



**A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine**

# ***The Standard Bearer***

## **In This Issue:**

Meditation — <i>Rev. Richard G. Moore</i> <b>Redemption Through Christ's Blood</b> .....	98
Editorial — <i>Prof. David J. Engelsma</i> <b>The Remarriage of the Guilty Party</b> .....	100
Letters .....	103
All Around Us — <i>Rev. Gise J. VanBaren</i> .....	103
Search the Scriptures — <i>Rev. Mitchell C. Dick</i> <b>The Raising of Lazarus (2)</b> .....	105
When Thou Sittest in Thine House — <i>Rev. Wilbur G. Bruinsma</i> <b>The Covenant of Marriage (2)</b> <b>Courtship Within the Covenant</b> .....	108
Ministering to the Saints — <i>Prof. Robert D. Decker</i> <b>The Elders and Discipline (2)</b> .....	110
Cloud of Witnesses — <i>Prof. Herman C. Hanko</i> <b>Herman Hoeksema: Theologian and Reformer (3)</b> .....	112
Go Ye Into All the World — <i>Mrs. Jeanette Kortering</i> <b>Our Work in Myanmar (2)</b> .....	114
Book Reviews .....	117
News From Our Churches — <i>Mr. Benjamin Wigger</i> .....	119

**Vol. 74, No. 5  
December 1, 1997**

# Redemption Through Christ's Blood

*"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."*

Colossians 1:13, 14

**B**lessed redemption! The text that we consider in this article reminds us of a most precious promise that is given us in Christ. Paul instructed us that we are delivered from the power of darkness in the redeeming work of our Lord as He died upon the cross. Now the apostle goes on to point out that not only are we delivered from the power of darkness, but we are translated into the kingdom of Christ. This is the amazing wonder of grace of which we need often to be reminded as we pass through this life as strangers and pilgrims. This is so because we must daily fight the battle of faith, and we are in ourselves

incapable of obtaining the hope of deliverance and glory.

Our text speaks of darkness as the characterization of that in which we were held. The term in our text pictures darkness as shrouding us like a black cloud. We are clothed in a deep blackness. It is in this way that the Scripture defines the terrible abyss into which we plunged ourselves by sin. It paints in a most striking way the picture of the darkness that pervades our souls. From a simply natural point of view, there is hardly a greater darkness and gloominess known on this earth than a mist-shrouded night. There are no stars, there is no moon, only a close, even foul-smelling, cold mist that surrounds one on such a night. Even the most bold will, in the middle of nowhere, experience

a terror in his inmost being on such a night.

By this picturesque language we are led to consider what it is from which we are delivered: the deepest darkness imaginable. That darkness is caused by our sin. It is the most horrible darkness imaginable to man. It is the darkness of death, death which strikes fear into the heart of man!

However, the reason that death is to man such a terror is the fact that it is not just a going to the grave, where, says Job, the worms shall consume the flesh. But death is the judgment of God against man for his disobedience in sin. Adam was told, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

*Rev. Moore is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa.*

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

**Postmaster:** Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

#### REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

#### EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

#### EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. David J. Engelsma  
4949 Ivanrest  
Grandville, MI 49418  
(e-mail: dje@iserv.net)

#### BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer  
Don Doezeema  
P.O. Box 603  
Grandville, MI  
49468-0603  
PH: (616) 531-1490  
(616) 538-1778  
FAX: (616) 531-3033

#### CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger  
6597 40th Ave.  
Hudsonville, MI 49426

#### NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer  
c/o B. VanHerik  
66 Fraser St.  
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

#### UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Jonathan McAuley  
164 Church Rd., Glenwherry  
Ballymena, Co. Antrim  
BT42 3EL Northern Ireland

#### SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

#### ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

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



Clearly, death is said of God to be the penalty of sin. This is repeated in Romans 6:23, where the apostle points out that the "wages of sin is death." This judgment of God against the sinner no man can deny, nor is there any way for man to remove this testimony from his conscience. Death is the punishment of God that sends man into deepest darkness, where there can be no hope, no joy, only suffering and misery. For death is to be cut off from the living, and thus it is to be cut off from God's fellowship. God is a light, and there is no darkness in Him at all. To be separated from God is to lack all light, and to know no fellowship. This is the fruit of sin. The sinner must die.

Now our text makes it clear that we are come under death's power. The power of death has the complete mastery over man. This is the idea of the term used in our text. The fruit of the fall is that man became completely obsessed with sin and was given over entirely to its judgment. The apostle Paul points out to us in the second chapter of Ephesians that we are dead in sins and trespasses. Jesus points out that we are so dead that we cannot even see the things of God's kingdom.

This is our experience. It is very real to us. All that man can do, by nature, is increase his indebtedness to death. He has no light or hope. Natural man stands in enmity against God and can bring forth no good. He is consumed daily by the judgment of God that is come upon him.

This is our personal confession, is it not? In the light of the Word of God we too must say that all we can do naturally is walk in sin, and we are unworthy of entering God's fellowship. We have sinned even when we did not desire to. We have come far short of the glory of God. Our confession is the same as the apostle's: even the good that we would, we have not done. We have sinned, and our sin has been

against God! We must make the confession that the psalmist David did in the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm. Indeed, darkness has dominion over us, and as we stand by nature, this alone can be the testimony.

How we need grace! How necessary that we see Christ as our salvation.

We need to see Christ as our salvation because one thing is so very clear to us as we stand before the testimony of the Scripture, namely, that we cannot save ourselves. There is no work that we can bring forth to make us worthy of God's fellowship and communion! We are debtors before God, and we cannot satisfy this debt. Rather, we can only increase the judgment that stands against us. And that judgment is that sinners must die.

To be delivered from the dread dominion of darkness, we must be redeemed by another. But who can stand under this judgment? Certainly no mere creature. Certainly not a sinner! It is God alone who can save the sinner. It is only a work of grace and mercy that enables us to have confidence that there is fellowship for us with God. That grace is the unmerited favor of God that makes us to be beautiful as He is beautiful. To be beautiful is to dwell in His image. It is to live. And it is to live in holiness, righteousness, and with true knowledge before God. Therefore it is to come to know God and to fellowship with Him.

This grace is given to us through God's coming in our flesh. It is bestowed upon us by the sending of His own dear Son to redeem us. He has chosen us from eternity in Him, to be holy and without blame before Him. In love He predestined us unto the adoption of sons to be heirs of the kingdom of His dear Son (Eph. 1:3-6). When it was wholly impossible for man to deliver himself from the power of darkness, God provided the way. His Son becomes our Head, very righteous man to bear our

debt, to take our guilt, and to redeem us. Wonder of grace!

Indeed it is of grace, for redemption requires that the ransom be paid in full. This required that one enter the suffering of death willingly for us. And that one could have no sin of His own, for a debtor cannot pay the debt of another. But also, He must be able to bear the debt of those who are the debtors. And the debt against us, the debt that holds us under the power of darkness, is the eternal wrath of an infinite God. We can therefore be delivered from the power of death only if there be a Mediator who is not only very man, but also very God.

### **Redemption!**

Jesus has, according to our text, redeemed us in the obedient death of the cross. He has fully satisfied before the throne of God's judgment the penalty of our sin. We understand, then, that Christ has completely taken away the guilt of His people before the throne of God's judgment. There remains nothing more to be accomplished for us to be delivered from the death that had so completely enshrouded us that we had no hope.

This redemption obtains for us the forgiveness of sins. So speaks Paul. Forgiveness means that there is a dismissal from mind, from the consciousness, of the guilt of sin. This is true first of all of God. His justice is fully satisfied, so that He looks upon His children in Christ as cleansed, cleared of all guilt, worthy heirs of the kingdom of Christ. Secondly, it is true of us, as Christ is proclaimed unto us our Savior. We see in Him the power of God's grace to deliver us from our sin, and we are given the assurance that our sin and its guilt is removed, so that we may enter the presence of God as heirs of the kingdom of His dear Son.

The fruit, then, of our redemption by Christ is that our guilt is no longer imputed unto us, for it was imputed unto Christ, and He



paid once and for all the penalty for our sin. This reveals to us that the authority of darkness is defeated completely, and the fear of death is taken away. Thus all the blessings of that redemption become our portion. By grace we are made heirs of eternal life.

We are translated indeed! The term translation is one that we are familiar with in regards to the translation of the Bible from the original languages, or to translation that takes place when one does not speak our language, so we need a translator to interpret for us. This is also the idea of our text. The

term means to transfer, or exchange. We are translated from one state to another and one condition to another. A little different from a translation of mere words this is, in that the fruit of this translation is a radical change. It would be like having a language that is fully foreign or unintelligible to us become perfectly clear and easily recognizable. This is what takes place spiritually as a fruit of our redemption by God's beloved Son. There is an absolute change in our state and life.

Our state changes from that of

absolute guilt to that of innocence. And on this basis Christ gives to us His Spirit and makes us new creatures, so that our condition is changed from that of totally depraved sinners to that of the children of God, heirs of righteousness and partakers of the life of Christ.

We are translated into the kingdom of God's dear or beloved Son. He is the firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29). This means that we are become sons with Him. As Paul points out in Ephesians 1:3, He has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." □

## Editorial

# The Remarriage of the Guilty Party

**N**ow the *guilty* party may remarry. The man or the woman who committed adultery against his wife or her husband, thus causing the divorce in his or her first marriage, is allowed to remarry and to be a member in good standing in the church. The churches that are now allowing this are evangelical, Reformed, and Presbyterian churches. They are evangelical, Reformed, and Presbyterian churches that have a reputation for conservatism and orthodoxy.

These churches approve the remarriage of the guilty party. In some cases, they may require confession of the adultery that broke up the first marriage. But they approve the remarriage of the guilty party. (It is not my concern

here to examine the popular distinction between "innocent party" and "guilty party" in a divorce, whether this distinction is as valid in every instance as is often assumed.)

Approval of the remarriage of the guilty party has become common in the churches. The Christian Reformed Church synodically approved the remarriage of the guilty party in 1956. This is also the position, evidently, of those who recently seceded from the Christian Reformed Church. They lived peaceably with their church's decision for many years. Objection to the church's teaching and practice of marriage, divorce, and remarriage was not part of their reason for leaving. As I pointed out in the editorial of November 1, 1997, approval of the remarriage of the guilty party is now the policy

and practice of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated").

How the remarriage of the guilty party is regarded in many conservative Presbyterian churches is fairly indicated in the writings of Jay E. Adams. In a book that is highly recommended in conservative Reformed and Presbyterian circles, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Baker, 1980), this popular theologian and counselor teaches his readers that "remarriage, in general, is not only allowed but in some cases encouraged and commanded. It is looked upon favorably in the NT." To the question, "Who may remarry after divorce and under what conditions?" he answers, "All persons properly divorced may be remarried." "Properly divorced," however, does not mean for this influ-



ential marriage counselor those who are divorced on the one biblical ground, namely, the fornication of one's mate. Rather it means "those who are released without obligations." These include a professing Christian who has divorced his unbelieving wife in disobedience to the command of Paul in I Corinthians 7:12. Also the guilty party may be "properly divorced" so as to be free to remarry. "Remarriage after divorce is allowed in the Bible and ... the guilty party—after forgiveness—is free to remarry." It makes no difference whether the guilty party committed adultery, divorced, and remarried before or after his conversion (pp. 84-96).

The remarriage of the guilty party is approved in many churches that do not blow a trumpet before their practice. In their public utterances, they argue for the remarriage of the "innocent party." Probably, the minister refuses to officiate at the wedding of the remarriage of the guilty party, for the sake of appearance (mainly, his own appearance). But minister, consistory, and congregation allow the remarried guilty party to remain, or become, a member of the church in good standing. They too approve the remarriage of the guilty party. I know whereof I speak.

### **A Radical Change**

The approval in recent time of the remarriage of the guilty party by these conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches is a radical change and a significant development. In the past, these churches have rigorously restricted the right of remarriage to the innocent party. They forbade the guilty party to remarry. They refused to allow the remarried guilty party membership in the church. Especially the Presbyterians extended the right of remarriage to the believer who is deserted by an unbelieving mate on account of the gospel, with mistaken appeal to I

Corinthians 7:15, but they too disapproved the remarriage of the guilty party.

For many years, the Christian Reformed Church and other conservative churches criticized the stand of the Protestant Reformed Churches, that Holy Scripture forbids all remarriage after divorce. Their vociferous argument was that the innocent party may remarry. What their argument might be today, we do not know, for they have all fallen silent on the matter of divorce and remarriage. The churches do not like to speak on this subject. Whatever the argument might be, it is certainly no longer a defense of the remarriage of the innocent party. For they now approve the remarriage of the guilty party.

### **Chickens Coming Home to Roost**

The radical change demonstrates that it is impossible for a church to restrict remarriage to the innocent party. Such is the pressure of the world, such is the force of the carnal element in the church, and such is the power of the sinful nature of the saints themselves that a church that opens the door "slightly" to the remarriage of the innocent party will eventually throw it open all the way to the remarriage of the guilty party. And if the guilty party may remarry, men and women divorced for any and every unbiblical reason, including burning the toast, are allowed to remarry.

But there is more to the recent development than this. In the approval of the remarriage of the guilty party the chickens are coming home to roost. The right of the remarriage of the guilty party was implied in the churches' approval of the remarriage of the innocent party. What we witness today is simply the logical, inevitable outcome of the approval of the remarriage of the innocent party. The evil tree now bears its evil fruit. And the fruit is exceeding bitter, both in the dishonoring of God and

in the destruction of marriage, family, husbands, wives, children, grandparents, grandchildren, and others.

For consider: if the innocent party in a divorce has the right to remarry, the reason must be that the marriage bond has been dissolved. Obviously, one may not remarry, if he is still married to someone else. And this is exactly what the conservative churches have said in the past: the adultery of the guilty party dissolves the bond. But if the marriage bond is dissolved, it is dissolved, not only for the innocent party but also for the guilty party. This is in the nature of the case. A marriage cannot be dissolved for only one of the married companions. If the marriage has been dissolved, the guilty party has every right to remarry. He has as much right as does the innocent party. He is no longer married. It was his own adultery that dissolved the bond, but the bond is dissolved. As one who is unmarried, he has the right from God Himself to marry. It is preferable that he remarry, for it is not good for man to be alone.

The refusal in the past by conservative churches to allow the guilty party to remarry was a mistake. It was a mistake when judged by the standard of their thinking on divorce and remarriage. One can understand why they made the mistake and even, to a certain extent, sympathize with the mistake. The guilty party is a scoundrel. He is unfaithful. He sins against his wife. He is responsible for the breakup of his family. Often, he is also responsible for the breakup of his neighbor's family. The emotional reaction naturally is to refuse him the right of remarriage and, if he does remarry, the right of church membership.

Nevertheless, the conservative churches that approved the remarriage of the innocent party did not base their prohibition of the remarriage of the guilty party on Scripture. Nor did this prohibition re-



flect biblical thinking on marriage. Therefore, it could not stand the test of time. To say it better, God's judgment in the history of the church has exposed the approval of the remarriage of the innocent party as erroneous by angrily leading the churches to approve the remarriage of the guilty party.

As an unmarried man, in the thinking now of those churches that approve the remarriage of the innocent party, the guilty party has every right to be married. He has been "loosed" from his wife. Does not the apostle teach, "Art thou loosed from a wife ... If thou marry, thou hast not sinned" (I Cor. 7:27, 28)? Remarriage, therefore, does not exclude him from the church. Likely, he will have to confess the sin of adultery that he committed when he was married to his first wife and also his guilt in breaking up his first marriage, just as any public sinner is required to do. But he may be member of the church as remarried. He did not sin when he remarried. Nor is he living in continual adultery in his second marriage. This would imply that he is still married to his first wife, but the churches have said that that bond has been dissolved.

To be sure, this approval of the remarriage of the guilty party is a nasty, disgusting business. A fellow church member may break up my and his own marriages and families by committing adultery with my wife. After his wife divorces him, he may very well remarry mine. If he confesses his sin of adultery, and my wife does the same, he may be member with me in the church—living with my wife. What happens to all the children involved, only the devil who is behind the whole business knows. But this is the implication of the position that the innocent party may remarry. And this grim, damnable state of affairs actually obtains in "evangelical" and "conservative" Reformed churches today.

This is what the churches are

approving, even though the Word of God teaches, in language that a child can understand, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery" (Matt. 19:9a). When the guilty party in a divorce marries someone else, he commits adultery. The relationship is an adulterous relationship, so that he goes on committing adultery as long as he maintains it.

Jesus Christ disapproves the remarriage of the guilty party.

### Reexamining the Traditional Position

Inasmuch as it is their approval of the remarriage of the innocent party that has brought the conservative churches into open war with Jesus Christ by now approving the remarriage of the guilty party, the churches must reexamine their traditional stand on the remarriage of the innocent party. It is unbiblical to view marriage as a contract, or bond, that man can dissolve by his sin and at his will. Scripture teaches that marriage is a lifelong bond established by God. God makes the two one flesh (Gen. 2:18ff.; Matt. 19:3-9). Only the death of one of them dissolves the bond, so that the other has liberty to marry again (I Cor. 7:39). The sexual unfaithfulness of one of them is ground for divorce in the sense of rightful, even legal separation (Matt. 5:31, 32; Matt. 19:9). But not even the innocent party may remarry. If she does, she and her new husband are guilty of adultery (Matt. 5:32b; Matt. 19:9b). She still has a husband. She is still bound to him, "until death do us part," as the form of marriage states.

The thinking that has prevailed in Reformed churches concerning the right of the remarriage of the innocent party always suffered from a fatal flaw. This flaw should at last be recognized. It is the notion that adultery dissolves the marriage bond. This is the notion

that was the basis of the churches' approval of the remarriage of the innocent party: her husband's adultery dissolved the marriage so that the innocent wife might remarry. This is also the notion that today compels the churches to approve the remarriage of the guilty party: having dissolved his own marriage by his adultery, the guilty husband has every right to remarry. In view of the importance of sex for marriage and in light of the reaction of the saints against adultery, it is understandable that the churches took the position that adultery dissolves marriage.

But the notion is false.

First, experience gives the lie to it: many marriages of the people of God have survived adultery.

Second, the notion rules out the exercise of forgiving grace in the lives of married believers: if adultery dissolves marriage, there is not even the possibility that a betrayed husband or wife forgives the offending marriage companion and is reconciled.

Third, and worst, it flies in the face of the gospel concerning the real marriage, of which ours are symbols: our adulteries against God in Jesus Christ do not and cannot dissolve His covenant with us (see Jer. 3; Ezek. 16).

Let it be shouted from the housetops: adultery does not dissolve marriage. It does not dissolve marriage so that the guilty party may remarry. It does not dissolve marriage so that the innocent party may remarry. Only God puts asunder what He has joined together, and He puts asunder by death (Matt. 19:4-6; I Cor. 7:39).

This must be the stand of the church of Jesus Christ. Only then is she secure against the wickedness of the approval of the remarriage of the guilty party. □

— DJE



## Letters

### ■ Read on the Web

I have just finished reading the article on John Gill and hyper-Calvinism ("John Gill: Hyper-Calvinist? [A Review Article]," *Standard Bearer*, April 15, 1996). I want to thank you for posting this on your site and for the professor's clear explanation of the difference

between real hyper-Calvinism and what is falsely called hyper-Calvinism, that is, the denial of the so-called "sincere" or "well-meant" offer. I have not previously been acquainted with your circle of churches (I am a Reformed Baptist), but I am pleased to read of your

history on this site. Thanks again for posting this material on the web, and thanks for the helpful argument of the article. I shall keep it for my files.

Rob Ziegler  
Washington, DC □

## All Around Us

## Rev. Gise VanBaren

### ■ "Mary, Mother of God"

One of our younger readers called my attention to the cover story of *Newsweek*, August 25, 1997, which presented "The Meaning of Mary—A Struggle Over Her Role Grows Within the Church." The article discusses at length the "growing movement in the Roman Catholic church (which) wants the pope to proclaim a new, controversial dogma: that Mary is a Co-Redeemer...." He thought it deserved some comment—and I agree.

The article reports on petitions within the Roman Catholic Church to have the pope declare Mary to be "Co-Redeemer." In the last four years, the article states, the pope has received "4,340,429 signatures from 157 countries.... Among the notable supporters are Mother Teresa of Calcutta, nearly 500 bishops and 42 cardinals, including John O'Connor of New York, Joseph Glemp of Poland and half a dozen cardinals at the Vatican itself...." The article goes on to state:

If the drive succeeds, Catholics would be obliged as a matter of faith to accept three extraordinary

doctrines: that Mary participates in the redemption achieved by her son, that all graces that flow from the suffering and death of Jesus Christ are granted only through Mary's intercession with her son, and that all prayers and petitions from the faithful on earth must likewise flow through Mary, who then brings them to the attention of Jesus. This is what theologians call high Mariology, and it seems to contradict the basic New Testament belief that "there is one God and one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). In place of the Holy Trinity, it would appear, there would be a kind of Holy Quartet, with Mary playing the multiple roles of daughter of the Father, mother of the Son and spouse of the Holy Spirit.

"Personally, I'm confident that there will be this recognition of Marian truth before the year 2000," says Prof. Mark Miravalle, 39, the leader of the petition drive and a lay theologian at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. Miravalle has met with the pope several times and published three books since launching his bold initiative at a Marian conference in 1993. An infallible papal definition, he says, would put these doctrines "at the highest level of revealed truth."

...In many ways, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has belonged to Mary. From almost every continent, visionaries have reported more than 400

"apparitions" of the Virgin—more than in the previous three centuries combined, Miravalle estimates. Taken together, these visions point to what the Marian movement believes is a millennial "Age of Mary," which will produce a final dogma that confirms her ongoing maternal mediation between God and humankind....

...Not all of it, however, is driven by Marian apparitions. Feminists who 20 years ago dismissed Mary as the oppressive Virgin-Mother created by a clerical patriarchy now celebrate her as a "free woman" who chose to say yes to God at the Annunciation where Eve said "no" in the Garden of Eden—and thus made salvation history possible. Even liberation theologians have found in the humble Mary an apt symbol of God's "preferential option for the poor."

The secret of Mary's mysterious power may be just this: having no history of her own, she entices every new generation to draw her portrait. The Bible offers only scraps to build on....

...From this meager line of development, Mary gradually grew in stature. Astonishingly, this obscure Jewish mother absorbed and transformed the most powerful pagan goddesses. She was the Madonna who gives life, but also the Pietà who receives the dead. Once asceticism became the privileged road to Christian holiness, she became the perpetual virgin,

---

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



the model of chastity and self-denial. In 431, the Council of Ephesus issued the first dogmatic statement on Mary: she was to be honored as Theotokos, the God-bearer or Mother of God. Thereafter, theologians were unceasing in their efforts to probe the mystery of her meaning within the fabric of the whole Bible....

...Since June there have been a number of conflicting commentaries on the proposed dogma published for the Vatican's consumption. In one, French theologian René Laurentin, an internationally known specialist on Mary, strongly opposes the proposed dogma as un-Scriptural and an affront to the uniqueness of Christ's redemptive death. All this suggests that there is a battle going on behind the scenes for the mind of the pope. But John Paul has a mind of his own. His devotion to Mary seems to have no limits. His papal motto, "Totus tuus," means "All yours"—a reference to Mary. He firmly believes that it was the Virgin of Fatima who rescued him from a gunman's bullet—and almost certain death—in 1981, on the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, as it turned out. He rarely delivers a homily or issues an encyclical without praising the Virgin Mary. He routinely uses words like Mediatrix, Advocate and occasionally even Co-Redemptrix. This year he concluded a series of 50 Wednesday-noon addresses on various aspects of Mariology, including one in May in which he went well beyond the silence of Scripture to claim that Mary was the first to experience the Risen Christ at Easter. It was, he said, only "fitting."

I had contact with a Roman Catholic ("converted" from Protestantism) and I asked him about this article in *Newsweek* (and a similar one in *Time* magazine). His response is of interest:

In past correspondence I have tried my best to clear up any misunderstandings you may have regarding the Church's Marian Doctrines. In my human weakness I may not have been very adequate

but I will briefly touch upon this once more. From the tone of your last reply it seems as though you are more obsessed with the Church's Marian Doctrines than I, and I'm the Catholic here. Please be aware that most who try to understand what the Church teaches do not begin with the Marian Doctrines. They begin with the Church itself, its history, why the Church claims to have the authority she has, etc. Once these are understood, everything else falls into place. As a convert, I can attest to the fact that the Marian Doctrines are probably the last, and most difficult to understand. In my last correspondence I brought to your attention former Protestant minister Marcus Grodi and his ministry "The Coming Home Network." All these former Protestant ministers say the same thing about their journey to the Catholic Church. They will say it begins as a detective story, as they investigate the history of the Church, reading the early Church Fathers, etc. It very quickly becomes a horror story as they discover the claims made by the Church begin to make sense. But it ends as a love story as they complete their journey.

As for the writings of Ligouri, etc. why does the Church refer to Mary as Queen of heaven and earth, Ligouri in his writings as Queen of Hell and Sovereign Mistress of the devils? Why does the Catholic Church seem to elevate Mary to the level that it does? This may be best explained by looking at the historical and Old Testament background for it.

First of all I'm sure you would agree that Jesus is a king in the line of David. This can be proven from the genealogy at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel. If you study the Davidic Dynasty of the Old Testament you will discover that all the kings in the line of David had a queen. But who was the queen? Was it his wife? No. It was always the queen mother. In all ancient monarchies it was the king's mother who was elevated to the queenship. An example of this can be found in I Kings, chapters 1 and 2. In chapter 1, verse 10 we see the death of

King David. The kingship is passed on to his son Solomon and in chapter 2, verse 19, we see Solomon elevate his mother Bathsheba to the queenship. We also see in these verses Bathsheba interceding with King Solomon on behalf of others. Now the question is, Did Jesus intend to abolish all the structure of the Old Testament or did he come to complete and fulfill it? The answer can be found in Matthew 5:17. Now if Jesus were truly a king in the line of David, it would be natural for him to elevate his mother to the queenship. This is the whole role of Mary in the Catholic Church. She is the Queen Mother and she intercedes for us.

Also briefly, in my last reply to you, I recommended that you get a copy of Dr. Mark Miravalle's book, "Mary, Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate" to fully comprehend the dogma of Mary as Co-Redemptrix. Have you done so? Instead you read *Time* and *Newsweek* magazine's explanation of this. ...If you want to understand what the Catholic Church teaches, you won't get it from *Time* and *Newsweek*. The secular press is continually distorting the teachings of the Church. If your car were in need of servicing or repair would you take it to your doctor? Or if you were ill would you seek assistance from your auto mechanic?

The correspondent's appeal to the line of David and the "queen mother" in seeking to show the place of Mary in the work of her son, Jesus Christ, is absurd. First, where does this person read of the "queen mother" of David? Where does he read of all these other "queen mothers" besides Bathsheba? Did not the request of Bathsheba to Solomon on behalf of another represent a foolish intercession which led even to the destruction of the one for whom she interceded? What a poor example to support Mariology! The same correspondent insisted that "Co-Redeemer" and "Co-Mediatrix" simply means that Mary (and we too) stand with or alongside of Christ



in support of His work of mediating with the Father. But the terms surely mean far more than that. Mary is presented as performing a part, however small, of the work of redeeming God's people. It is surely a denial of the clear teachings of I Timothy 2:5, "There is one God and one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus."

Yet the stir about this proposed new and supposedly infallible doc-

trine concerning Mary is somewhat strange. Has not the Roman Catholic Church already denied the sole redemption through the blood of Jesus? It insists on works which man must perform to finish his salvation. Some, called "saints," presumably do enough works to avoid purgatory. These can enter immediately into glory. Others must spend some time in purgatory so that they may be purged of remaining sins. Roman Catholics can in-

tercede with "saints" so that these can assist them. To declare Mary to be "Co-Redeemer" would only compound the heresy already existent within the Roman Catholic Church. This would only further detract from the blessed gospel of salvation through the cross of Christ. This represents only one further evidence of the departure from the true gospel by the Romish Church. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

# The Raising of Lazarus (2)

## (John 11)

In our first study on John 11 (cf. the *Standard Bearer*, November 1, 1997) we introduced the narrative, and noted the main purpose of Jesus' raising of Lazarus, namely, that it be "for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (v. 4).

We noted also that, really, the main focus in John 11 is not on Lazarus, nor his death and resurrection, but on Jesus, the resurrection and the life.

Let us continue to have this biblical focus in our searching the Scriptures! In this we show that *we* have the resurrection and the life!

Resurrected and living children of God, let us search the word of life!

This "for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby"!

### For Study, Meditation, & Discussion

#### 3. Walking in the day (vv. 9, 10).

In answer to the disciples' question and fear that Jesus would meet His death if He went to Judea (11: 8, 16), Jesus speaks of walking in the light, and walking in the night (vv. 9, 10).

What does Jesus mean by this?

By referring to the day and to walking in "the day," Jesus is most likely speaking of *His* day, His time on earth, when He must work the works of the Father that sent Him (cf. John 9:4, 5). By referring to the twelve hours in a (the) day, Jesus speaks of the fact that this, His day, His time on earth, is fixed, ordained of the Father according to His unchangeable decree. Whether Jesus lives or whether He dies, therefore, is all in the plan of

God. Men may make their plots to kill Jesus. But the purposes of the Lord, they shall be established! And all in God's timing! It could very well be, in fact, that Jesus is implying here that it is *not* God's time for Him to die. It is *still* the day; Jesus *still* has Father's work to do on earth. Therefore, though the Jews, or even the whole world, plot His demise, no one, at this time, can put Him to death!

Consider here how Jesus rests in God's sovereignty and goodness, and also how He comforts the disciples by referring them to these virtues of God! How do we take the same comfort in these glorious things?

Jesus mentions "walking in the day," and He says that, in so walk-

---

Rev. Dick is pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.



ing, one stumbleth not because he seeth the light of this world. How do we walk in the day? What is the blessing of walking in the day? Comment on how the following passages bear upon Jesus' words about "walking in the day": John 9:4, 5; 12:35, 36; Ephesians 5:1-20; I John 1:5-7. Is there any parallel to what Jesus is saying here, in the Israelites following the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness?

#### 4. "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth" (vv. 11-16).

The message had come that Lazarus was sick. For two days Jesus abode where He was. Then, after announcing His resolve to go to Judea, Jesus announced, without having heard from anyone, that Lazarus was sleeping, but that He would go and wake him out of sleep (11:11).

The disciples thought Jesus spoke of literal sleep. They even thought that this, maybe, was a sign that Lazarus was recovering (11:12). Jesus, however, spoke of Lazarus' death (v. 13, 14), and of the fact that He would raise Lazarus from the dead.

Of death as sleep:

\* In one sense, of course, the person who dies is "asleep" after death—that is, with regard to the body; the body and bodily functions are "asleep." They are no longer operative. But does the Bible teach, as some suggest, that also the soul of man sleeps after his bodily death, i.e., is unconscious? What do these passages teach with regard to the state of the body and soul after death: Job 7:9, 10; Ecclesiastes 9:6; Isaiah 63:16; Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; II Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-23; Revelation 7:15-17; 20:4; Heidelberg Catechism, LD 22, Q. 42?

\*There is gospel in sleep, and in describing the death of believers as falling asleep. Comment on this in light of such passages as Acts 7:60; I Corinthians 15:55-58; I Thessalonians 4:13-18.

#### 5. Grieving (vv. 17-37).

By the time Jesus came to Bethany, Lazarus had been in the grave already four days (v. 17). Jesus finds Jewish comforters there, consoling Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus.

What Scriptures might the Jews have brought which would provide comfort in the loss of a loved one? Is there any evidence that these Jews would or would not have brought the comfort of the gospel?

In Martha's grief (vv. 21-27) she shows faith. How does she show faith? In what way does she show *little* faith?

Jesus works Martha's faith and strengthens it by one of His seven "I Am" sermons (cf. John 6:35; 8:12; 10:9,11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:5). What does Jesus mean by declaring Himself the resurrection and the life (v. 25)? What is this life to which Jesus refers (cf. John 17:3)? What does Jesus say is the relationship between faith and life? How do we harmonize the fact of Lazarus' death and our dying with Jesus' promise that those who believe in Him shall never die?

Jesus asked the question of Martha: Believest thou this? Why did He ask this? Ought ministers ask this question of professing believers? Parents, of children? Missionaries, of those who have only just heard the gospel? What is the purpose?

How was Mary's grief (vv. 28-33) different from, but also the same as, Martha's?

Jesus, at this time, grieved. This is clear in that He wept (v. 35); He groaned in the spirit (vv. 33, 38); He was troubled (v. 33).

Truly profound, this! Two questions immediately come to mind. For *what* did Jesus grieve? And *how* could Jesus grieve?

Was Jesus' weeping over the loss of a good friend? Did He weep for the others' sake, grieving for their grief? Or was He troubled, as some suggest, only because of the unbelief of the people? What does Jesus' grieving here teach of

His humanity and empathy and qualification to be our High Priest (cf. Heb. 4:14, 15)?

But *how* can Jesus grieve? Does Jesus weep *as God*, in His divine nature? Is it possible for there to be suffering with God? Consider and discuss this in light, always in light, of the passages which teach the absolute perfection of God!

What of our grief? Is it right for a Christian to cry? What comfort can we find in our grieving? How can we comfort others in their grieving?

#### 6. Lazarus, come forth (vv. 38-44)!

Jesus goes to the grave site of Lazarus. Lazarus' body is in a cave, and a stone is laid across the entrance to protect it from wild animals, and to seal in the stench of a decaying body. Jesus commands that the stone be taken away from the opening of the grave. Why, considering what happens next, was it necessary that the stone be rolled away?

Verses 41, 42 teach that the raising of Lazarus was in answer to the prayer of Jesus. In connection with this, our Savior makes this statement about His prayers: that He knows that the Father hears Him always (v. 42). How does this statement, all by itself, refute the commonly held view that Jesus is the Savior of all men, or at least *intends* the salvation of all, even of the reprobate? (Hint: if Jesus is the Savior of all, or desires to be, would He not pray for them? But if He prays for them, then what would happen, according to v. 42?) What does this statement say about Jesus' harmony with the Father? Does God hear us always? How do we keep in harmony with the Father so that our prayers are not hindered, but heard?

The raising of Lazarus was also by the *word* of Jesus. "*Lazarus, come forth!*" (v. 43) was Jesus' word at this time. Look up the following passages, and others, and reflect



upon this *word* of the Son of God: Genesis 1; Psalm 33:6, 9; John 1; Romans 4:17; Hebrews 1:3.

Was Lazarus alive by an act of God *before* Jesus called to him to come forth? Or did Jesus' *word* work the life and the response so that Lazarus could come forth?

These are important questions with regard also to the preaching of the gospel to sinners, especially if we consider that Jesus' call to Lazarus is a picture of Jesus calling the believer to life in the preaching of the gospel.

The question is: is regeneration (the spiritual resurrection life) effected in the heart of the dead sinner apart from, without the means of, the preaching (immediate regeneration)? Or is the regeneration effected by means of the preached Word (mediate regeneration)? For reflection and discussion consider Romans 10:14, 15; I Peter 1: 23-25; Canons III, IV/11-13).

Consider in this light the distinction made in Reformed theology between regeneration in the narrower sense (in the heart, beneath the consciousness of a person—likened to the *planting* of the seed of life as in natural conception), and regeneration in the broader sense (that life *which is already there*, energized by the preaching to consciousness and believing activity—likened to the *sprouting of the seed*, otherwise known as *conversion*: cf. L.D. 33). Consider also how elect infants, when God takes them to glory in infancy, and how physically (deaf) and mentally handicapped people are called from spiritual death to life and to glory.

#### 7. Faith and Unbelief (vv. 45-57).

Many of the Jews who had come to Mary and who saw what Jesus had done, believed (v. 45). Amazing gift, this faith! Through it, Jesus says, those who believe see the glory of God (v. 40)! How does faith enable us to "see" the glory

of God—even in the darkest of our circumstances? Just what do we see when we see the glory of God? Why is faith necessary (cf. I Cor. 2)?

In their unbelief many of the Jews, including the Jewish leaders, the chief priests, and the Pharisees, were not able to see the glory of God in Jesus, and in the miracle of Jesus. These, upon hearing of the things Jesus had done, called together a council (a session of the Sanhedrin: the great council of seventy-one prominent members of the Jerusalem community who judged important issues concerning the Jewish people). At the council, fear was expressed that all the people following after Jesus would occasion the Romans coming in and taking away any authority to rule that the Sanhedrin possessed, and also threatening the entire Jewish nation (v. 48). It is probable that the Jews were thinking that Jesus intended to establish some kind of earthly kingdom. The Romans, according to the Jewish understanding, would see Jesus and His Jewish disciples as a threat.

Caiaphas, the high priest at that time, and therefore the president of the Sanhedrin, then counseled that, for the good of the nation, this one man, Jesus, ought to die (vv. 50, 53, 57).

In verses 51, 52 John has a wonderful, Spirit-inspired gospel interpretation of Caiaphas' pronouncement! Reflect upon and discuss what Caiaphas' words, as interpreted by John, signify regarding: God's inspiration of His prophets (note: John understands Caiaphas to have been prophesying here: cf. I Pet. 1: 10-12); the substitutionary atonement of Messiah; the gathering together of the people of God from the nations to be one church (cf. John 1:29; 10:16; Is. 43:5; Eze. 34:12; 36:24ff.; I Pet. 2:9).

As then, so now, there is a twofold result of Christ's work and word: some believe, and some do not, and even seek the overthrow

of the Lord. What are evidences of this twofold result today?

#### 8. Perspective (John 20:31).

This miracle of the raising of Lazarus was among the many miracles recorded in John for the purpose of our believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that, through faith, we might have life through Jesus' name.

List ten ways *this* notable miracle, and the whole narrative of John 11, reveal plainly that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Was Lazarus in heaven in his soul during those four days his body lay in the grave? If this is the case, then surely after his resurrection (and thus after his soul reunited with his earthly body to continue on in this earthly life) Lazarus must have had the same mixed feelings Paul had (cf. Phil. 1:23, 24). On the one hand, Lazarus must have felt the most severe "let-down" one could possibly experience: he was let down from heaven! But on the other hand, Lazarus was no doubt "lifted up" in his faith—as one surely would be if he had actually experienced glory (I Cor. 12:1-7—Paul's experience).

Do we experience this same kind of thing? God has regenerated us. This is a spiritual resurrection from the dead, and even the experience of heaven on earth (Eph. 5:14; cf. Eph. 2:6)! But God is pleased to leave us on this earth, and in this vale of tears, fighting sin, and enduring all manner of trials for God's sake!

How do we "come out of the grave," only to have to die again, even daily in the soul, and one day in the body, *with joy and confidence*? What is the key to the *blessed* resurrection life, while in this life we do weep? □



## The Covenant of Marriage (2)

# Courtship Within the Covenant

**M**arriage is an honorable state. It was instituted by God at the time of the creation of the woman. The purpose of God in marriage is to give the believing man and his wife an earthly means by which they can experience with each other the great love and friendship that exist between Christ and His church. This is that mystery which only those who are in Christ can discover in their marriage. Marriage is a covenant bond that symbolizes the unbreakable union of Christ and His church.

But if the purpose of God in our marriages is to discover this blessed bond of friendship, then we must be careful whom we choose to be our husband and wife. If we marry an unbeliever, that intimate bond of love will elude us, and our marriage will become a sore burden rather than a life of joy and happiness. This is why it is so important to think about this *before* we marry! We wrote this at the outset, and we repeat it now: a good marriage does not simply fall from the sky! To have a spiritually strong marriage means we must take seriously our calling to search out a godly spouse! To have joy in marriage means we must find a sincere, God-fearing wife or husband.

That means we ought to have a proper understanding of dating or courtship. This is true of us as parents, first of all. The children God has given us are His children. Our children are the heritage of God to us. Parents, therefore, are obliged to guide their children into a sanctified view of courtship. At the same time, however, young people themselves ought to be busy exerting themselves in the pursuit of proper behavior in this area of life. Both parents and children do well to reexamine this institution that has come to be known as *dating*.

I approach this subject with some reluctance. Not because I have not dealt with the subject before, but because the conclusions to which I have come do not seem to meet with the accepted norm of *dating* as it has been practiced among us in the past couple of generations. Because of that, some readers will not give these articles very serious consideration and will continue in the direction that has been set for us by our society. Some young people will snicker and think that the views of these articles are antiquated and irrelevant for today's modern generation. But maybe a few parents will reconsider what they have been allowing their sons and daughters to do, and direct them in a better path. At the least I hope these articles will challenge all of us, parents and young people alike, to make serious evaluation of our modern practices of Christian courtship! After all, certainly all of us want to establish a spiritually strong marriage and home!

### The Goal of Courtship

Long before our children have reached the age of dating, parents must determine the goal behind this function. Why will we allow our son or daughter to "go out with" someone on a date? What must be our and their goal in dating? Is the goal of dating simply to have good times with persons of the opposite sex? Is it the freedom to have no responsibilities, make no commitments, but just "hang loose" with a girl or a guy? Such, of course, is what our modern society has come to make of dating. It is a game—the "dating game." Men and women of all ages love to play the game, it seems. In fact, it has become the seedbed of all kinds of immorality and irresponsible living. Proof for this is found in the books, magazines, and television programs which are a reflection of and have a major influence upon our society. The wicked, unbelieving world has succeeded well in distorting our thinking as to the true goal of dating.

Before parents allow their children to date, it is important to instill in them a deep understanding of the spiritual goal of such an action. Dating is courtship. The name has been changed to take away the serious implications of this activity in a person's life, but that does not change the fact: dating is courtship. In other words, the goal of dating is to find someone to marry! Dating is a means which a person uses prayerfully to search for a spouse! It is a means by which a man and woman are able to learn to know each other to

---

*Rev. Bruinsma is pastor of Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan.*



ascertain whether God has indeed intended them to spend a lifetime together in marriage. That is the godly goal of dating. It is not an empty game with no meaning. It is a means God has given us to seek and find a godly mate. What this implies we will consider in a future article.

### Learning to Love

If the goal of dating or courtship is marriage, then its purpose is to learn to love the one we have chosen to date. Sometimes we find (either immediately or after we have dated for awhile) that the person we are dating is not the one God has meant for us. Then we certainly must terminate the relationship. But neither is this done frivolously and just because it does not "feel" right. Learning to love another person takes time and takes work. Contrary to popular opinion, a man and woman do not just "fall in love." True love between a man and a woman—the love that will bind them into one flesh in marriage—takes time and effort. A person learns this kind of love.

Again, this is where the unbelieving world has destroyed the proper conception of love. The "love" on which the vast majority of unbelievers build their marriages in our modern society is nothing more than lust. They have a sexual attraction toward each other—one to which they have given full vent before marriage, and one that they think will unite them for a lifetime after marriage. At the time the Bible was written, marriages in the Greek and Roman society were based on this same kind of "love." The Greeks even had a term for it. They called it *eros*. In our English language this Greek term is used too. We see it in such terms as "erotic." This type of love is nothing more than the sensual, sexual lust that arises out of one's base desires. It is the type of "love" (lust) that gives rise to fornication, adultery, homosexual-

ity, and other gross sins of this nature. The Bible nowhere uses the term *eros* to describe love or any other type of proper affection of one person toward another.

Especially since the sexual revolution of the 1960s this perverted, twisted idea of love has come to dominate our society. This is why premarital sex is not only excused but lauded as a necessary act if one is to know whether he "loves" the person he is dating. It is little wonder that our society is plagued with divorce and remarriage! People are falling into and out of love all the time! This kind of love does not take time or work! And that is because their love is nothing more than lust! Certainly, it is not this type of love we must learn of one another when dating! In fact, if this is the type of love we seek, if the reason we date is to gain carnal knowledge of another, then our future marriages (even if we finally marry for the right reason) will be threatened! What a threat to the bond of love in marriage if in the back of one's mind there always lurks the erotic knowledge he had of others when he was dating them! Fornication in dating is condemned out of hand by the Word of God! "Flee fornication!" we are told (I Cor. 6:18). Why? Because the bond of marriage cannot be founded upon the lust that is unleashed in fornication!

A good marriage does not come by chance. A good marriage is firmly grounded on a love discovered and pursued during courtship. That love is not fallen into. It is cultivated and nurtured while dating. And it continues to blossom and grow before and after marriage. What love is that? It is the love that can be found within God's triune Self. It is the love which binds the three persons of the Trinity together in a bond of perfectness. It is that love which God has shown toward us in Christ—a love that sent Christ to the cross to die for us. It is a love

that God has shed abroad in the hearts of His people. It is that love which binds the church, the bride of Jesus Christ, together with her Bridegroom in an everlasting bond. That is the love we must discover and nurture while dating. That is the purpose of courtship within the covenant! We are to discover the same friendship with that person we date that we have with our God! Is that a lust-filled, sensual, fornicating love? What? The very thought of loving God in that way repels us! Then it ought to repel us in the relationship we nurture in our dating life as well!

The love we must seek and cultivate is that love which holds the other in highest esteem as one worthy of our respect and admiration. Such love implies knowledge! It is rooted not in the ever-changing emotions and feelings of our desires but in the stable and well-grounded knowledge and understanding of our reasoning. The purpose of dating is to discover that kind of love! In other words, we must use our dating to get to know each other. A man and woman must discover what is the spiritual makeup and character of the person they are courting. They must discover the flaws and strengths of the other's character. They must inquire deeply into the spiritual qualities of that person. They must examine and search out what makes that person who she is. Is she the kind of woman who will love me and care for me and my children the way that I believe she should? Will she in my absence guide my home and instruct my children the way I would if I were there? Is this the kind of man that will support me and my children? Will he be the spiritual head that I need to lean on? Will he insist by instruction and discipline that my family will be led in the way of God's Word?

How many young couples ask these questions when they are dating? How many diligently search into these matters in an attempt to



know and love the person they court?

So many young men and women rush into marriage without taking time to discover who the person really is that they are marrying. They feel this sudden infatuation, this sudden giddiness, this sudden gush of emotion. They feel a sexual attraction toward another person and they right away think: "it's love!" They then hurry into marriage, expecting that this fairy tale love will last them a life-

time! But they have failed to discover who it is that they are really marrying. Then in a year or so (maybe it takes a few years) they find out that they did not really know that person or love that person. Some of these marriages by God's grace remain intact, since God after marriage leads these couples through much turmoil and pain into that true love they should have had before marrying. Most of these marriages are trashed because the couple has no love for God and His Word, much less a

love for each other!

A person ought not to date until he or she well understands that the goal of dating from the start is marriage. Neither ought that person to date until he or she understands that the purpose of courtship is to learn to know and esteem the other as one's closest friend, and in that way to love him or her.

We will discuss the practical implications of this in the next article. □

**Ministering to the Saints**

**Prof. Robert Decker**

## The Elders and Discipline (2)

**T**here are two questions of an introductory nature which must be answered before we discuss Articles 72, 73, and 74, which deal with the discipline of those who have committed secret sins. Those questions are: May non-communicant members (members by baptism) be disciplined? And, Is it possible for impenitent members to avoid being disciplined by leaving the fellowship of the church before discipline is applied? The latter question could be put this way: May a consistory refuse to grant a person who is under discipline his/her membership papers in order that discipline may be continued?

We answer the second question first. The Reformed churches have always taken the position that a man's membership in the church is a matter of his own choice. This is

correct. This means that if a member is placed under discipline and then decides to terminate his membership in the congregation, the consistory must honor this decision. The consistory may not refuse to grant a request for one's membership papers. When this happens, and it all too often does, the consistory can and ought to attempt to persuade the man to change his mind and remain in the church in the way of confessing and leaving his sin. The consistory ought to remind such a person of the vows he made at the time he made confession of his faith. Confession of faith, after all, includes the vow to submit to church government in case one becomes delinquent in doctrine or walk of life. The consistory, if possible, ought to remind the person that one of the purposes of discipline is to save the sinner and that, as such, discipline is the rod of Christ's chastisement. The consistory ought also to remind the impenitent that to leave the church of Jesus Christ is a very serious sin indeed. He ought to be reminded that his act

of leaving the church is tantamount to his excommunicating himself from the church of Christ. If, after all this, the person persists in his desire to leave the church, the consistory has no option except to grant his request. This puts an end to discipline. In most of our Protestant Reformed Churches, when this happens the Dismissal Certificate is delivered to the person by a committee of elders.

There has been and probably still is difference of opinion in the Reformed churches on the question of the discipline of non-communicant members. There are those who argue that discipline cannot be applied to baptized members who have not yet made confession of faith. Others take the position that discipline can and must be applied to older non-communicant members. The latter position, we believe, is correct.

When the youth of the church arrive at years of discretion they must be pointed to their calling to make confession of their faith. They sin if they do not. If, after the elders have patiently worked

---

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



with them, they persist in their refusal to confess their faith they must be erased as members of the church. Erasure applies to baptized members who walk in sin and are impenitent. The elders must patiently and in the love of Christ labor with such, calling them to faith in Christ and repentance towards God. They must bring to the impenitent repeated admonitions from the Word of God. When the Word of God is rejected and the sinner refuses to repent, and it becomes evident that he is hardened in his sin, the elders must take a decision to erase him from membership in the congregation. Before implementing the decision to erase a baptized member the consistory must seek the advice and approval of the classis. Upon securing classis' approval, the decision to erase is carried out. The sinner ought to be warned that erasure is tantamount to excommunication.\*

This brings us to Article 72 of the Church Order, which stipulates, "In case anyone errs in doctrine or offends in conduct, as long as the sin is of a private character, not giving public offense, the rule clearly prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed." This article obviously applies not just to the elders and their work, but to all of the people of God. The article speaks of two kinds of sin: errors in doctrine and offenses in conduct. The first is any doctrine which is contrary to the confessions of the church. There is room for differing interpretations of a given passage of Scripture. The confessions, however, contain what the church believes to be the truth of the Word of God. This truth is the basis for the unity of the church. This truth must be taught, known, and defended by the church's members. One who teaches doctrine which contradicts the truth of the confession "errs in doctrine." That error must be removed or it will cause schism in the church.

One who offends in conduct is

one who lives in disobedience to the will of God as taught in Scripture and summed in God's Law. Disobedience is offensive to one's fellow saints and to the holy God. When one errs in conduct, he sins against the holiness of the church.

When these sins are "of a private character," the article says, Matthew 18 must be followed. Sins of a private character are sins which are known only to very few in the church. Indeed, some might argue on the basis of Matthew 18 that a private sin is known only to the sinner and the one against whom he has sinned. In any case, a private sin is known only to a very few. It is not always so easy to determine when a sin ceases to be private and becomes public. Individual cases will have to be decided on their own merits.

If the sin is of a private character, "the rule clearly prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed." In verses 15-17 of Matthew 18 Christ lays down three steps to be followed. The first is, "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." This does not preclude the possibility of the sinner going to seek forgiveness from the brother he has offended (cf. Matt. 5:23-24). But the article speaks of the responsibility of the one sinned against. He must seek out the one who sinned against him.

At least three important truths are implied in this. 1) The one against whom the sin has been committed must make clear to his brother the nature of the sin and why, on the basis of God's Word, his teaching or action is sin. 2) The purpose of going to the offending brother is to achieve reconciliation in the way of removing the offense. Jesus adds, "If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." 3) The one offended by the sin of the brother must be motivated by the desire to save the brother. He must go to him in humility and with the love of God in his heart and as one

himself in need of the cross of Christ.

In the event the sinner refuses to repent, the second step is to be followed, "... take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." The purpose of taking witnesses is twofold. If the one who sinned denies that he has sinned as charged, the witnesses establish the fact that he has sinned. If he admits to the act as charged but denies that that act is sin, the witnesses must show him from Scripture that his act is indeed sinful.

This brings us to the rule of Article 73: "Secret sins of which the sinner repents, after being admonished by one person in private or in the presence of two or three witnesses, shall not be laid before the consistory." If reconciliation is achieved in the way of the sinner's repenting after either the first or second step prescribed by the Lord in Matthew 18, the matter is finished. It must not be reported to the consistory. In the way of the sinner's repentance the offense is removed. There is no need of any further disciplinary action.

If the sinner refuses to repent after the first two steps of Matthew 18 are applied, then, says Christ to the one sinned against, "tell it to the church." This last step is spoken of in Article 74: "If anyone, having been admonished in love concerning a secret sin by two or three persons, does not give heed, or otherwise has committed a public sin, the matter shall be reported to the consistory."

In the Reformed tradition the word "church" has always been understood to refer to the consistory, the body of elders. This is in harmony with the position of government which the elders occupy in the church of Christ. This is also the interpretation of the word "church" found in the *Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons*: "And thus the ministers of the Word, together with the elders,



form a body or assembly, being as a council of the church, representing the whole church; to which Christ alludes when he saith, 'tell the church'—which can in no wise be understood of all and every member of the church in particular, but very properly of those who govern the church, out of which they are chosen."

Concerning reports which come to the consistory, the elders must carefully observe several principles. 1) Never may the elders act on rumor or gossip. They must listen to the report only of

the one against whom the sin was committed. 2) The elders must be certain that the steps of Matthew 18 have been followed and that the sinner remains impenitent. 3) They must give the one charged with sin the opportunity to defend himself. The elders may not apply discipline until they are certain that the one charged is indeed guilty as charged and impenitent. Failure to observe these principles will result in all kinds of trouble in the congregation, and, worse than that, "the Lord does not command his blessing there." □

\* For a more detailed discussion of the discipline of non-communicants, we call the reader's attention to an interesting article by the well known church historian, Dr. W. van't Spijker, "Discipline of Members-by-Baptism," which appears in the magazine, *Diakonia*, vol. 11, number 2, Sept. 1997 issue. This publication is available in the Protestant Reformed Seminary library or by writing Brookside Publishing, 3911 Mt. Lehman Road, Abbotsford, BC V4X2M9, Canada.

Cloud of Witnesses

Prof. Herman Hanko

## Herman Hoeksema: Theologian and Reformer (3)

### Conclusion

It is hard to imagine the amount of work which Herman Hoeksema produced. But this was and is true of many whom God uses in His church. They spend themselves in the cause of the gospel and do work that indeed derives its power from heaven.

Hoeksema was, above all, a preacher. It is difficult for us to understand how anyone who heard his preaching could leave his congregation. He was clear, concise, biblical, and confessional. A little child could understand him; an adult versed in theology could be stimulated by his thought. He was eloquent, moving, forceful, and persuasive. The real power of his

preaching was in careful exegesis, which unfolded the riches of the Scriptures and brought them home in countless practical ways.

One who heard him preach could never doubt that his first love was preaching. I well remember that near the end of his life, while he was still preaching, he would begin a sermon in such a painfully slow manner that one wondered whether he would be able to get through the sermon. But as he became caught up in it, his eyes would begin to sparkle, his face would light up, and he would begin to preach as one who had received new life.

It was also especially toward the end that Hoeksema began to preach more and more about heaven. When he spoke of heaven he would refer to it as "that blessed hope." This was significant because, as he was ready to explain, he did not mean that hope was a mere "shrug of the shoulders," as he called it; hope was absolute as-

urance which rested on the faithfulness of the promise of God. His "blessed hope" was real and certain.

But his exegesis was always his strength. It is the strength of his *Reformed Dogmatics*; it is the strength of his many books; it was the strength of his instruction in the seminary. He would debate with us with great patience and longsuffering and would bear with our immaturity with grace and kindness; but he insisted that we bolster every argument with Scripture. If we did not want to take the time or put forth the effort to do that, he would not permit us to waste his time.

He was a man of great physical strength who wore himself out in his work. But he was a man of great mental strength as well. He would never cease to amaze us in seminary with his ability to show the falsity of a theological argument with sure, probing, and few remarks that exposed the hollow

---

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



character of much theological thought.

He was also a man of enormous spiritual strength. Some called it stubbornness; the Bible calls it steadfastness. He loved the Scriptures, was committed to the defense of the Reformed faith, and would not be moved, no matter what the price. And he paid a very dear price indeed.

He was a sinful man—as we all are. He knew how great is the miracle of grace that God uses sinners in His church. Hoeksema had his weaknesses. He was not above making fun of shoddy thinkers who passed themselves off as profound theologians and made bold but unproved assertions. He sometimes walked his own path without due consideration of those who were one with him and were determined to support the cause for which he stood.

But he was absolutely convinced that the truth which he preached was the truth of Scripture and the Reformed faith. He said in my hearing more than once that he would stand firm for that truth, even if all others turned away. His conviction was unshakable and his commitment to faithfulness was total.

Yet, when he was in the circle of friends and fellow saints, he was jovial, with a robust laughter, a ready wit, a warm spirit of camaraderie. Some never came to know this side of his character, but even within the congregation he showed it in moments of relaxation.

Two incidents which demonstrate Hoeksema's character stand out in my memory. The first had to do with our seminary training.

Hoeksema was content all his life to teach in a single room in the basement of First Church, a room which was dark, dingy, cold, damp, and wholly unattractive, when with some compromise he could have been an outstanding theologian in the ecclesiastical world and a blazing star in the ecclesiastical firmament. He never

complained that he was squandering his gifts when he spent his life with two or three students patiently teaching them theology in what was little more than a walled hole in the ground. The only explanation for this can be a total commitment to the truth of Scripture and the Reformed faith.

The second incident is of a different kind. It took place when in 1953 we had to seek other quarters for the seminary and we were using Adams Street Protestant Reformed Christian School. It was Hoeksema's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. It was coffee time. We were in the teachers' lounge. Hoeksema was soliloquizing. His remarks went like this.

"Now that I am 70 years old I sometimes wish that I could live another 70 years. If the Lord would give me another 70 years, I think I could finally come to understand the truth a bit. Now I know almost nothing."

I do not know whether he saw our jaws drop in amazement. I doubt it. But he added, almost to himself, "No, I am glad that I won't live very long anymore because I shall soon go to heaven. Then I shall understand perfectly."

It was an important evidence of the fact that Hoeksema well understood that, because the truth of Scripture is the truth of God Himself, it is unfathomable, and we mere men can know only very little of it. He often concluded a sermon with a remark to the effect that he had succeeded only in scratching the surface of a text; and he often said in his prayer at the end of the sermon that all he had done was mutter and stutter a bit about the truth. It was all rooted in that great governing principle of his life that God is God, great and glorious and greatly to be praised.

Nor was he a man that gloried in an isolated ecclesiastical life. It was forced upon him because of his defense of the faith; but it was not his wish.

He would have enjoyed seeing

sister-church relationships established between the Protestant Reformed Churches and the churches formed under Dr. Schilder's leadership if a common basis could have been found in the truth. That enjoyment was rooted in part in a personal affection for Dr. Schilder himself. Hoeksema was saddened by the rift between himself and Schilder and between the churches they represented. He was genuinely sorrowful when Schilder died.

Hoeksema preached in other churches when the opportunity was given him. Dr. Henry Atherton's Grove Chapel in London is one example. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Portland, Maine, near the place where Hoeksema vacationed, was another. He sought out and eagerly participated in a conference with ministers from the German Reformed Churches of Eureka Classis. He willingly participated in a conference with Christian Reformed ministers called to try to heal the breach. He urged the synod at one point to send observers to the Reformed Ecumenical Council. But he permitted no compromise when it came to questions of the truth.

Hoeksema hated church politics in any form. His firm belief that Christ preserves His church kept him from the evil of playing political games in the church, soliciting support through ways other than debate, attempting to influence decisions by maneuvering, and "counting noses" to be assured of sufficient support before making a move. All the things so important in today's church world were abhorrent to him.

Above all, Hoeksema was used by God to bring reformation to the church. With the adoption of common grace the Christian Reformed Church chose a path of apostasy which would (and has) led the denomination astray. It is understandable that common grace would receive a great deal of attention in the early years of the



Protestant Reformed Churches. But it is a man who leads a sect who never gets beyond criticism of heresy, always and only against things, having an obsession to write critically of others without producing anything positive. Hoeksema wanted more than anything else to see the CRC reject the false doctrine it had adopted. But when it would not, when it cast Hoeksema out after stripping him of his office, and when it persisted in going its own way, Hoeksema turned to the positive work of church reformation. Such reformation was in the area of church government and liturgy without doubt. The CRC had departed from the Reformed line in introducing hymns into worship, and the church polity of the church had been corrupted when the broader assemblies engaged in discipline of Hoeksema. But such reformation was especially in doctrine.

I cannot spell it out here. But as Hoeksema stood for the truths of sovereign and particular grace, he developed those truths in some

important areas. Undoubtedly because of his experience in the case of Dr. Janssen, who denied the miracles in Scripture and did so on the grounds of common grace, Hoeksema developed those truths of sovereign and particular grace in the area of miracles. In his *Reformed Dogmatics* one will find one of the best, most biblical, and most beautiful developments of miracles that one can find anywhere.

He applied the truth of particular grace to the concept of revelation and subjected the doctrine of "general revelation"—especially as many wanted to relate it to common grace—to rigorous scrutiny in the light of Scripture.

But above all he saw the implications of the doctrine of sovereign and particular grace, rooted in eternal election, for the doctrine of the covenant. And here is his greatest work. He has given the church an inheritance of the truth which is powerful, throbbing with life, filled with practical implications for an antithetical walk on the part of

God's covenant people, and, above all, gives all glory to God. It is a biblical doctrine of the covenant which begins with God and ends with God and has as its theme: Glory to God. If Hoeksema had done nothing else but this, it would have been enough.

He has not been recognized by the church world. To know the approval of God was the important thing. Mostly he knew opposition, hatred, and slander, or cold and disdainful ignoring of him and his theology. Records are kept in heaven that are the only ones which count. The sins are there too, of course. They are covered in the blood of Christ. But the suffering, the persecution, they too are noted. And God, who had His own place in the church militant for Herman Hoeksema, has His own place in the church triumphant for a man who fought a good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith. He received the crown of righteousness which God gave to him and will give to all who love Christ's appearing. □

**Go Ye Into All the World**

**Mrs. Jeanette Kortering**

## Our Work in Myanmar (2)

**Tuesday, January 9.**

Conference carried on as before. I told Tracy that I would really like to meet with the women during the noon break after lunch was finished. Afternoon session didn't start until 2 P.M. So she rounded them all up and we met in the ladies' house.

*Mrs. Kortering is the wife of Rev. Jason Kortering, a minister-on-loan from the Protestant Reformed Churches in America to Singapore.*

They all sat on the floor, but they brought in some chairs for Fiona, Leh Wah, and me. I made some opening remarks, expressing our thanks that the Lord had brought us there safely and that we had the opportunity of meeting all of them, and our desire to get to know them better. I was surprised at how quickly they responded and opened up. They had questions about how we conduct a Ladies' Fellowship in Singapore, so I explained that to them, and told them about some of the difficulties the women in Singapore encounter, being first-generation Christians.

They are very concerned for the village people and have a great desire to witness to them, to share the gospel and help in whatever way they can. One question they came up with was, when they have their fellowship, the women preach—is this right or wrong? This goes so painstakingly slow with interpretation, but you have to ask more questions to get a complete picture of what is going on. There has been some objection to "women preaching" by some of the people. What it boils down to is defining their terms. The women were not preaching. There was no



call to worship. They were simply meeting together and one was explaining a portion of Scripture and what it meant to her. Other things they brought up were family problems. For example, a mother had a 16 year old son who is rebellious against religion. Their method of discipline when he was naughty was to have him sit on the table. He couldn't look to the right or to the left, but could only look at the Bible in his lap and memorize the verse they assigned to him. These people said they don't spank very much. More often they bend the index finger, strike the child on the head with the knuckle, or talk with him. A girl asked about a teen-aged brother who gives in to peer pressure and listens more to friends than parents. One mother is a widow and has four children. Because it is so difficult to get money in Myanmar, she sometimes has to go into India to buy and sell in order to provide for them. How frequently and for how long? Four times a year, anywhere from two weeks to a month at a time. And she leaves her four children alone, the oldest being 17 and the youngest eight. Time is up—promise to get back with them the next day.

Fiona, Leh Wah, and I left then and went shopping at Bogyoke Aung San Market. The two girls would be leaving on Thursday so they had to do a bit of sightseeing too. The market place is all small shops, has a lot of character, and is a good place for souvenirs. We had a fun afternoon and met Dad and Elder Siew at the hotel for dinner. That night we chose to have the one western set meal the hotel offered, but it wasn't all that great. We decided the cooks were better at preparing their own cuisine.

### **Wednesday, January 10.**

Conference continues. We were invited to the house of Moses' neighbor, who lives on the other side, for our noon meal. His 18 year old son passed away in No-

vember, 1994, when the group from Singapore was in Myanmar, and they asked Elder Siew, who was also along at that time, to give the funeral message. The wife is a Christian. Their oldest daughter, also a Christian, is very intelligent and is studying in the US to be a doctor. She's there on a US scholarship. They attend the Baptist Church. He opened with prayer before the meal, but he said he and his youngest daughter were not "born again" and he asked that we pray for them. They were very hospitable. He even came to the airport to see us off. He's a good friend of Moses and will do anything to help. They are trying to fix up their house a little—making rooms with doors instead of using fabric to separate the rooms—and they will also attach the outhouse to the house and run a pipe to a drain field or something like that. No furniture in the house—just a couple of small tables, and they borrowed the chairs from church.

We continued meeting with the ladies after lunch. Fung Dun had to be the interpreter this time because Tracy was busy with someone else. They explained to me how they try to provide for others. Rice is their only meal. They allow a small cup measure for each person. So if six people are eating, they will measure out six of those portions. Then they will reach in with their hand and take a handful out and put it in a container. "That," they say, "is for the Lord." They accumulate that rice, and then all the ladies put their rice together and give it away. Before coming to the Reformed church, they were members of larger churches, so they could give away more rice. Now they belong to a small church, and they feel bad that they don't have as much to give. I explained about the widow's mite, and said that in God's sight they were giving generously of what they had. I tried my best to encourage them, and they expressed appreciation for my meeting with them.

The three of us met with the English teacher in the afternoon. He took us to visit his cousin's wife. His cousin is an orthopedic doctor, and their two sons are also doctors. One is in the US specializing in internal medicine, and the younger one is putting in his year of government-required medical service before he goes on to specialize. The whole family are Christians. She was a school teacher for over 20 years and is now retired. She speaks excellent English, so we thought she must have studied abroad, but she was never out of Myanmar. She is busy now with translating English works into Burmese. Burmese is written with all little circles and curlicues. She is working on a Bible Story Book at present, starting with the New Testament, and having it printed in sections. When she completes it, she hopes it can be printed in one volume. She gave each of us one of the sections which is finished, so I'll take it along when we come. She said, "The Lord has been so good to me all my life, I just want to give the rest of my life in serving Him." She offered that if we have anything that we need translated into Burmese, she would be very happy to do it for us free of charge. She goes into the villages every Saturday and Sunday to witness to the poor people. She goes empty-handed because she doesn't want them to listen to her because she brings something for them. When it was time to leave, she got her youngest son, who is single and lives at home, to drive us around, show us Chinatown, and take us back to the hotel. It was so nice to get in the car and have a tape of familiar Christian hymns on.

### **Thursday, January 11.**

We said good-bye to the girls before leaving for the conference. Now that the girls were on their way, I stayed all day at the conference. Elder Siew was gone most



of the day. He wanted to do some shopping and he also had to take care of the finances of the conference. Fung Dun, Tracy, Dad, and I walked out to the main road to a little restaurant for lunch.

The five of us all contributed some extra money and gave it to them so they could prepare a special evening meal for all the people there. We didn't see what the people ate, but I hope it was the same they gave us. It was absolutely delicious and was prepared very nicely. The chief cook for the conference was Hla Hla, and she's an expert! After the dinner we went back to the hotel. Each evening all the people at the conference had some kind of service, but since it was all in Burmese or Chin, without interpretation, it wasn't necessary for us to stay, nor did they expect us to.

#### **Friday, January 12.**

We said good-bye to Elder Siew before leaving for the conference. The conference continued as before.

At noon I met with the widow lady alone and then with the orphanage lady (and my interpreter, of course). I must tell you about the orphanage lady yet. This is a couple up in the Falam province. They have four children of their own and have taken in 10 orphans. It's not so often that we hear of orphans nowadays, but in Myanmar it is very common, due in part to the fact that they cannot afford medical attention when they are sick. The church really feels a burden for these children, because sometimes there are Christian orphans, and if there is not a place for them, they will be provided for in the Buddhist orphanage and indoctrinated in Buddhism. This mother told me how she instructs her children that God has blessed them with parents and now they have a calling to be kind to these orphans and help them. Their children gladly receive these orphans in their home and treat them as

brothers and sisters. They all live in one small rented house—or I could better call it a room.

It's really something to see the poverty of these people. You can't remain untouched. They do not have running water. They have no washing machines, no refrigerators, no telephones. They sleep right on the floor without any mattress or rug. They must use an outhouse, which is a little shack on stilts with an eastern toilet (flat on the floor) with a pipe that goes down into the ground. They have a bucket of water with a dipping pan in the outhouse, which one can use for flushing. In each neighborhood there is a well, and one can go there to buy water by the bucketful. Baths are taken outside by pouring water over oneself with a pan. All the laundry is done by hand and hung over a line to dry. (I asked at the hotel if they had a washing machine for their laundry and she told me, "No, we don't. We do it all by hand." Can you imagine washing sheets and towels every day by hand?)

I haven't figured out how the people get along during the rainy season. The road is higher up than where the houses are, so I guess that is tolerable. The houses are all built on stilts. We were told that during the rainy season there is a lake with fish swimming in it around the house. Natural question is, how do they get about during that time? Everyone wears flip-flops, and they simply take them off and let the mud ooze through their toes and they slip and slide.

These people are poor physically, but they are spiritually rich. We have such an abundance, and it just seems as if our lives have so much clutter (materialism, entertainment, etc.) that draws us away from things spiritual. Their life centers in the church. Their thoughts are not on what they can get but on what they have—salvation in Jesus Christ. I don't think we could even exist on their level, but I'm sure we could get along

with a whole lot less than we have.

After the other three left, we were told that the noon meal would be prepared for us. Dad and I were glad. We wanted to have the opportunity to eat as they eat. But ... no way. We didn't get to eat with them, and they continued to fuss for us, preparing very nice special dishes and bringing it over to where the conference was, so that we could sit on chairs by the desk. We didn't have to eat alone. Fung Dun, Moses, and Tracy always ate with us, and once the executive board had lunch with us.

#### **Saturday, January 13.**

Dad finished up his instruction on the Covenant by "stretch time" and coffee at 10:15. They had some chairs and benches set up along the walls for us and for some of the men during the entire conference, and the rest of the people sat on straw mats on the floor. The mats were about five feet square, and I wouldn't dare guess how many people could sit on them. It surprised us that some of the people did not even get up during this time, but just remained sitting on the floor waiting until we got started again. (That means sitting on the floor for three to three and a half hours with legs crossed some way or other!)) With about 45 minutes left for the morning session, Dad took the time to tell them about himself—the family he was born into, how his parents desired for him to be a minister, and how the Lord led him in his youth. He told them about our marriage and family, the churches we were in, about our working now in Singapore, and the great blessing it is to be able to tell others about the gospel. He shared also several Scripture verses which have always meant a lot to him. After that, there were a few questions.

Another beautiful noon meal was served, and then in the afternoon Dad had the introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism. Back to



the hotel again, where we had just a simple meal of fried rice since we had such a big dinner at noon.

#### Sunday, January 14.

Sunday again and Dad preached at Grace Church. All through the conference, and again on Sunday, we were just struck by how heartily the people sing. No question about it that it really means a lot to them and they have great joy in singing. They do have a little book made up in English as well. In it they have hymns that they also have in their language, so we can sing together: "Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land," "Bring-

ing in the Sheaves," "How Great Thou Art," etc. In the afternoon, Tracy and I worked on translating some of the testimonies that the people had written. It went faster for her if she could just say it, so I did all the writing.

Hla Hla and her helpers prepared a special dinner for Sunday night. I had watched them for awhile, so I knew what we were getting and what to avoid. One dish was liver and fish eggs. Dad took about three bites of that dish before deciding he couldn't handle any more of it. He fed the rest to the cat who was frequently around. They also prepared some beef with

mushrooms which was delicious! Another thing that they prepare so nicely is their mixed vegetables. They serve it on a platter, and it's so colorful and pretty.

Dad and I would be so tired in the evening after a busy day, that after the others had gone back to Singapore, we would fall asleep early at night, and consequently wake up very early. Our minds would then be working a mile a minute, thinking about the people and all our experiences. Dad must at that time have written, in his mind, quite a few of the reports of his work.

... to be continued □

## Book Reviews

*Today's Gospel and Apostolic Exhortations: A Study in the Presentation of the Gospel*, by A. G. Randalls. Windmill Hill, East Sussex, England: The Huntingtonian Press, 1997. 103 pp. Price unknown (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

Promising much, this book delivers little. It claims to be "the first book to set in order true principles regarding the way in which it is safe to address mixed congregations expounding those passages of Scripture which for too long have been misrepresented" (back cover). It intends to set forth the biblical mode of preaching, particularly the call of the gospel, against the error of a gracious offer to all who hear.

But, in fact, it merely restates the position of certain English Baptists, that the external call of the gospel—the command, or summons, "Repent! Believe!—is to be restricted to those hearers who are already regenerated. According to these English Baptists, the Calvinistic preacher may call no one to believe in Jesus Christ of whom he is not sure that he is already born again. God commands no one to

believe on His Son whom He has not already regenerated.

The book, therefore, misses a grand opportunity. At the present time, the Reformed faith is being subverted by means of a doctrine of the preaching of the gospel that presents the preaching, particularly the call, as God's grace to all men without exception. This is the doctrine of universal, ineffectual grace that is inimical to the Reformed faith and that destroys the entire Reformed system wherever it gains entrance. The book reacts to this heresy by denying the creedal Reformed doctrine of the external call of the gospel altogether. It does this *in the name of genuine Calvinism*. Thus, the book actually gives aid and comfort to the enemy, who now can say that the alternative to their doctrine of universal, ineffectual grace in the preaching is a doctrine that makes promiscuous preaching impossible.

One fatal weakness of Randalls, if not of his whole movement, is the ignoring of the Reformed confessions. How can a writer who claims to be giving the Calvinistic doctrine of the preaching of the gospel completely ignore Article 5 of the second head of doctrine of the Canons of Dordt?

Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel.

Although Randalls makes no contribution to the issue of the promiscuous preaching of the gospel, he does make certain things plain beyond the shadow of a doubt.

First, the position on preaching that he represents emphatically denies that God or the preacher extends the external call to any but the elect and regenerated person (see pp. 36, 41, 42, and 76).

Second, according to Randalls and the position that he defends, God does give the unregenerated person in the audience of the preaching of the gospel a certain command. This is not the command to believe on Christ presented in the gospel. But it is the command to believe the Bible and to believe in God as Creator with a "natural" faith that the unregenerated is supposed to be capable of (p. 37). That any professing Calvinist could think that the com-



manding God could be pleased with such a "faith" as this is astounding.

Evident in this odd doctrine is a fundamental error of all the English Baptists who, like Randalls, have denied that God commands unregenerated people to repent of their sins with genuine repentance and to believe on Christ with true faith. This is the error of thinking that a divine command implies the ability to obey the command. I have charged elsewhere that the English Baptists who deny the external call are guilty of the same basic error that characterizes the Arminians whom they oppose. On the basis of the notion that a command implies ability to obey the command, the Arminians teach that all men are naturally capable of repenting and believing (free will). On the basis of the same notion, such English Baptists as Randalls deny that God commands any to repent and believe but the regenerated. Randalls is aware of my charge, but dismisses it (see p. 83).

Third, the position that denies that the gospel externally calls all to repent and believe must grievously distort the clear teaching of the Bible. Acts 17:30 is conveniently explained as referring merely to a "natural" repentance of which everyone is capable by nature, not to genuine repentance. Evidently, God will be satisfied with this. Acts 3:19 refers only, we are told, to a "national repentance" on the part of the Jews, which was a "natural duty," of which, presumably, Peter's audience was naturally capable. Matthew 22:14, which is the death-blow to the position of Randalls and the English Baptists, is quickly brushed aside by the explanation that "called" in the text merely means "hear the Gospel." This, in spite of the fact that the preceding verses state that "called" consists of God's ministers commanding reprobate, unregenerate people, "Come unto the marriage." Simon the magician is

transformed into a "*bona fide* believer" in order that Peter in Acts 8:22 may not be found commanding an unbeliever to repent (see pp. 37, 38, 46, 49, 53, 54, and elsewhere). This is sinful twisting of the Holy Scriptures.

The Protestant Reformed Churches must firmly and publicly decline to be associated with the *Gospel Standard* magazine in its opposition to "offers":

The *Gospel Standard* magazine stands almost alone (with the Protestant Reformed Church [*sic*] and the British Reformed Fellowship set up in 1990) in their opposition to indiscriminate "offers" (p. 83).

The Protestant Reformed Churches, representing the Reformed, confessional tradition, differ sharply with the *Gospel Standard* magazine on the important issue of the preaching of the gospel. The Protestant Reformed Churches do indeed reject and condemn the "well-meant offer," in the sense of preaching to all as God's love for all and desire to save all. This is the Arminianism, or "free willism," condemned by the Reformed churches in the Canons of Dordt. But the Protestant Reformed Churches teach and practice the earnest external call of the gospel to all hearers without distinction and without exception. That is, these churches hold that *God Himself* seriously commands, or summons, every hearer, unregenerated as well as regenerated, to repent of his sins and believe in Jesus Christ. Here, the Protestant Reformed Churches differ sharply and significantly with the *Gospel Standard* magazine. I am confident that the British Reformed Fellowship also declines to be associated with the *Gospel Standard* magazine.

This is not to say that Randalls has got everything wrong. It is of crucial importance to recognize and insist that the gospel's address of the thirsty in Isaiah 55:1 and of the laboring and heavy laden in Matthew 11:28 is the Savior's loving call to His own in whom the

Spirit has worked these spiritual characteristics. This tender, particular address is the call in its full, saving reality: external summons accompanied by the internal drawing of the Holy Spirit. ■

*Sincerity Meets the Truth*, by John K. Pedersen. Audubon, New Jersey: Old Paths Publications, 1997. Pp. vii + 56. \$5.95 (paper). (Reviewed by the editor)

In the clean and decent town of Evangelical Religion (across the tracks from the depraved city of Badstuff) was a loving, caring Reformed church. Its name was Kindlove Reformed Church. The minister, Nuance Greytone, was a friendly, popular pastor. Polished, positive, and tolerant, he knew how to please everybody. He reserved his criticism for "the T. R. Crowd," that is, those Reformed people who thought, and claimed, that the Reformed faith was the one, only, true gospel—the "Truly Reformed." Into this church, of a Sunday morning, came a guest minister, Faith Not-His-Own. He preached the good news of salvation by grace alone, grace that is freely and sovereignly bestowed upon the elect, grace that is truly grace. In the course of preaching the gospel, he condemned the teaching that salvation is conditioned by man's own will (Arminianism). He condemned it, not as an inferior form of the gospel but as "the Lie." This divided the congregation. Some were outraged, including Pastor Greytone. Others were saved from their evangelical self-righteousness and enjoyed the comfort of the gospel of grace for the first time.

Another result of the unwanted preaching of grace that is really grace was that Sincerity, a "nice" member of the church (with a public penchant for Sunday afternoon football games on television that kept him from the evening service and a private delight in the depravity of Badstuff), met the Truth. He



will meet Him again at the book's end. Both times, this "nice" church member painfully discovers that sincerity counts for nothing with the Truth.

This is the story in John Pedersen's powerful allegory, *Sincerity Meets the Truth*.

As every reader of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* knows, an allegory tells an interesting tale. This tale of life-and-death struggle in a Reformed church, with its life-and-death implications for one of the church's members, is interesting. My 18 year-old son picked the book up and read it straight through without any urging.

An allegory is peopled with aptly named, memorable characters. In addition to *Sincerity* and *Greytone*, Pedersen's allegory includes such familiar church members as Mr. Sly Humble, Mr. and Mrs. Pants (Smart and Wear), and Want Pity. Want Pity can respond to the faithful preaching and defense of the gospel only by lamenting unfulfilled personal needs:

I sensed no desire in this Faith  
Not-His-Own to meet my needs.  
None. I am a hurting person. I  
need someone who wants to extend  
the gentle touch of a caring  
shepherd. I got nothing but talk  
about sin, righteousness, and

judgment. The Holy Spirit was  
absent from all this talk about gos-  
pel this, and gospel that. I feel  
empty, uncared-for.

The Christian allegory teaches some spiritual truth. It is a veiled sermon in writing. This Christian allegory is a vehement protest against the denial of grace in Reformed churches by means of an affirmation of "grace" conditioned by the will of the sinner, or by means of the approval of Arminianism's conditioned and conditional "grace" as a legitimate form of the gospel. The author himself explains in his preface:

There has never been a more subtle expression of false doctrine than that which affirms all the "truths" of the Christian faith on the basis of human effort, merit of works, foreseen faith, or "free will." To affirm grace on the condition of works is the ultimate perversion. It is The Lie. And the "Reformed" establishment has made peace with it. Apologists for the truth of the "Reformed Faith" have become apologists for Arminianism, defending the false gospel as a less consistent version of the same religion as that of the Apostle Paul, of Calvin, Knox, Turretin, and Owen.

The allegory is a protest. But

the protest arises from the passionate love of the truth of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Mrs. Hope Against-Hope gives expression to this love:

The heart of the good news—the grace of God—the right of God to give his grace to whom he will, for his own Glory; and his power to do this through the work of Christ on the cross—this precious truth—(is) ... the one thing that matters over everything else!

The message of the allegory is that of the Bible, positively and negatively. For this, the Reformation contended (I write this review on October 31). It is the confession of all the Reformed creeds. But it is anathema in many Reformed and Presbyterian churches today, corrupted as they are by their associations with American evangelicalism, that is, American Arminianism; by their own commitment to the doctrine of a love of God for all and a desire of God to save all; and by their lust to grow numerically. To preach the message of the allegory is to bring down upon one's head the wrath of nominal Reformed Christianity. John Pedersen is likely to find this out.

This brief work is a little bombshell. □

## News From Our Churches

## Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL has created a sermon tape album on a series of eight sermons taken from the admonition of Philippians 4:8, namely, to think upon those things which are true. These messages expound the great Christian graces

so vital for one's own peace and comfort.

Special applications are made to youth and young couples concerning the need to adorn their lives with true virtues. This series includes "True Love," "True Humility," "True Courage," "True Joy," "True Peace," "True Greatness," "True Honor," and "True Friendship." The cost of the album is \$11.95 and can be ordered from Bethel Protestant Reformed Church, 1047 Florida Lane, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007.

In a follow-up to our "News" of November 1, we report that Rev. J. Mahtani, pastor of the Trinity

PRC in Houston, TX, was invited to return to Texas Christian School for yet another visit, to answer more questions on the doctrine of predestination. When he returned this time he also found two Youth Pastors from the local Baptist churches in attendance, who were apparently invited by some high school students. Rev. Mahtani reports that the time spent proved to be very profitable, and he was able to answer questions such as, "How can you say God hates; is He not a God of love?" or "Show us from the Bible that God sends people to hell!" Some of the positive fruit from this visit is already evident,

---

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



since Rev. Mahtani has been invited to return to Texas Christian to lead in staff devotions every Friday morning beginning in December.

The Evangelism Committee of the South Holland, IL PRC sponsored a Reformation Day lecture at their church on October 30. Prof. R. Dykstra, of our seminary, spoke on the subject, "A Restored Treasure of the Reformation: Sovereign, Free, Double Predestination."

Rev. A. denHartog, pastor of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, spoke at a Reformation Day celebration on October 31 at Hope, on the subject "Reformed Worship."

The Evangelism Society of the Byron Center, MI PRC, along with the congregation of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, sponsored a Reformation Day lecture on October 30 at the Martin Reformed Church in Martin, MI, approximately half-way between Byron Center and Kalamazoo. Rev. Bruinsma, pastor at Kalamazoo, spoke on "Making a Stand on the Truth."

#### **Mission Activities**

Elder Perlin Schut of the Hudsonville, MI PRC and Rev. J. Slopsema from our denomination's Domestic Mission Committee traveled to Northern Ireland on November 5 to visit with the newly organized Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland and consistory there, and to help in the oversight of the mission work being done. They have a large agenda set by the Mission Committee and Hudsonville's consistory, and will be kept very busy meeting with our missionary, with the new consistory, and with as many of the members and new contacts as possible.

At the request of our Domestic Mission Committee, the consistory of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI sent their pastor, Rev. R. VanOverloop, to labor for a long weekend in Pittsburgh, PA with a small group which has been showing great interest in our preaching. Our home missionary, Rev. T. Miersma, has been there several times, and other of our ministers have labored there as well. Besides preaching there twice, Rev. VanOverloop spent some time visiting and teaching three catechism classes, each of which was several hours long, one with teenagers and one with adults.

#### **Denominational Activities**

Prof. and Mrs. Hanko left in late October for several weeks in Singapore. Prof. Hanko will preach in our two sister churches there; the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church and the First Evangelical Reformed Church. He will also give several public lectures, teach in their Bible School, and consult with them about beginning a seminary. Plans also called for him to attend and speak at a ministers' conference in Malaysia and preach and teach a course to ministers in Myanmar.

#### **Young People's Activities**

In a couple of interesting items concerning our young people, we find that in late September the young people of the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL spent a Saturday afternoon at the Chicago Art Institute. One month later, completely unrelated to the above, the Young People's Society of Bethel met for their regular weekly meeting to discuss "The Human Body and Correlation to Spiritual Life."

#### **Minister Activities**

Our South Holland, IL congregation has extended a call to Rev. Arie denHartog, pastor of Redlands PRC.

#### *Food for Thought*

"If I speak what is false, I must answer for it; if truth, it will answer for me."

—Thomas Fuller □

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

#### **NOTICE!!**

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 14, 1998, at the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, Grandville, MI. Material for this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk by December 14, 1997.

Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk

#### **NOTICE!!**

Subscribe to the *British Reformed Journal*, the quarterly magazine of the British Reformed Fellowship. Every issue thought-provoking and informative. Subscription £10.00 or \$16.00 per year. Contact Mr. Tony Horne, "Bromstone," Auquorthies Rd., Stonehaven, Kincardineshire, AB39 3QB, Scotland, UK.

#### **WEDDING ANNIVERSARY**

On December 4, 1997,

#### **MR. and MRS. GORDON VAN OVERLOOP**

will celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We praise God for the covenant love and instruction they have given, and we thank our heavenly Father for preserving them to this time. May the Lord give them continued joy and peace. "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1).

- ❖ Rev. Ron and Sue VanOverloop
- ❖ Jim VanOverloop (and Linda in glory)
- ❖ Tom and Vicki VanOverloop
- ❖ Greg and Vicki VanOverloop
- ❖ Randy and Ellen VanOverloop
- ❖ Dave and Julie VanOverloop  
twenty-seven grandchildren  
three great grandchildren

Hudsonville, Michigan