our loved one now experiences perfect fellowship with God in heaven, and that God will walk by our side and help us deal with our loss!

These are but a few times when the believer experiences in life the faithfulness of God. God is always there to love, strengthen, and console us when we hurt the most. Neither ought the believer ever fear that our God, once having saved us, will ever grow weary of us and

cast us away. His promise is sure to those with whom He has entered into covenant: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). God holds His people in His almighty hand, and no one is able to pluck them out. We are Christ's and Christ is God's!

This intimate relationship between God and His people in Christ is labeled in Scripture as God's covenant. God's covenant is that bond of friendship and fellowship into which He enters with His people in Christ. In several different places God's covenant is described as a covenant of marriage. This is pointed out most beautifully in Ezekiel 16, where the prophet Ezekiel was instructed to shame Jerusalem by pointing out to her what God had done for her. In verse 8 of that chapter we are given a description of God's grace towards His people. "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine." God spoke similar words to His church through the mouth of Hosea in chapter 2:19, 20: "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord."

There is no better way than this for the Bible to express the intimate union of love and devotion that God shows toward His people. His church is His wife! God has entered into covenant with her and she has become His — forever! He swears to her His faithfulness (Heb. 6:13-18)! What a wonderful relationship we share with our God! God, our husband, delights and rejoices in us, His bride (Is. 62:4, 5)! We have become the apple of His eye, whom He loves and shelters from all harm (Ps. 17:8)! Even

when we do our husband wrong and sin against Him (what horrible whoredoms we commit!), He is faithful to us and forgives us of our sin. Never will He cast us away from Him!

It is to that solid commitment of God to us that we cling! "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22, 23)! We would despair if it were not for that assurance. We would lose all security and peace in life if it were not that God is ever faithful and ever sure! Never would the church survive without the knowledge that God will never leave her or forsake her. Neither could the individual saint forge ahead in adversity without the assurance that God is there by His side loving and upholding him.

We find this same intimate union between God and His people described in a slightly different way in the New Testament. John the Baptist testified of Jesus with these words in John 3:29, "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom." Jesus approved of this description of Himself when later John's disciples came to Him to ask Him why His disciples did not fast. In Matthew 9:15 He answered, "Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?" New Testament Scripture does not speak of our marriage to God as much as of the marriage of the church to Christ.

This does not mean that Old and New contradict each other, of course. Christ is God, after all! Besides, God's faithfulness to His bride, the church, is rooted in Jesus Christ. If it were not for the atonement of Jesus Christ we would be cast away forever on account of our sin. Sin renders us as "women that break wedlock" (Ezek. 16:38), and we would be judged by God and destroyed by God — unless God remembers His covenant with us and reconciles us to Himself in the blood of Jesus Christ! In a very

real way, then, we can say that we are married to Christ! In fact, by means of His death and resurrection we have become *one flesh* with Christ. This is the testimony of Ephesians 5:22-33. Those who are saved in the blood of Jesus Christ are *in* Christ. We do not merely walk with Christ, but we are in Him and He in us. We become bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh.

This happens by means of faith. At the moment of regeneration the Spirit of Christ is sent forth to dwell in our hearts. He applies to us the gift of faith, and by means of that faith we are grafted into Christ. We are made one living organism with Him. His life becomes ours. His thoughts and desires become our thoughts and desires. Neither is there anything that is able to uproot us from that life and salvation which we have in Christ. We are joined to Him so closely, so securely, that we can no longer be viewed apart from Him. We are one flesh with Christ.

Talk about intimate union and fellowship! It cannot be closer than that! It is inseparable! Christ has become our heart and soul and life! He is our everything! All we are and hope to be we owe to Him. We love Him more deeply than anyone and anything else in life! Our hopes and desires all center in Him! And Christ, in turn, takes His delight in us. He defends and preserves us with His life. He has given all for us, even suffered the deepest pangs of hell for our sakes! This union of Christ and His church is a blessed mystery which is discovered only by believers.

This is the great mystery that must be discovered in marriage too!

Husbands and wives, is the relationship of love and fellowship you share with each other of this sort? Young person who searches for a wife or husband, is it this relationship into which you desire to enter? Our covenant life with God must dictate what we seek in mar-

riage. Rev. Carl Haak recently concluded a sermon on the Reformed Witness Hour broadcast with these words:

Only when one knows the living God, only when one fully understands the grace of God, the faithfulness of God, the tenderness of God, only then are they fit, ready to live in marriage. Your marriage does not begin with your husband or wife. It begins with God and in how you are living toward God, and the state of your heart toward God.

Let us then learn of God. Let us bow before His throne. Let us seek His face with all our hearts. And let us live even as God lives with His church. For the Lord calls His church His delight, the one to whom He is married in perfect delight and love.

May God so bless your marriage (Feb. 16, 1997. Broadcast #2823).

Marriage is more than just a picture or symbol of the relationship between God and His church in Christ. It is a divinely instituted bond by which two believers are able to experience in an earthly way the blessed intimacy they share with God in Christ. We must realize, of course, that marriage is a divine institution whether it is the marriage of unbelievers or believers. All marriage is an unbreakable bond. But the wondrous intimacy and love that can be found in marriage ever remains a mystery to the unbeliever. He may have what is deemed a good marriage. Everything from an outward, even moral point of view may indicate that he has a stable and fulfilling life in marriage. He may even be happy his whole life long. Yet, the unbeliever, so long as he remains in his unbelief, will never be able to attain to the full blessedness of marriage. Only the child of God experiences in an earthly way in marriage the joy and pleasure that also belongs to him in his relationship with God in Christ!

When we are burdened with

the cares and difficulties of this life, when life seems to be riddled with troubles, then the godly husband and wife pour out their cares to one another. They share one another's burdens by entering into one another's lives. When one of them or someone they love is racked with pain and sickness, then they find comfort in one another's arms. They embrace each other and hurt with each other. When they mourn the loss of a loved one, they find solace in the friendship they share with each other. Even when they sin they know that they can talk about that sin and confess that sin with each other without fear that it will be spread to others. They cry together and laugh together. Their knowledge of one another is so intimate that they seem to know what the other thinks and desires. They go places together and do things together. No one can be a closer friend. They never grow weary of each other. They find unending joy and happiness in the fellowship they share. The husband is in his wife and the wife in her husband. They are in every sense one flesh with each other. In this way, life in marriage reflects our life with God.

That is the mystery of marriage!

Marriage is a union that comes so close to the mystery of Christ's relationship with His people that there is nothing in this world that can better describe it! And when death severs this earthly relationship, revealing to us that it is only earthly as opposed to our eternal union with Christ, it tears the believer apart! When God takes from us a spouse in death He rips apart our flesh; and the pain we experience cannot be described! Who truly can put into words the union, the unbreakable bond, that the child of God experiences with his marriage partner? Who can put into words the bond we share with God in Christ? It is a mystery! This is the covenant of marriage!

□

Minister Activities

Rev. A. Spriensma received the call from our Hull, IA PRC to serve as our churches' missionary to Ghana.

In news from our sister churches in Singapore, we learn that Pastor Lau Chin Kwee, minister of the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, has received the call from Covenant Reformed Church of Singapore to be their minister. Covenant called from a duo of Pastor Lau and Candidate Cheah Fook Meng.

Rev. C. Haak declined the call he had been considering to serve as the next pastor of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI.

We thank our Grace PRC in Standale, MI for providing the following information. They contacted some of our emeriti ministers in late April and found that Rev. Hanco is active in some translation work, although he is slowing down due to his age and his physical infirmity. He remains in his home with his daughter. Rev. Heys broke a hip a few weeks ago, but has improved enough to be moved back to the Hudsonville Christian Rest Home, where he is beginning to take a few steps with help. His wife is still in their home. Rev. Lubbers and his wife are both in failing health, although he is also working on a pamphlet at this time. Let us remember all our emeriti ministers in our prayers.

Congregational Activities

From another bulletin of the Grace PRC we learn that the site plan for their future church was approved by Tallmadge Township in mid-April.

In observance of the tenth anniversary of the organization of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada, their consistory set aside the evening of May 16 for a congregational supper. Following the supper there was also planned a short ground-

breaking ceremony for the building of their new church building. Following the ground-breaking, there was also planned a program commemorating their tenth anniversary.

In connection with these activities, various members of Immanuel's congregation expressed a desire to start a choir. It was their desire to give their first public concert by singing a few numbers at their anniversary program.

We are also happy to report that the contract for the building of Immanuel's new church has been awarded. The contractors gave a tentative starting date of May 19. This is exciting news for all of us and we will do our best to keep you informed of the progress being made.

The Council of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI called a special congregational meeting for March 28 after their Good Friday service, to consider a recommendation from the Council to purchase 6.2 acres at 7146 48th St., north of Hudsonville, for a future building site. This recommendation was approved. It appears that it will be an ideal site for a future church home. It is near the center of their church population. It is large enough for present needs and for any long-range plans, and the parcel is very close to their parsonage. Preliminary site plans, which could change before construction begins, call for a church building of 13,500 square feet, with parking for a total of 210 cars.

Evangelism Activities

The congregation of the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada recently sponsored their annual Spring Lecture on April 18. Rev. M. DeVries, their pastor, spoke on "The Mystery of Marriage."

The Evangelism Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC recently added itself to a growing list of our churches who now have a home page on the World Wide Web. They can be reached at <http://www.iserv.net/~hud-prc/>.

School Activities

A program celebrating the 50th anniversary of our Hope PR Chris-

tian School in Walker, MI was held on April 18 at Covenant Christian High School. It served as a fitting way to stop and take time to give thanks to God and also rededicate ourselves to the cause of Christian education. Following the program, there was an Open House at Hope School.

Even as one school celebrates its 50th year we see the beginning of plans for another school for our covenant young people. The Secondary School Society of South Holland and Peace Churches in Illinois have made a decision to purchase four acres adjacent to our Peace PRC for a future high school. We rejoice with them in this advance towards their goal of obtaining their own high school.

A meeting held April 14 for the promotion of PR secondary education in Northwest Iowa was well attended. Seventy-one men from our three area churches, Hull, IA; Doon, IA; and Edgerton, MN, gave their signature as a show of support for the concept of organizing a high school society. A steering committee was appointed to write a constitution.

Denominational Activities

On Sunday evening, April 27, 140 members of the PR Mass Choir made up of a Faith, Hudsonville, and Southeast Choirs, and singers from other congregations in and around Grand Rapids, MI gave their choir concert at Fair Haven Ministries in Jenison, MI.

Plans call for this concert to be professionally recorded at a later date by the choir, with tapes and CD's available for \$8.00 per tape/\$11.00 per CD through Heritage Christian School, 4900 40th Ave., Hudsonville, MI 49426.

Food for Thought

"A father is a mirror which the child dresses himself by; let the mirror be clear and not spotted. Let it not be said to you by your son, 'If I have done evil I have learned it of you.'"

— Thomas Watson □

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On June 20, 1997

MR. and MRS. BILL SWART

will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them and thank the Lord for them, for their faithful example, for their love, guidance, and prayers. May our heavenly Father continue to give them the assurance of His richest blessings.

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

- ✿ Rev. Ron and Sue VanOverloop
- ✿ Cal and Linda Kalsbeek
- ✿ Jay and Judy Kuiper
21 grandchildren
2 great grandchildren

Grand Rapids, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On June 19, 1997, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. CLARENCE PRINCE, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We thank the Lord for His sovereign care over them, and pray for His continued blessing upon them.

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

- ✿ Chet and Sharon Haveman
Joel & Janna Huisken
Mike Haveman
- ✿ Doug and Mary Jane Prince
Hilary Prince

Jenison, Michigan

TEACHER NEEDED!

Hope Christian School (Redlands) is seeking a teacher for the 1997-1998 school year. The opening is for the middle grades (3-5), but grade assignments are negotiable. Interested persons, please call the school at (909) 793-4584, Mr. Doug Pastoor at (909) 792-9392, or Mr. Glenn Feenstra at (909) 794-5859.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On June 11, God willing, our parents and grandparents,

REV. and MRS. J. KORTERING, will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary.

God has been good to our family in giving us parents who love the Lord. They led us to our Savior by their godly example as well as by their constant love, guidance, and instruction.

As we are separated from them, we pray that God will continue to provide strength and faithfulness as they labor for Him in Singapore.

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

- ✿ Barry and Lori Gritters
Curt, Kevin, Eric, Dan, Brad, Lisa
- ✿ Dennis and Sharon Griess
Cory, Tara, Justin, Seth,
Derek, Joshua
- ✿ Bruce and Joann Klamer
Alyssa, Jaycen, Deanna, Zachary
- ✿ Leon and Ellen Kamps
Nick, Caleb, Gina, Jake
- ✿ Rick and Carol Bos
Andrew, Kayleigh
(one grand-daughter in glory)

Singapore

CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 1996 appointed Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, Grandville, Michigan the calling church for the 1997 Synod.

The Consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 1997 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 10, 1997 at 9:00 A.M. in the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, Grandville, Michigan.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 9, at 7:30 P.M. Rev. Slopsema, president of the 1996 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Consistory of
Grandville PR Church
Cornelius Jonker, Clerk.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church express our heartfelt Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Richard Worries and family in the sudden death of their son,

MICHAEL NEIL WORRIES.

May you find the comfort found only in the sovereign grace of our covenant God and be upheld in the Word from Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Gil VanBaren, Vice-president
George DeJong, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On June 18 our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents,

MR. and MRS. JACOB REGNERUS, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to our Lord for the covenant instruction and care they have given us. We pray that God will continue to bless them.

"For the Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- ✿ Joan Regnerus
- ✿ Jake and Rena Mae Soodsma
Dan and Becky Soter
Laura
James and Heidi Kooiker
Ben Soodsma
- ✿ Jack and Sue Regnerus
Matt, Sarah
- ✿ Steve and Ev Oosterhouse
Mary, Liz, Mike, Jake
- ✿ Rich and Jan Regnerus
Jon, Jackie, Dan, Joe
- ✿ Norb and Sandee Alsum
Sandee Lynn, Bob, Levi

Randolph, Wisconsin

PLEASE NOTE:

The summer issues (June, July, and August) of the *Standard Bearer* will come only once a month. The July issue will include information about Synod 1997, and may therefore appear closer to mid-July than the first of the month.