



# *The Standard Bearer*

**A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine**

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**Vol. 74, No. 7  
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# But Our Eyes Are Upon Thee

*O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.*

II Chronicles 20:12

**A**nother new year. The year of our Lord 1997 is now history, and a new year, 1998, has been ushered in.

We know what took place in the past year. However, tomorrow, the new year, the remaining years of our life are a mystery to us. Since the future is a dark unknown, we are so inclined to ask many questions. Will we enjoy health, or will we become sick and perhaps even die? Will we have prosperous times, or will there be economic depression?

Because we do not know the details of the future we are inclined to become afraid. If our portion is going to be sickness, how will we

be able to press on? Or will we give up? If the church of Jesus Christ will sustain a greater measure of opposition as she fights the battle of faith, how will she be victorious? How will God govern all things for her well-being? We know that the people of God will suffer more hardships as the end approaches, and the devil will work with greater determination to deceive the very elect of God—but we do not know the details.

Looking back is easy. Viewing all that one has come through, one can say, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." However, looking forward is not so easy. Through our human eyes we look into the future and we tend to despair. Everything looks like an obstacle over which we will stumble.

At this time, as well as always, we need the Word of God to direct us, to shed light upon our path, so

that the darkness of doubt and despair may be dispelled. We must look upon Jehovah, finding our strength and courage in Him. We can do that by following the example of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, when he and the people of Judah were in a position in which they did not know what to do. This account is found in II Chronicles 20, particularly verse 12.

Judah was in danger. Three mighty kingdoms, Moab, Ammon, and Mt. Seir, had joined hands together in a confederation for the purpose of taking the children of God captive and spoiling the land. Militarily speaking, the confederacy had every advantage, and Judah had no chance. Further, Judah had received the distressing news that the enemy was arrayed for battle.

Understandably, the children of Judah were afraid. The very thought of having to meet such a

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formidable foe brought them to their knees, upon which they cried unto the Lord, "We know not what to do." They could visualize the battle before their eyes. The helpless children and the sick would be brutally killed, while all the able-bodied would be taken captive to lead a life of slavery.

Thus, the whole congregation stood before the temple: husbands, wives, children, little babes, old grandparents, the sick, and the untried youth.

Their fear was a real fear. A perplexing question vexed their righteous souls. These were the enemies which God had forbidden them to destroy. How could God first forbid the destruction of those enemies, and then bring them up to destroy His children? Would God really allow this confederacy to wipe out His church? After all, Israel was not as the other nations, for she was God's chosen possession and heirs to the promise. The promise was that they were to have the victory, that the seed of the serpent would go down in defeat. Did God change? Would Christ be born? How could the promised seed be born if the church were trodden under foot and destroyed?

No doubt, as children of God, you and I have similar questions as we begin this new year. We, too, are and shall be surrounded by enemies as long as we live.

There are powers that threaten our natural, physical lives. Today there are wars and rumors of wars. The nations of the earth continue to struggle for the psychological advantage of having the biggest, the newest, and the most. The environment is becoming more and more polluted with toxins invading our water and air. Abortion abounds, with euthanasia gaining momentum. What will life be like for me and my children in the year and years to come?

However, the real problem for the church of Jesus Christ is not that which will harm our physical lives. The battle which we will fight

is not first of all an international political war, but a spiritual battle of faith against unbelief. Thus, the battle is in the heart.

That old adversary, Satan, goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour and destroy. In fact, your and my enemy does not appear to be our enemy. What he has to offer is pleasing to our flesh and very hard to resist. A life of fun and pleasure, luxuries and riches, appeals to our vanities. The old deceiver stands in the doorway of the theater, entertains us on our televisions and videos, beckons us to join him in a multitude of places for pleasure, so that we think less and less of church attendance and the studying of God's Word, whether that be at home or with the fellow saints in Bible study society. When we look for work he tempts us with double wages if we will only work on Sunday. His labor unions will give us job security and better wages. Always we must be on our guard.

As if that were not enough, the father of the lie points to the achievements of men rather than to the glory of God. Man has subdued the earth from the depths of the sea to the outreaches of space. No problem is so great that man in his ingenuity cannot figure it out. Philosopher of philosophers, Satan has the answer to all our inquiries. His pleasing message is not to follow the narrow, strict, hard way of obeying the law, but to mold and shape our own destiny, as we have the right to do what we please with our own life.

Sounds pleasing, does it not? So pleasing does it sound that we are ready to join Satan and the world. In doing so we are ready to abandon the preaching of regeneration as God's way into His kingdom. We are ready to trade our citizenship in the kingdom of everlasting life for that which is passing and temporary.

The knowledge that we are so inclined puts fear into our hearts. How shall we be able to stand in a

world that is becoming increasingly wicked? We, too, cry "We know not what to do."

In answer to the question of what to do we turn again to the example of Jehoshaphat. This scriptural history is more than just a Bible story. It is God's message to us. What did Jehoshaphat do which serves as our guide even today? He gathered all the people before the Lord and they bowed down as they looked into the sanctuary of the temple. Although they did not know what to do, their eyes were upon Jehovah. This is always the answer for the troubled church. She must look away from herself and focus her attention upon her God.

Judah had good reason to lift her eyes heavenward. Their king, Jehoshaphat, reviewed before them all the wonderful works which the Lord had performed on their behalf. He led them safely out of Egypt and through the burning wilderness. During this journey He protected them from the burning sun by the pillar of cloud by day, and He guarded them by a pillar of fire by night. The shoes on their feet did not wear out; they were fed and refreshed with bread from heaven and water from the rock. When the enemy came He sent the angel of death to disquiet them. No, their God was not a man, but the living God, creator of heaven and earth.

In addition to listing all that Jehovah had done for them, the king had to make plain to the people that God had not so wonderfully preserved them because of their own goodness. Their history clearly showed otherwise, in that they constantly went awhoring after other gods from which Jehovah had to call them. The goodness was in the Lord Himself, as that goodness was represented in the presence of the blood of Jesus Christ typically manifested on the altar. On the basis of that blood, Judah could very well look to Jehovah and trust in His promises.



That is your and my calling today. As members of the church today we have an even clearer understanding of Jehovah's faithfulness. Christ no longer is simply a promise, but He has come in the flesh and fulfilled the work of redemption. We have the privilege to behold God's covenant faithfulness as it is revealed in the cross and as the benefits of that cross are given to us through the working of the Holy Spirit.

By faith we now see Jehovah in the marvelous depths of forgiving love as we kneel before the cross and witness the suffering and death of the Son of God in our flesh. Like the children of Judah, we behold such power, such love, such mercy that we are moved to bow in humble adoration and confess that Jehovah is in truth the only God and worthy of all praise.

Thus, to Him we turn for guidance and courage as we face whatever He sends us in the new year.

Knowing these things we confess three truths. Our first confession is that God knows all the future because He is God. God does not have to wait around for something to happen before He can act. Rather He is the sovereign determiner of all things.

Secondly, we confess that the whole purpose of God's control is centered in His people as they are in Jesus Christ. No matter what He will in His wisdom do with us in the new year, we firmly believe that it will be for our good.

Finally, we seek our strength from Him, believing that He will not send us a great trial without also giving us the necessary grace to bear it.

What happened to Judah as they stood before the Lord with

their little ones and their children, as they placed their burdens on the Lord, confessing that He is faithful and has control of the battle from beginning to end? They were not destroyed by the enemy. Rather, the enemy fought among themselves and were killed by those of their own number. Needless to say, Judah could not boast in this victory, for the battle was the Lord's.

Before this God you and I also stand. Upon this God we must fix our eyes. When we grow faint-hearted, discouraged, and know not what to do, we must remember Judah. For, turning to Jehovah in all our needs, we will have no fear for the new year and for all the years yet to come, but will have peace in our hearts, knowing that we shall abide forever in Christ, whom we shall follow into glory. □

## Editorial

# 1998 BRF Family Holiday Conference



*Castlewellan Castle*

The fifth Family Holiday Conference sponsored by the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) will be held this summer in Northern Ireland, God willing. The site will be the lovely Castlewellan Castle Christian Conference Center in Castlewellan, County Down. The impressive Castle and its spacious grounds are located five miles inland from Newcastle and the Irish Sea in a park of about 1,600 acres. The area is the northern foothills of the majestic Mourne Mountains.

The theme of the conference will be "The Doctrine of the Last Things." The speakers will again be Prof. Herman Hanko and Prof. David Engelsma of the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Mr. David Blunt, chairman of the BRF, will also take part.

The dates are Saturday, July 25—Saturday, August 1, 1998.

The BRF has drawn up an informative brochure describing the conference. What follows is taken from this brochure, complete with British spelling.



## Programme

This conference will be of a relaxed nature and adequate time will be available for recreation with family and friends.

Meetings will be held in the mornings and evenings in one of the large conference rooms and, except when optional tours are arranged, afternoons will be free. The bi-annual business meeting for members of the BRF will take place during the Conference.

Day visitors are most welcome to attend but any meals requested must be booked and paid for in advance.

The Conference theme is "The Doctrine of the Last Things." "The Doctrine of the Last Things" incorporates the final consummation of the counsel of the triune God, which along the way of sin and grace, death and the curse, as well as the wonder of salvation in Christ, is finally realized in the eternal kingdom and everlasting covenant of God, where the tabernacle of God will be with men. At the Conference the doctrine will be presented under the following headings:

- 1) *The Idea of the World's End*—the place and importance of eschatology;
- 2) *The Millennium*—an exposition and defence of amillennialism;
- 3) *The Signs of Christ's Coming*—near but not imminent;
- 4) *Christ's Return*—its time, manner, and purpose;
- 5) *The Great Judgment Day*—the parties, standard, and parts involved;
- 6) *Our Calling With Respect to Christ's Coming and the End of the World.*

Coach tours and day trips will be arranged to places of local interest and beauty.

## Accommodation

Castlewellan Castle is situated 30 miles south of Belfast and 5 miles inland from the sea at Newcastle. Accommodation is in rooms varying in sizes from 2 to

10 bedded rooms. As the number of single rooms is limited, it is suggested that any persons wishing to attend the conference and insisting on having a single room, should make their own arrangements for accommodation outside the Conference Centre. There are a number of hotels and guest houses in the surrounding area. For more information contact *Newcastle Tourist Information Centre, Central Promenade, Newcastle, Co. Down, BT33 0AA* (Tel: 01396 722222). All rooms have hand basins and wardrobes, all beds have duvets, and there are showers on each floor. Sheets will be provided. The castle is situated in a large Forest Park, providing ample space for campers and caravaners. Enquiries concerning facilities and cost should be made directly to the *Forest Park* (Tel: 013967 78664).

## Recreation

Facilities are provided for the usual outdoor sports, such as football and volleyball, as well as a nine-hole putting course. There is a Games Room with pool, table tennis, and darts equipment. A large lake covers 40 hectares (100 acres) and is well stocked with trout, making it a popular spot for fishing. The safe and accessible nature of the waters has made it an increasingly popular location for canoeing and other water sport activities. The Forest Park offers pleasant and interesting opportunities for walking and the Centre has lounges, a coffee bar, a library, and a souvenir shop. Televisions and a pay phone are also on the premises.

Within easy reach of the Centre is the seaside resort of Newcastle ('Where the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea'), the cathedral town of Downpatrick (Town and immediate locale, including Saul, associated with Saint Patrick, Ireland's patron saint) and Castleward. The house is a unique mixture of Classical and Gothic styles with beautiful gardens.

There are also the majestic Mourne Mountains which include Slieve Donard, Northern Ireland's highest mountain, and the artificial lakes in the Silent Valley.

Two full-day coach tours have been arranged, which are particularly designed for those not taking part in the planned recreational activities and games. The first will be to Downpatrick, Castleward, and Saul. The second will be to Belfast, Northern Ireland's capital city. An afternoon trip will also be arranged to Newcastle and the Mourne Mountains. In order to assist the organisation and administration of the coach tours, it is necessary this year that the bookings for these are included with bookings for the Conference.

## Cost

### Full Board Rates

Adults — £145 [\$240.70]

16-12 — £95 [\$157.70]

11-8 — £76 [\$126.16]

7-4 — £52 [\$119.52]

3-1 — £34 [\$56.44]

Under 1 — Free

Students and those of reduced circumstances *may* qualify for reduction—please enquire for further details.

### Day Visitors

Those who are not conference delegates are welcome to attend the public addresses throughout the week.

### Coach Tours

(Tue. 28<sup>th</sup>) County Down Countryside — £8 [\$13.28] (children under 15—£5 [\$8.30])

(Wed. 29<sup>th</sup>) Newcastle and Mournes—free

(Thu. 30<sup>th</sup>) Belfast Day Trip—£8 [\$13.28] (children under 15—£5 [\$8.30])

## Travel

By Plane: two airports serve Northern Ireland; Belfast International Airport near Antrim and Belfast City Airport near Holywood. By Sea: frequent ferry services operate between Stranraer and Belfast, and Cairnryan and



Larne, while an overnight ferry connects Liverpool and Belfast. By Rail: trains run regularly between

Larne and Belfast, and Belfast and Dublin, stopping at Newry. Corporate transport will be

provided to the Conference Centre at set times for visitors travelling by air or sea.

The BRF, sponsor of the conference, was founded in 1990 for the defense and propagation of the historic Reformed faith in the British Isles. Its doctrinal basis is "the divine inspired, infallible, and inerrant Holy Scriptures" as confessed in the "Three Forms of Unity" and in the Westminster Standards.

The stated objectives of the Fellowship are three:

- 1) "To promote a knowledge of the Reformed Faith in the British Isles, as defined in the Doctrinal Basis.
- 2) "To organise meetings, conferences, preaching services and other activities in order to further the Reformed Faith and to give practical expression to the unity enjoyed by Christians of Reformed persuasion.
- 3) "To encourage the formation of groups in different areas of the country who will seek to promote the Reformed Faith on a local level."

Although it is separate and distinct from the church in Ulster, the BRF has a close working relationship with the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland. Three men of the church are members of the BRF Committee, as is Rev. Ron Hanko. Through missionary Hanko, as well as the speakers at the BRF conferences, the Protestant Reformed Churches in America sustain a strong interest in the BRF and its activities, particularly the conferences.

The other six members of the BRF Committee are Reformed and Presbyterian men from Scotland, England, and Wales.

The biennial family conferences have proved to be a major work by the Fellowship, under the blessing of God. This conference will be the fifth. The first was held in the north of Wales. The subject was "Marriage and Family." The second was held in Northern Ireland. The subject was "The Covenant of Grace." The third was held in Scotland. The subject was "The Doctrine of Sovereign Grace." The fourth was held in the south of England. The subject was "The Doctrine of the Church."

Attendance at the conferences has grown steadily. In recent years, the conferences have drawn interested visitors from different parts of the world, including what was formerly East Germany, Australia,

Singapore, and the United States. By means of the conferences, important contacts have been made for the BRF. Men and women throughout the British Isles who embrace the Reformed faith as the gospel are enabled to meet and help each other. And, of course, the conferences are themselves occasions for instruction in the Word of God and for delightful fellowship.

The chief hope of the BRF is to attract interested persons from the British Isles. The *Standard Bearer* has a number of readers and correspondents in the British Isles. On behalf of the BRF, I extend an invitation to all these friends to attend the conference this summer. This is the opportunity for a face-to-face meeting. I encourage them to inform their acquaintances of the conference.

Nevertheless, the BRF is sincere in its invitation to all others to attend, particularly the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the United States and Canada. Those who have attended a BRF conference will enthusiastically attest to the warm welcome and fellowship at the conference.

The number of rooms in the Castle is limited. Those who want to be assured of a place in the Conference Center itself should register ("book") early. First come, first served.

In the United Kingdom, checks ("cheques") should be made payable to the British Reformed Fellowship and sent to:

The Booking Secretary, BRF  
44 Rathmore Heights  
Ballymena, Co. Antrim  
Northern Ireland BT43 6NQ.

Two stamped addressed envelopes should be included.

In North America, registrations should be sent to:  
Mr. Bill Oomkes  
6299 Wing Ave., SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49512.

Those desiring more information, registration forms, or a brochure on Castlewellan Castle and environs can write Mr. Oomkes, or call him at (616) 698-6697.

May God bless the conference, that the Reformed faith may grow and prevail in the British Isles. □

—DJE

## Letters

### ■ Theological Honesty Regarding Infant Baptism

Your recent editorial on catechism (*Standard Bearer*, Sept. 15, 1997) prompts me to write and query some of your assumptions.

Firstly, I presume that you only attribute the qualities of election, redemption, and regeneration to the demonstrated spiritual seed of believers, because many by their behaviour in childhood are mark-

edly still children of wrath. Therefore, you would not describe all children of believers in these terms, right? We agree that they are all encompassed in the covenant and ought to receive the sign of that;



yet, we know what happened to Esau: given the sign but not elect. By the way, can you prove that "hated" does not simply mean "loves less" as it does in Jesus' demands that we put Him before family, etc.?

Secondly, when you state that they are born again as infants you presumably are referring again to the elect children. This is fine, except that I am sure a number only come to faith in late teens or early adulthood after a long period of rebellion.

Thirdly, can the prayer after baptism in the Reformed form for baptism truly thank God that He has "forgiven us and our children all our sins through the blood of Christ" when it is likely that one or more of our children may perish outside of Christ? The only valid reason I can see for infant baptism is the fact that Abraham was commanded to give the sign to his seed. But it does not assure any believing parent of anything! Do you not think there ought to be more theological honesty about and at these sacraments?

(Dr.) Julian M. Kennedy  
Royal Bournemouth Hospital  
Bournemouth, England

#### Response:

For a thorough answer to your vitally important questions about children in the covenant, I may refer you to three, closely related series of editorials that I have written on the subject. They were "The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers" (six articles; vol. 66); "The Approach to Covenant Children" (six articles; vol. 67); and "An 'Election Theology' of Covenant" (six articles; vol. 67). All of your questions are addressed in these articles.

Very briefly here, the basis of infant baptism is God's continuation of His covenant in the families of believers by saving their children (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39). The true, spiritual children of believers

are those, and those only, who are the children of the promise according to election (Rom. 9:6ff.). In the Old Testament, when God promised His covenant and its blessings to Abraham's seed, He referred to those only of Abraham's physical offspring who were in Christ by election (Rom. 9:6ff.; Gal. 3:16, 29). So today, when God promises to save the children of believers, He refers to those only of our physical offspring who are, or will be, united to Christ spiritually according to election. These—these *only*—are our true children.

As a rule, God regenerates these (elect) children, who are given to godly parents and raised in the fear of God, early in childhood. Not always, as you point out, but as God's ordinary way of working. This is why these children could, and were expected to, obey the fifth commandment of God's covenant-law from their earliest consciousness (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-3). Unregenerated children cannot honor their parents for God's sake, in thankfulness for His redemption of them out of the Egypt of sin and death.

This is why John the Baptist jumped for joy at the presence of His Lord and Savior, when John was in his mother's womb (Luke 1:41, 44).

This is why Jesus said of "infants" being carried to Him in their parents' arms that they must be allowed to come to Him (in *this way!* in the way of being *carried by their parents, as, e.g., infants are carried to Christ by being presented for baptism!*) for His blessing. And this is why He added, "for of such (infants) is the kingdom of God (made up)" (Luke 18:15-17). Infants of believing parents are in His kingdom. They are in His kingdom already in their infancy. They are in His kingdom by election. They are in His kingdom by redemption. As a rule, they are in His kingdom by regeneration.

Jesus Christ is indignant with all Baptists, who exclude from His

kingdom great numbers of its citizens (Mark 10:14).

The prayer after baptism in the Reformed form for baptism is indeed objectionable, not only to all Baptists but also to Reformed people who refuse to acknowledge that membership in the covenant is determined by election.

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise Thee, that Thou hast forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through Thy Holy Spirit as members of Thine only begotten Son, and adopted us to be Thy children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism....

This simply is not true of all the physical children of believers. But it is true of all the genuine children of believers, i.e., the spiritual children, the children of the promise, according to election.

You declare, with some vehemence, that infant baptism "does not assure any believing parent of anything!" On the contrary! The baptism of our infants according to God's command, in harmony with infant circumcision under the old covenant, assures us of everything. It assures us that God has not changed, saving the children of the godly under the old covenant but refusing to save them under the new covenant. It assures us that God has not restricted the extent of His covenant mercy in this age of the church's maturity, withholding His mercy from the children of the godly today, whereas He extended it to the children of the godly previously. It assures us that God will gather His church from our family. It assures us that God will graciously save our true children, every one. It assures us that our efforts to rear our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord are not in vain (Eph. 6:4). It assures the covenant children, from their youngest years, when first they hear the gospel with the faith



given them by the Spirit, that God loves them, Christ died for them, and they are saved, according to His eternal election of grace.

I agree that there should be theological honesty regarding the sacrament of baptism. All ministers should teach and all confessing Christians should believe and practice that the proper administration of the sacrament includes the baptism of the infant children of believers.

As for the meaning of "hatred" in Romans 9:13 ("Esau have I hated"), the proof that the word means 'detest and will to damn,' not 'love less,' is the passage from which Paul is quoting, Malachi 1:3ff. Try reading Malachi 1:3, 4 while translating "hated" as 'loved less.' Incidentally, your assumption that "hate" means 'love less' in Luke 14:26 is mistaken.

—Ed.

#### ■ The Implications of "The Sad Case of Bert Zandstra" for the Young People

I am writing in regard to the editorial, "The Sad Case of Bert Zandstra" (*Standard Bearer*, Nov. 1, 1997). The Young Adults Bible Study Class in the South Holland, IL PRC are discussing the article. The article was very clear and definitely "sad" to read. I would like to know the implications of the article for us young people who are not married. Also, what are the implications for us of the acceptance of the Bert Zandstras by many of the other Reformed churches.

Nathan Haak  
South Holland, IL

#### Response:

I am especially delighted to receive such a letter from one whom I baptized and whom I catechized for many years.

The implications for young people such as yourself of the editorial on the mythical Bert Zandstra are the following. First, be thank-

ful that you are raised in a family that is not troubled and broken by divorce, but dwelling together in love and peace. Thank God for this daily, and ask His blessing on your home. Second, befriend the young people in the church whose parents are divorced, and pray for them. Third, make up your mind that the woman you marry will be your one and only wife as long as she lives, come what may. This is God's clear, authoritative, unchangeable will for His institution of marriage in His world. Fourth, following from this, marry wisely. Marry in the Lord Jesus Christ, and marry one who shows herself to be the kind of young woman with whom you can live happily, with your children, for an entire lifetime. Do not make a mistake here! Do not marry outside the faith. Even within the church, do not marry carelessly. Some young people in the church are more careful in buying a used car than they are in choosing their wife (or, husband, as the case may be). Listen to your parents' advice. Fifth, once you are married, work hard from day one of your marriage to make the marriage a godly, good, solid, happy one. Some men in the church spend more time on their golf game than they do with their wife. Then, they wonder why things are not well at home. Sixth, if the time should come that you and your wife are having trouble (and every marriage has its troubles), keep in mind that divorce is not an option for you. You are called to live with your wife, even if, to use the language of Proverbs, she is a brawling woman. Life is short; marriages are ended by death; God will reward you for suffering in discipleship of Jesus Christ. Marriage is a calling.

As regards the Reformed churches that now fall away from the truth by allowing the Bert Zandstras to be members in good

standing, the implications of the editorial are these. Be sure that you are member of a Reformed church that teaches the truth of marriage and backs it up with discipline. All who are members of Reformed churches that permit the Bert Zandstras and their new wives to be members are guilty before God of the adultery and unrighteousness of these sad cases. Also, fight to keep the Protestant Reformed Churches free of the cancer of divorce and remarriage.

Greetings to the Young Adults Class in South Holland.

—Ed.

#### ■ The Scandal and Children

Since renewing my subscription to your magazine, I have told our people of your doctrines; passed out your literature to our churches; and given copies to some Southern Baptist ministers who have come to the knowledge of the excellency of grace. I've often been asked what your position on divorce and remarriage was; now I can tell them! Your editorial on the issue is timely, and very much to the point ("The Scandal and Silence," *Standard Bearer*, Nov. 15, 1997). As a retired school teacher, I can vouch for what was reported relative to the children's reaction to this "scandal." I did a study for our school system a few years ago. At that time, one-third of those I polled were in single-parent homes, one-third in homes with a step-parent, and one-third in what otherwise would be considered a "stable, two-parent family." Surprisingly, students from what we considered stable family settings had a very difficult time adjusting in school after their parents were engaged in disputes. They worried that their parents, too, would end up in a divorce court.

The number one cause for stu-

*Some  
young people  
in the church  
are more careful  
in buying  
a used car  
than they are  
in choosing  
their wife.*



dents' low academic achievement today is not lack of educational dollars, well-trained teachers, or adequate teaching materials. It is divorce and remarriage, feuding, fussing, fighting, screaming, etc., as well as single "parenthood" (misnomer). Our children cannot achieve in the ghettos of social catastrophe. Their security, social support, love, and guidance are almost nonexistent. And you are correct, no one dares to speak out as our social fabric disintegrates around us.

Thank you for your and the Protestant Reformed Churches' stand. May God grant you His sovereign grace as you contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.

Stanley C. Phillips  
Quitman, MS

### ■ The Pain of Divorce for the Children

**N**o one says anything about it; it seems like no one cares. This was the sad comment made to me by a co-worker as he was telling me of the many in his church who were divorcing and remarrying. This comment illustrated the eerie silence in many churches today that was discussed in the November 15, 1997 editorial of the *Standard Bearer*, "The Scandal and Silence." The silence truly is eerie, and the results are sad and disastrous for the families and churches involved.

I can personally attest to the sadness of this comment, being the son of parents who divorced 13 years ago and have since remarried other spouses. The pain and sadness for children of divorced parents go on long after the mom and dad have gone their separate ways. It is hard to put into words the great pain that divorce inflicts on children. I think it can best be described by saying this, that my father and mother are no longer together as one. They have now taken in strangers whom they call "husband" or "wife." The two

people whom children look to for stability and love have gone their separate ways, bringing an end to happy family gatherings, fellowship, good examples, and the list goes on. The pain and sadness are greatest for children who are young and still in the home at the time of the divorce, but it is also true for adult children. This pain and sadness does not get better with time either. There are constant, sad reminders that children of divorced parents must deal with.

I do not write this to ask for pity. My reason for writing is this, that people will realize the devastation that divorce brings to children and be strengthened in their biblical stand against divorce and remarriage. This is especially important for anyone who loves the truth of God's covenant. God uses covenant homes and parents who are *together* to bring forth and rear covenant children. Divorce and remarriage are a *threat* to covenant children! Do we love our children? We do! Do we love the truth of the covenant? We do! Do we see the threat and ruin that divorce and remarriage bring to covenant children and God's church? I pray that we do!

Another reason for writing is to speak to those who may be experiencing difficulty in their marriage and are contemplating divorce. Let me ask you this one question, "Do you want to leave your children with a lifetime of pain and sadness?" Really? Ask anyone whose parents have divorced if it has really brought an end to the problems, or only compounded and prolonged them. If you don't have children, then consider your example to fellow believers and your witness to the world. I plead with you, don't do it! Get help, talk to your family members, pastor, elders, but don't break up your marriage.

A man who professes to be a Christian recently came to my work and noticed my pictures of my wife and five children. He made a chill-

ing comment. He said, "Do you realize that two of your five children will probably marry and divorce?" This was his experience with two of his five children. I pray that his prediction will be wrong, for my children and yours. However, if we let the tent door open, and this camel of accepting divorce and remarriage sticks his nose in, I am afraid it will become the norm for us too. I pray *fervently*, that God will not permit it to happen.

Three questions that I would like to see the *Standard Bearer* address in future articles. 1) What should someone who is in a "bad" marriage do when he or she needs help? Many times people in a bad marriage feel trapped and see divorce as the only way out. 2) How can we help those families who have been abandoned and hurt by divorce? 3) The November 15 editorial spoke against divorce and remarriage. How about an article or two encouraging godly marriages and the great blessing that we find in them?

Ken Elzinga  
Byron Center, MI

### ■ Uncompromising Articles

**I** am pastoring a small church on Drummond Island. I am not, nor have I ever been, affiliated with the Protestant Reformed Churches. A Protestant Reformed visitor to one of our services gave me a subscription to the *Standard Bearer*. I want to tell you how much I appreciate your publication. The meditations from Romans by Rev. Hoeksema are excellent. I also appreciate the editorials concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Praise the Lord for men who will still stand for and proclaim the truth without compromise. I will renew my subscription and continue it as long as you continue to publish uncompromising articles as you are now.

Doug DeGood  
Drummond Island, MI



# The Elders and Discipline (3)

Article 74 of the *Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* speaks of the last step required by Christ in Matthew 18:15-17: "If anyone, having been admonished in love concerning a secret sin by two or three persons, does not give heed ... the matter shall be reported to the consistory." This article also stipulates that "public sins" must be reported to the consistory. It is possible that the sin is so public that the consistory is aware of it even before someone reports the matter. In any case, public sins are the business of the consistory, i.e., the elders of the church.

A public sin is an offense which in its very nature affects the entire congregation. The breach is struck, not between two individuals in the congregation, but between the sinner and the rest of the congregation. The whole church is involved and must act. But the church must act through her elders. The elders are responsible for the exercise of Christian discipline in the church because they are called by Christ to rule and govern the congregation. This in no way changes the obligation of individual members of the congregation to admonish the sinner in love. The fact that a case becomes the official work of the elders never absolves the individual believer of his calling to pray for and admonish the sinner.

The Church Order recognizes this calling too, as we shall see.

Articles 76 and 77 carefully and in detail lay out the procedure the elders of the church are to follow in the application of Christian discipline to the impenitent. Two kinds of people must be disciplined according to Article 76: "Such as obstinately reject the admonition of the consistory, and likewise those who have committed a public or otherwise gross sin...." These must be "suspended from the Lord's Supper."

Suspension from the Lord's Supper implies several truths. This suspension bars the sinner not only from the Lord's Supper lest the table of the Lord be profaned, but also from all privileges of membership in the church of Christ. Such an impenitent sinner has no right to present his child for baptism and no right to vote at a congregational meeting. He is ineligible to serve in the special offices of the church: minister, elder, or deacon. Neither may he protest or appeal to the assemblies of the church concerning any case other than his own discipline. Furthermore, suspension from the Lord's Supper implies that the impenitent is barred from the means of grace. He is, because of his sin, removed from the communion of the saints, refused the means of grace which Christ has ordained only for the faithful. In one word, suspension from the Lord's Supper implies that the impenitent is deprived of his place in the congregation of God's people.

Suspension from the Lord's Supper is sometimes called "silent

censure," because the congregation has not been informed by the elders of the sinner's impenitence or sin. Or this suspension is called *excommunicatio minor*. It is called this in distinction from excommunication itself, which is called *excommunicatio major*. Whatever terminology we use, we should understand that this first action of the elders, suspension from the Lord's Supper, is essentially excommunication itself. And, if the sinner continues to reject the repeated admonitions of the consistory, excommunication will be applied. This is a process which takes place over a relatively lengthy period of time. The reason for this is to be found in one of the purposes of Christian discipline, *viz.*, that the sinner may be saved in the way of repenting of his sin and being reconciled with God and His people. This repentance God accomplishes by means of His Word. This is why the consistory must patiently labor with the sinner, bringing the Word of God to him repeatedly.

Sometimes it happens that there is disagreement among the elders and/or members of the congregation as to whether a sin has indeed been committed. Or it happens that a report of sin comes to the consistory too late for the elders to investigate thoroughly prior to a scheduled celebration of the Lord's Supper, or there may be suspicion that a sin has been committed. Two practices have been followed by Reformed churches in such cases. The consistory may apply a temporary suspension of the person from the Lord's Supper,

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giving it time to confirm its suspicions; or the consistory may postpone the administration of the Lord's Supper until it has completed its investigation. The latter practice is to be preferred.

Article 76 further stipulates that there shall be "repeated admonitions" if the sinner remains impenitent. Article 77 explains the entire process leading up to excommunication and explains of what these "repeated admonitions" consist:

After the suspension from the Lord's table, and subsequent admonitions, and before proceeding to excommunication, the obstinacy of the sinner shall be publicly made known to the congregation; the offense explained, together with the care bestowed upon him, in reproof, suspension from the Lord's Supper, and repeated admonition; and the congregation shall be exhorted to speak to him and to pray for him. There shall be three such admonitions. In the first the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned that he be somewhat spared. In the second, with the advice of the classis, his name shall be mentioned. In the third the congregation shall be informed that (unless he repent) he will be excluded from the fellowship of the church, so that his excommunication, in case he remains obstinate, may take place with the tacit approbation of the church. The interval between the admonitions shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

After the impenitent sinner has been suspended from the Lord's Supper, there are to be three announcements made to the congregation. The biblical basis for these three announcements, or "admonitions" as Article 77 calls them, is to be found in part in Titus 3:10, "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject."

There are two points to note as to the character of these three announcements. They do not preclude private admonitions made to

the sinner by the consistory in official visits. There must be "repeated admonitions" brought to the impenitent by the elders all through the process of discipline. These public announcements do not preclude, as we mentioned earlier, private admonitions being brought to the sinner by members of the congregation. That always remains the calling of the people of God. These public announcements are called by the article, "admonitions." The point is twofold: the announcements are admonitions to the congregation itself on behalf of the sinner, and the announcements are indirectly admonitions to the sinner. He is admonished by having his sin and impenitence made known to the congregation.

These admonitions must include the following elements: a) The offense must be explained. b) There must be an explanation of the care bestowed on the sinner by the consistory. c) This care bestowed on the sinner must be explained in connection with the reproof of his sin, his suspension from the Lord's table, and the repeated admonitions made to him. This explanation should be detailed enough to give the congregation a clear understanding of the disciplinary work being done by the elders. d) An exhortation must be given to the congregation to speak to the sinner and to pray for him.

In the first public admonition the name of the sinner is not mentioned "that he be somewhat spared."

The second public admonition must include the name of the sinner. But this announcement may not be made without the consistory's seeking the advice of the classis. This advice is also mentioned in Article 76 in connection with excommunication. Some think that classis' advice must be sought twice, once before the second public admonition and again before announcing the excommunication. While it is not wrong to do this, it is not necessary. Ordi-

narily the consistory seeks the advice of classis just once, and that is before making the second public announcement. This advice of the classis is important. There must be safeguards. The consistory must be certain it is doing the right thing and dealing with the sinner fairly.

The classis, therefore, needs to know whether a sin has been committed, whether there is evidence of impenitence, whether the sinner has been suspended from the Lord's Supper, whether the first admonition to the congregation has been given, and whether the labor of the consistory is sufficient. Classis must give its advice carefully, for it is giving the consistory its approval for excommunication if the sinner remains impenitent.

Proper procedure for this second announcement must be followed. The consistory must make a formal decision to proceed with the second announcement. This decision must have at least two grounds: repeated admonitions have been brought to the sinner, and the latter in spite of these remains impenitent. But the actual execution of this decision must have the approval of classis.

With the third announcement the consistory informs the congregation that the sinner will be excommunicated on a given date if he shows no signs of repentance. This announcement is made so that the excommunication may take place "with the tacit approbation of the church." In this way the entire congregation participates in the discipline of the sinner. If a member at this late date objects to the excommunication, he would have to appeal to classis, and the consistory would have to postpone the excommunication until classis has spoken.

The article stipulates that the interval between these three announcements or admonitions "shall be left to the discretion of the consistory." There are two extremes to be avoided by the consistory. The one is acting too



hastily, and the other is acting too slowly. On the one hand, the elders must exercise patience and give the sinner repeated admonitions and offer many prayers for

him in the hope that the Holy Spirit will use these to bring the sinner to repentance. On the other hand, the elders must not allow the sin to fester and grow so that it dis-

rupts the unity and witness of the church. The church of Jesus Christ must be kept pure so that no shame is brought to the name of Christ. □

**In His Fear**

**Rev. Arie denHartog**

## **The Necessity of the Strict Preaching of the Law in Church**

**F**rom the time of the Reformation the truly Reformed church has been serious about preaching the law of God. Reformed churches have a tradition of reading the law of God each Lord's Day in the worship service. This practice, however, has often been opposed. It has been abandoned by most Protestant churches. There are two great errors that arise repeatedly in the church. There is the error of antinomianism, which is the false teaching that salvation by grace alone excludes all necessity of law-keeping by the redeemed Christian. Though not all the advocates of this position would oppose all reference to the law in the life of the Christian, they would certainly not want any great emphasis on the law in the preaching. Other advocates of this position would insist that at least the "thou shalt nots" of the law do not need to be preached in the church.

The second error that comes up again and again in the church is that of legalism. This is the teach-

ing that we are after all saved in part at least by the keeping of the law. Also this position has its variants in the church. The Pharisees of Jesus' day were legalists. They insisted on meticulous keeping of the law. They added to the law as given in the Bible many of their own refinements. They were hypocrites. They boasted in their outward observance of the law. But in fact in their hearts they hated God and had little or no love for their neighbor. Jesus condemns them for neglecting the weightier matters of the law.

Prevalent among many so-called evangelicals is the notion that there is an inherent conflict between preaching the gospel and emphasizing the importance of keeping the law. God abhors both antinomianism and legalism. Both errors must be condemned. Proper preaching of the law has by the grace and Spirit of God in the Christian's heart a sanctifying effect on his whole life.

There is perfect harmony between true preaching of the gospel of grace, and strict preaching on the law of God. We want to show this in this article. Roman Catholicism continues to teach that our salvation is in part by the works of

the law. In doing this it denies the cross of Christ. Many modern day Protestants imagine that they will get to heaven finally because of their own goodness. There could not be anything more contrary to the gospel of grace. This is the pharisaism hated by the Lord so profoundly. The gospel of salvation by grace alone has been almost entirely lost in much of the modern-day church.

But the condemnation of salvation by works is not the same as teaching that the Christian need not be serious about keeping the law. The law of God is the rule of gratitude for the redeemed Christian. He does not keep the law to earn in any way his own salvation, but rather to show his thankfulness to God for God's gracious and wonderful salvation. The law of God must be strictly preached in the church because we need a rule for a life of gratitude. We need God's own absolutely perfect rule. Goodness before God is not determined by the vain imagination of man but by the perfect law of God. We need to be serious about keeping the law of God. Jesus says, "If ye love me keep my commandments."

One of the greatest statements

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regarding the necessity of strict preaching of the law is given in the Heidelberg Catechism. It is the practice of our church to preach regularly following the Heidelberg Catechism as a guide. The Reformed confessions, both those from the continental Reformers (the Three Forms of Unity) and those from the British Isles (The Westminster Confession and Catechisms), stress the importance of teaching serious observance of the law. These confessions state the official Reformed church position regarding the place of the law in the life of the Christian.

Modernism has little use for serious preaching on the law. Modernist preachers, according to their claims, want to be only positive. They refuse to condemn sin which is so abhorrent to God. They speak only of the love of God and seldom if ever of the justice and wrath of God. The prevailing teaching in the modern church is that God loves all men no matter how they live. This is construed to be based on God's grace for all and a death of Christ for all men. So modern churches tolerate almost all sorts of sin. After all, God will forgive our imperfections. They are not that serious. No one is perfect. In the end God will overlook the sins of virtually all men and all will be saved, with perhaps the exception of some of the most grossly wicked in our society.

I consider Lord's Day 44 of the Heidelberg Catechism to be one of the most outstanding of all the Lord's Days of this very beautiful and powerful confession of the Reformed faith. Lord's Day 44 is first of all a discussion of the meaning of the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet." The Heidelberg Catechism shows how the tenth commandment is unique in that it speaks of matters of the heart. The tenth commandment reveals the perfect and holy requirement of the whole of the law of God.

Let me quote the whole significant and powerful discussion of

Lord's Day 44 of the Heidelberg Catechism especially for those who have never read it or do not have access to a copy of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Q. 113 What doth the tenth commandment require of us?

A. That even the smallest inclination or thought, contrary to any of God's commandments, never arise in our hearts; but that at all times we hate all sin with our whole heart, and delight in all righteousness.

Q. 114 But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?

A. No: but even the holiest of men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.

Q. 115 Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?

A. First, that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin, and righteousness in Christ; likewise, that we constantly endeavor and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us, in a life to come.

There is no better passage of Scripture to turn to for the biblical basis of this instruction than the teaching of our Lord Himself in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:17-19 our Lord says, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever

shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

There are many preachers of our day who will in the great day of the Lord's judgment be condemned as least in the kingdom of heaven because of their failure faithfully to teach and preach the law of God in the church. These will be condemned to eternal fires because they refused to warn wicked, impenitent sinners about disobedience to God's holy law and exhort and admonish Christians to be serious about keeping the law of God.

In the passage (Matt. 5) quoted above, Jesus teaches the difference between His abolishing and fulfilling the law. Jesus did indeed on the cross fulfill the law of God. This is the gospel, the good news of our salvation. When we ourselves were wholly incapable of keeping the law of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, through His perfect obedience and sacrifice on the cross, fully satisfied the rigorous demands of God's holy law. He alone of all men perfectly kept the law of God. Our Lord kept the law of God perfectly in behalf of all of His people, all those given to Him by His heavenly Father. By doing this He fulfilled all righteousness on their behalf.

Jesus, through His once and for all atoning work, laid the foundation of our salvation. There is no other foundation. Nothing can be or need be added to the perfect righteousness of the cross. It is the only ground of our righteousness before God. It is the only hope of our salvation. Our glorying is not in our law-keeping but in the perfect obedience and righteousness of Christ.

However, our Lord Jesus emphasizes very strongly in the Sermon on the Mount that in His fulfilling the law at the cross He did not abolish it. That is, He did not do away with the law so that it no longer stands. It is not true at all that Christians redeemed at the



cross need not be concerned about the law of God. The law of God will stand as the rule of gratitude for the life of the Christian until heaven and earth pass away, until all things be fulfilled. Not one jot or one tittle shall pass away from the law until the end of the world. So absolutely perfect is the requirement of the law of God for Christian living also today.

That Jesus Himself taught the strict observance of the law is brought out in the instruction He gave after the passage of Matthew 5 quoted above. There He teaches us that it is not good enough that we only do not kill. We may also not hate our brother. Hatred is the heart sin that is the root of murder and is by God condemned as murder. There will be many going to hell because of impenitent hatred in their hearts for their neighbor, even though they never actually in an outward way killed their neighbor.

It is not good enough that we do not fall into the gross sin of open adultery and fornication. Jesus says that whosoever looks after a woman with lust in his heart commits adultery with her in his heart. Who among men has never had an unclean and unholy thought in his heart? Without forgiveness at the cross of Jesus Christ for these sins of our hearts, we stand condemned before God.

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that the tenth commandment, when it commands us not to covet, requires spiritual perfection. Coveting is after all not something observable in one's outward conduct. Only God, who sees and knows the heart, can judge concerning its covetousness. Paul says in Romans 7: 7, "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." It was especially after he considered the demand of God's law that we must not covet, and after he had considered himself, his own heart, that the apostle Paul cried out: "For

the good that I would I do not: but the evil that I would not, that I do.... O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:19, 24). Because of God's commandment against coveting, Paul realized that he was according to his sinful nature carnal and sold under sin. Yet he confesses that the law of God is good.

Coveting in its broadest sense refers to evil desire of every sort. In Exodus God speaks of coveting our neighbor's house, man servant, maid servant, ox, and ass. This is the condemnation of all evil desire for the goods God has given to our neighbor. It condemns materialism in all its forms. It condemns the love of money which is, according to the Bible, the root of all evil. It condemns greed, jealousy, hatred, selfishness, and pride with respect to earthly possessions. All these are forms of covetousness. The commandment in Exodus speaks of coveting the neighbor's wife, which is adultery and leads to the great evils of divorce and remarriage condemned by the Bible.

The Heidelberg Catechism states that the tenth commandments requires "that even the smallest inclination or thought, contrary to any of God's commandments, never arise in our hearts; but that at all times we hate all sin with our whole heart, and delight in all righteousness." This is the perfection required in God's holy and perfect law. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). The inspired apostle Peter in the same manner says, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Pet. 1:15 and 16).

The law of God reveals the fearful, absolute, and infinite perfection of God Himself. Man cannot dwell with this holy God except he also be holy as God is. We are not yet perfect unless we with our whole heart constantly, every

moment of our life, delight in all righteousness.

There is no law of man that can ever demand such perfection. Only the law of God can and does require such perfection. Many, even professing Christians, go through life imagining that mere outward observance of the law is sufficient. They do not see the need of condemning the evil thoughts and desires of their heart and mind and the urgency of waging a constant spiritual warfare against these. This was exactly the hypocrisy of the Pharisees so severely condemned by the Lord.

The Heidelberg Catechism then asks the important question whether there is any man who can keep this perfect law of God perfectly. The emphatic answer to this question is that even the most holy men have in this life but a small beginning of this new obedience.

Every honest Christian, when he places his heart and mind and not only his outward conduct under the all searching light of the law of God, knows that he stands condemned before God's law. Even as a Christian he is far from perfect. He agrees with the Heidelberg Catechism that even the most holy men have but a small beginning of the new obedience. It is true that there is a vast difference in holiness between one Christian and another. But who would dare to be so bold as to classify himself as one of the most holy men on earth? In fact, anyone who imagines that he has even for a day or an hour or a moment kept all the perfect demands of God's law is a liar and the truth is not in him (see I John 1:9, 10). The true child of God grieves deeply over his continuing sinfulness.

The Heidelberg Catechism however is not pessimistic or morbid regarding the Christian life. It goes on to say that the Christian, by the grace and Spirit of God, begins to live not only according to some but according to all of the commandments of God. Take note,



however, of the fact that this beginning to live according to the commandments of God is only by the grace and Spirit of God. We have no strength in ourselves to do so. All our strength to keep the law of God is of Christ alone—Christ who not only fully satisfied the righteous demands of the law on the cross (justification), but who also by His Holy Spirit works in our hearts (sanctification). Christ by His Spirit gives us the will and the desire to live by God's law. He gives us the intense longing to be perfect as God is perfect.

We begin to keep the law according to the principle of Christ in us. This work of Christ is His wonderful work of regeneration, according to which He has created in us a new heart. This principle is a sincere resolution in our life to keep not only some but all of the commandments of God. We cannot be satisfied with merely keeping some of God's commandments, and then congratulate ourselves, so to speak, at the end of the day for doing so well. We must keep all the commandments of God, neglecting none of them. The law of God is a perfect whole. To break one commandment is to break the whole of the perfect law of God. We must keep also the tenth commandment of God's law in all its perfect demands or we have not kept the law of God.

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches in Lord's Day 44 the whole perspective of Christian living in the light of the perfect law of God. We believe that this perspective is that of genuine Christian living. Such a perspective is little known in modern-day Christianity. The strict preaching of the law of God in church is an aid to sincere and true godliness and to the true fear of God in our lives. God gave His law to His redeemed people for that purpose.

The strict preaching of the law teaches us that we are still far from perfection. By the strict preaching of the law we learn more and more

our sinful nature. True growth in Christ involves first of all knowing more and more our sinful nature. This is absolutely necessary to keep us from the pride and hypocrisy of the Pharisees hated by the Lord. Notice that the Heidelberg Catechism speaks of our sinful nature. Our sin is far more serious than merely a matter of a few evil deeds we do every day, or a matter of a slight imperfection. We have a corrupt and sinful nature. Christ has given us a new heart by the wonder work of regeneration. But as long as we are in this life we still have a corrupt and sinful nature.

From this sinful nature proceed all kinds of evil thoughts and desires. We must abhor these thoughts and desires. We must flee from all things in life that stir up such evil thoughts and desires. We may not be satisfied with mere outward Christianity. We must fight against every evil inclination of our mind and heart. We hate and abhor all sin, not only in the world around us but also in our own sinful nature.

The strict preaching of the law teaches us our constant need of the cross of Christ Jesus. The perfect sacrifice of Christ once accomplished on the cross is the only ground of our righteousness before God. Our law works cannot contribute anything to this righteousness. But the cross of Christ is also the power of our new life, our life of gratitude to God, which is a life lived by the law of God.

When the perfect law of God teaches us how sinful we still are, we are driven daily to the cross to seek the forgiving mercy of Christ. This is real and daily Christian living. This is genuine Christianity. Without this there is only pharisaical hypocrisy. We need the cross of Christ every day. We must earnestly seek that cross each day for forgiveness. There is nothing like the real knowledge of our continual sinfulness that drives the true child of God to fall on his knees before the cross of Christ. At

the cross we receive daily also the strength that we need to fight against and overcome our sin.

When the law of God sets before us the absolute perfection of God and we realize our own imperfection, as Christians we begin more and more to long for what the catechism speaks of as the perfection proposed to us in the life to come. This is a true longing for heaven.

What causes you to long for heaven, dear reader? Many of us have quite an enjoyable life on earth. We have our nice cars and our beautiful and comfortable homes. We enjoy our children and grandchildren and just love to watch them as they are growing up. We have exciting vacations planned long ahead of time. Why should we long to go to heaven? We are having too much fun here. The answer of the Word of God, I believe, is that we long for heaven because we are grieved about our continuing sinfulness. Nothing more than that causes us to long earnestly for heaven. We are deeply grieved about our own continuing sinfulness and long to be delivered from the body of this sin (Rom. 7:25). We long to be made perfect as God our heavenly Father is perfect. This will finally take place only when Jesus comes again to take us to heaven.

Christ Jesus has obtained absolute heavenly perfection for us. In heaven we will dwell in the presence of God and His Son Jesus Christ in sinless perfection. This will be our great joy and glory in heaven.

We close with the words of the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:21: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself." □



# "Behold These Glorifications!"

(John 12:20-33)

**I**t was dark. Very dark. It was the darkness of sin. The time of the power of darkness....

The Devil's darkness! This world's prince. Dark ruler. Chaining men to darkness. Confusing darkness. Death's darkness.

For this was judgment. Judgment of the God who is light and in whom is no darkness at all. Who hates sin. Who sends the darkness plague. Dark deeds, dark heresies, dark rebellions deserve damning darkness.

God kills darkness. Justice, Godness, demand darkness' death.

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Behold! There is light! *Speaking* in the darkness! Last public discourse of light....

Light. Very Light!

There had been light. The first day! Yes! Out of the darkness of the face of the deep, light! Light too, in the garden, in the fellowship of God, Adam, and Eve.

But this is the light of another day. It is the light after the night. Out of sin's night...light! The redeeming light. Jesus Christ! Light of mercy and grace. *This* Godness of the same holy, just God, darkness Killer.

Behold! New light! Something

of it in Old Testament's tunnel. But now the end of that, the *dawn* of the gospel day.

Behold! Strange light. Strange: uncreated, divine, incarnate light. Strange: brilliant, source of all light. Brighter than a thousand suns. But dimmed. A man. A babe. A manger. Growing. Learning. Tempted. Suffering. Dying light.... Strange too: light of *grace*! We understand justice. We live by it and die by it. Dog eat dog. Sinners sin and fight and die. *But light of grace?* Light not scorching but saving sinners? Light dying, atoning, all but out, that we might live, and live in light?

Behold! Soon! *Glorification* of the light! Light going up honored and exalted. Light at the right hand of God. Jesus—light glori-

fied with the Father Himself and with the glory He had with Him before the world was. Father, unchangeable Light—glorified in the Son's brilliance. And, behold, *the graced*—the church glorified!

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Eye hath not seen...but it is revealed. Light revealed. And the glorification of the light is revealed. Many glorifications!

Listen! Look!

"The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." "And I, if I be lifted up from earth, will draw all men unto me."

In the inspired John. Searching by His light. Behold these glorifications!

## For Study, Meditation, & Discussion

### 1. We would see Jesus! (vv. 21, 22)

Certain Greeks were among them that came up (to Jerusalem) to worship at the Passover feast. They requested of Philip: "Sir, we would see Jesus!"

Is there any indication in their conduct, or their request, or in Jesus' response to their request, that these Greeks were true converts? Why do the Greeks go to Philip, and not directly to Jesus?

We would see Jesus too! Why is this our urgent request: that we

might see Jesus? How do we "see" Jesus today? At least one pulpit, I am told, has the request of the Greeks engraved on it. Comment on the relation between seeing Jesus and the preaching of the gospel.

### 2. Jesus announces His own glorification (v. 23-32).

What is this *glorification* of the Son of man? How does the language Jesus uses to express His glorification suggest the *pre-ordination* or divine appointment of His glorifi-

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cation? Refer to other texts which teach this same thing: the ordination of the glorification of Jesus. (Here's one: Colossians 1:15-20.)

Jesus' glorification will be only in the way of His humiliation and suffering, even unto death. Explain how Jesus teaches this by way of the analogy of a corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying (v. 24). Explain how Jesus teaches this in verses 32-34.

At the time of this announcement of His glorification Jesus experiences this humiliation and suffering. "Now is my soul troubled," Jesus says, as He wrestles with the prospect of the terrible suffering He must endure (v. 27). This terrible commotion of soul is like unto that which the Savior would soon feel in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26: 38, 39). *How* is this anguish of soul *possible* for Jesus, Son of God? *Why* is it *necessary*?

### 3. The announcement of the glorification of the Father (vv. 28-30).

To Jesus' request, "Father, glorify thy name," a voice from heaven replies (v. 28): "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."

What do these words mean? When did the Father glorify His name, and when *shall* He?

What is the relation between the glorification of the Son and the glorification of the Father (cf. John 5:23; Hint: consider also: *what is the Name of God?*)?

Why, at this time and others (e.g., Jesus' baptism; Mount of Transfiguration), did the Father speak, audibly, to Jesus? What does Jesus mean in verse 30 when He says that this voice from heaven was not because of, or on account of, Himself, but for the sake of those to whom He was speaking?

4. The announcement of the glorification of the church (vv. 24-32). The glorification of the church is described in various ways in the passage. Jesus speaks of the "life

eternal" which the self-denying believer shall have (v. 25). He mentions the "honor" that the Father will give to believers (v. 26). He speaks of drawing all unto Himself (v. 32).

Recall other passages which speak of the glorification of the church. Explain what "glorification" for us is. List several characteristics of this blessed state.

A major point Jesus is making in this passage is that this glorification, this salvation of the church, shall be *universal*—of a church of every nation. This point Jesus makes, I believe, in answer to the request of the Greeks to see Him (vv. 20, 23). The church will include Jews, and also Greeks! Upon the corn of wheat's dying, there will be "much fruit (v. 24). "All men" shall be drawn to Himself (v.32). Recall other passages which speak of the "church universal." Do we see the church manifest "universally" today? Where?

The church's glorification occurs only through her self-denial, service, and suffering. Explain what this is in light of verses 25, 26 and other passages. Explain this in light of the gospel of salvation by grace alone. In this suffering how is the church like her Lord? What are some important differences between Jesus' suffering and the church's suffering?

### 5. The glorification of Father, Son, and church occurs through the judgment of the world (v. 31).

Is this the same "world" of John 3:16, the world God "so loved"? Is this the world for which Jesus does not pray (John 17:9)? Is this the world for which Jesus is the propitiation (I John 2:2)? Comment on the inspired John's use of the term "world."

Even as the glorification of the Son, and the elect church in Him, is ordained, so the condemnation of the wicked, unbelieving, reprobate world is ordained. This is the doctrine of reprobation. Prove this from Scripture. Where in the con-

fessions of the church is this taught? Why is it so important to maintain the doctrine of reprobation?

When Jesus says "now" is the judgment of the world, He is speaking of the fact that His death on the cross will be the condemnation for certain ones, even an entire world of them (cf. vv. 32, 33). How is a world's judgment effected and sealed through Jesus' death on the cross?

When the world is judged, the prince of this world is cast out (v. 31b). Show from Scripture that the reference is to *Satan's* being cast out. To what does his being *cast out* refer? How is the crucifixion of Jesus the casting out of Satan (cf. Gen. 3:15; Matt. 12:29; Luke 11:21, 22; Rom. 16:20; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2: 14, 15; Rev. 20:1-3, 10)?

Is there any sense in which the cross is the judgment of the *Church* (cf. Is. 1:27)?

Compare the *preliminary* judgment of the world, on the cross, with the *final* judgment, when our Lord comes again (cf. Amos 5:18, 20).

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

Behold these glorifications! Of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, of the Father, of the church!

They are revealed. The Word of God, the gospel, is the message of the exaltation of God and all that is of God.

But still there is this present darkness. The light of these glorifications is commonly comprehended not. How is it possible for one still in the midst of sin and death, not yet taken into and up to the glory, to see and to rejoice in the present and future glorifications? What will you see...today? This year? □



## Studies in the Life of Christ (1): Christ Circumcised and Presented to the Lord

**A**t present in this rubric we are "taking heed to the doctrine" of Christ (Christology). Rev. S. Key has been writing on this subject from the perspective of Reformed dogmatics. As I join him in writing under this rubric, I plan to present doctrinal studies based on specific scriptural passages. For the doctrine of Christ we will consider some aspects of His life and work from the perspective of the gospel accounts. I believe we will also find these biblical studies to be rich in doctrine and will profit from "taking heed" to them.

We begin with a look at the very early life of Christ on earth, specifically the eighth and fortieth days of His life. Our passage of study is Luke 2:21-24, with consideration also given to the testimonies of Simeon and Anna concerning the newborn Christ in verses 25-38. You are encouraged to look up and read this passage before reading on (Go ahead, get your Bible!).

### Christ Circumcised and Named

According to Luke 2:21 Joseph and Mary's son was circumcised on the eighth day. This was, of course, the mandate of the Lord (Gen.

17:9ff.; Lev. 12:3). Joseph and Mary showed their faithful obedience to God's law by seeing to this circumcision. Yet this act was much more than mere conformity to the law; it was a highly significant act, especially in Jesus' case. First, it signified Christ's subjection to the law: "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). This subjection was not just out of respect for God and His commandments. It belonged to the heart of Christ's mission as the Savior. He was the Second Adam, sent to be responsible to keep the law in the place of His people, who had broken that law in the first Adam. He was *the* Child of Israel, sent to fulfill the law for the sake of the rest of the children of Israel (i.e., the elect church), who had violated that law throughout their history. As He Himself said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17). It is important to remember that circumcision was a seal of the righteousness which is by faith (Rom. 4:11). This righteousness is not ours, but Christ's. His circumcision verifies that He came to obtain a perfect righteousness for us through His subjection to and obedience of the law.

Second, Christ's circumcision was significant in that it marked Him as a covenant child, indeed, as *the* covenant Child. When God

instituted this external sign, He did so in connection with the covenant He had made with Abraham and his seed (cf. Gen. 17). Circumcision was to be a concrete, visible token of the covenant between God and His people. But that covenant bond of friendship and fellowship between God and His own could not be established and realized except through *the* Seed of Abraham, the Mediator of the covenant of grace, Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). When Abraham and his seed were circumcised, God was already pointing them to that Son of the covenant (cf. Gal. 3:16). Appropriately, therefore, when that Son is born, He is given the sign of God's covenant. He is marked out as the One through whom God will reconcile His people to Himself and establish with them His covenant of peace.

Third, the significance of Christ's circumcision is to be found in the fact that it pointed specifically to His saving, covenantal work as Mediator. Circumcision was a bloody sign. It involved the cutting off and putting away of a piece of the male foreskin. As such, it pictured the sinner's justification and sanctification through the shedding of blood. He (as well as she!) needed to be justified because of his (her) guilty unrighteousnesses. He needed to be sanctified because of the presence of his sinful "flesh." This could be accomplished only by the shedding

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of blood, i.e., Christ's atoning blood. When Christ received this bloody sign, then, His saving work of justifying and sanctifying His people through the shedding of His own blood was pictured. From His circumcision we may know that He came to bear the sins of His people and "cut them away" by giving His blood on the cross. It is through the work of the circumcised Child of the covenant that we are forgiven and cleansed, and in that way given the legal right and the moral fitness to be God's covenant children.

Fourth, the circumcision of Christ was significant because it included His naming. This is actually what the gospel writer Luke focuses on. On this eighth day the name "Jesus" was given to this baby boy. This is what Joseph and Mary had been instructed by God through His angel to call their son (cf. Luke 1:31; Matt. 1:21). Also in this name is the gospel of our salvation. For the name means "Jehovah saves," or "Jehovah's salvation." This Child is none other than the revelation of Jehovah the Savior, the faithful covenant Lord come down to take on human nature in order to save His people from their sins! It is this which the aged Simeon saw by faith and gave expression to in his beautiful *Nunc Dimittis*: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (vv. 29-30). Is this also your spiritual vision of and confession concerning Him?

#### **Christ's Presentation to the Lord**

The second thing we wish to examine in Luke 2:21-24 is Joseph and Mary's presentation of Christ to the Lord in the temple. This took place in connection with Mary's purification. According to God's law a woman who bore a man child was ceremonially unclean for a period of forty days (Lev. 12). When this time was completed, she was restored to the worship of the

temple by bringing an offering for her purification (which proves that also Mary was a sinner and needed Christ for her Savior, something she herself confessed, cf. Luke 1:46ff.). It was at this time that Joseph and Mary also took Jesus with them in order to present Him to the Lord. They did this too in obedience to God's law, for it was written, "Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord" (v. 23). The reference is to Exodus 13:2 where God said, "Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine." God gave this directive in connection with Israel's deliverance from Egypt through the slaying of Egypt's firstborn. God was declaring that while He was destroying the firstborn of the wicked, He was saving Israel as His own firstborn son (cf. Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1). By having His people sanctify their firstborn, God was having them declare that the nation as a whole was God's firstborn.

Because He was Mary's firstborn son, Jesus was subject to this charge. But once again, what God said about the firstborn of Israel was fully realized in Mary's firstborn son Jesus. He was supremely sanctified (holy) unto God. For He was set apart for and consecrated to the Lord God as the Savior who would deliver God's true Israel, His elect firstborn, from the bondage of sin (typified in Egypt's bondage) and from the wrath of God which he deserved (pictured in the angel of death that passed through Egypt killing her firstborn). Furthermore, Jesus was specially the Lord's. Concerning Him God said, "He is mine," both because Jesus was God's only begotten Son sent into the world by God, and because only through Jesus did all the other children of God belong to the Lord. We are the Lord's as His firstborn only because Jesus is the Lord's as His first Firstborn. This is what was signified when

Jesus was presented to the Lord in the temple on that fortieth day.

But that's not all. In addition, this presentation of Jesus involved His being redeemed. Luke does not mention this, but it was an important part of the ceremony. According to Exodus 13:13, 15 and Numbers 18:16 the firstborn males in Israel had to be redeemed, i.e., they had to be bought back. Because they were the Lord's, the firstborn sons had to be purchased from God by the parents at a cost of five shekels. It was this redemption which Joseph and Mary also had to make with regard to Jesus at the time they presented Him to the Lord. What we have, then, in this incident in Jesus' life is the Redeemer being redeemed! Was this a sign of His own purpose in coming into the world? Absolutely! He came to redeem His people, to buy them out of their sin and death and restore them to the freedom of covenant family life with God. As Jesus said, He came to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). That was the price He would pay for our redemption—His own life on the cross. It was for this work of the Messiah that the remnant were looking, and it was of this work that Anna spoke according to verse 38.

But what a sign was this of Jesus' humiliation too! The One who would buy us out of sin's bondage and bring us into the glorious liberty of the children of God at the cost of His own life was Himself bought back by his parents for the price of five shekels! Our precious Redeemer was purchased for a pittance! Ponder that. And remember that this humiliation was necessary for Him to redeem us. It was precisely through His lowliness that Jesus paid our ransom and set us free. Wonderful Savior! Amazing salvation! Marvelous mercy of God! Hallelujah! □



# Hinduism

**H**induism is of great importance due to the fact that approximately 700 million people, or 14% of the world's population, adhere to this religion. Over 82% of India is committed to Hinduism, and more than one million adherents are found in North America.<sup>1</sup> Hinduism has also spawned three other movements which have become world religions; Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. These facts prompt us to ask a few questions: What does it mean to be a Hindu? What does the Hindu believe?

In the Hindu religion, as in most other pagan religions, there is a great degree of latitude. There is a great divergence between the traditionalists and those who represent modern thought. Traditional Hindus would insist that only one who is a native of India can be a Hindu; a Hindu cannot be a foreigner, a Christian, a Muslim, or a member of any other religious community. According to the traditional Hindu, a Hindu is born, not made. An American may hold the very same beliefs as his Indian friend, but he remains an outsider. There is only one path by which, according to orthodox Hindus, one may enter into the Hindu fold—let him live a pious life, and then, after many transmigrations, his soul may at last be born into a Hindu family.<sup>2</sup>

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The great goal of the Hindu is deliverance, emancipation, and liberty. From a negative point of view that goal is to be loosed from something felt to be undesirable—the cycle of rebirth and attachment to the material world. On the positive side the Hindu seeks a sense of calm and security, the power to be and to do. Most of the time, however, this salvation is spoken of in negative terms—doing away with the material, evil, and grief.

In order to understand Hinduism more fully we must examine three basic ideas: pantheism, karma, and reincarnation.

## Pantheism

First, the Hindu believes that his soul must be identified with god. Each person is like a droplet of water out of the ocean of god, and the goal of life is to be reunited to god. The soul is everlasting, and the soul is the true self, the *atman*. The soul is united to god, and every religious practice of the Hindu is directed toward the realization of this oneness with god. To know oneself is to know god. To grasp the full meaning and significance of this oneness is to realize the essence of Hinduism. The old and oft-repeated Hindu phrase which expresses this is: "God and I are one."

This notion of Hinduism goes far beyond the teaching of the Bible that God's people are the children of God and that their lives are a reflection of God's life within them. The Christian believes that he is an image bearer of God—the Hindu believes that he and his god are

one.

## Karma

Secondly, the idea of karma is central to Hinduism. Karma, loosely translated, means destiny or fate and has to do with both good and bad occurrences. To the Hindu, karma is an unchangeable law. A man is what he is with respect to his place in life because of his karma. The Hindu explains everything in life—suffering, blessings, sorrow, joy, high caste, low caste, pauper, priest, poor, rich with the words: "It is karma." If one is poor or in a low caste, nothing can or may be done to change that situation. If something happens to an individual, it is karma. Everything in life is due to unchangeable karma. It is because of this conviction that Hindus refuse to help out the poor, or even someone in need. They would not dare to give to the poor, lest they violate the karma of that individual. Likewise, they would not stop and help someone in need, perhaps with a flat tire, because to do so would be to go against the karma of those people.

Karma not only applies to this present life, but also to the life to come, as is expressed in the third basic belief of Hinduism—reincarnation.

<sup>1</sup> These facts are taken from *The Compact Guide to World Religion*, Dean C. Halverson, general editor (Bethany House: Minneapolis, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Less orthodox Hindus have received foreigners after certain ceremonies and a change of name.



## Reincarnation

Thirdly, crucial to the Hindu religion is the matter of reincarnation. Reincarnation simply means that the soul of man, his *atman*, is in a constant revolution of births and rebirths. The Hindu believes not only that he will live forever, but also that he has already lived before. If a man dies, he will live again on the earth to reap the reward of his previous acts. This wheel of life explains the variety of personalities, the gap between rich and poor, good and bad, wise and foolish. It produces a solution to the question why some die young and why others live to be old. All of this is due to the fact that they were either good or bad in their previous life. It is their karma.

Reincarnation prepares the Hindu for eventual union with god in a state of immortal bliss. This union is the aim and purpose of life, and through birth after birth man is given the chance to merge eventually into the soul of god. The soul of man always exists and will always be present in the world until it is merged with god who is the soul of souls.<sup>3</sup>

## In General

The Hindu believes that god is one, but at the same time he confesses that there are many gods. All gods are representations of the one true god. The one true god is Brahma, who has the power to create. Representatives of Brahma include Krishna, the god with the power of preservation; Shiva, the god of destruction; Indra, the god of the firmament; Varuna, the all-seeing god; Agni, the god of fire; Soma, the personification of the juice of the soma plant. There are gods and goddesses galore. Certain animals are seen to be symbols of various gods. The god Krishna, for example, is worshiped through the cow. Feeding a cow is an act of worship, as is the use even of the cow's urine in various purification rites. Although some Hin-

dus eat meat, the majority of them are vegetarian, since reverence for the cow is extended to reverencing all the animals.

The book of Hinduism is the *Bhagavad-Gita*, a dialogue between the god Krishna, and Arjuna, a disciple. The theme of the book is to teach individuals how to recognize men who know the truth and are illumined. To the *Bhagavad-Gita* must also be added another book: The four collections of the holy *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. The *Vedas* are full of knowledge and advice concerning creation and the life of man—following the form of the Psalms and Proverbs somewhat. The *Upanishads* are mystical writings consisting of 108 poems which search for meaning in life and the universe and explain the great ideas of identification, karma, and reincarnation.

The Hindu is on the road to hell. He denies that salvation is through the name of Jesus Christ, and his religion is self-seeking and meritorious and does not honor Jehovah as God alone.

## Hinduism in America

Acupuncture, vegetarian diets, and alternative healing attempts are not as innocent as they may seem. Thousands of Hindus from India and other Hindu countries have emigrated to America bringing many concepts of their religion with them. Hinduism is rapidly influencing our culture, as is evident in many different ways, some conscious and some more unconsciously.

Many Americans view yoga simply as a discipline which strengthens the body and provides relaxation to the mind. Businesses are employing these techniques in an attempt to reduce their medical insurance costs and improve the health of their employees. In the context of Hinduism, yoga and meditation are the means by which a person strives for salvation. Salvation is achieved when the dualism of self and Brahma is overcome

and all selfhood is lost. Movements such as transcendental meditation recommend yoga to reach this goal.

Rajan Rajbhandari from Nepal has exposed the strong Hindu beliefs which were present in *The Star Wars Trilogy* by George Lucas. He writes: "Of the trilogy, *The Empire Strikes Back* seems to portray Hinduism in the fullest sense." He finds evidence of Hinduism in the concept of life being an illusion, the desire of identification with the Force, and religious cremation. Similar concepts are increasingly being found in children's cartoons and video games, as well as through the filth portrayed on MTV.<sup>4</sup>

## Bringing the Gospel to the Hindu

Once we have established an open communication with a Hindu, we must talk about the promise of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. The Hindu religion has no concept of forgiveness. Evil deeds simply accumulate and add to one's negative karma, thus making the prospect of escape to a higher life hopeless. The elect child of God in the bondage of Hinduism will be troubled by this lack of forgiveness and the hopeless nature of the religion. There is no hope of salvation or comfort to be found in an inherently meritorious religion such as Hinduism. The joy of the gospel is that Jesus Christ removes the burden of our sin and guilt. We do not need to pay our debt, and that debt is not transferred to our next life. Forgiveness, rest, peace, and joy are found in Jesus Christ alone.

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3 Along with the *Compact Guide to World Religions*, another helpful source for understanding Hinduism is: *Eerdman's Handbook to the World's Religions*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1993).

4 The article, "Star Wars and Hinduism," was published in the HSC newsletter and is posted on the internet.



The fact that God is a personal God is also of highest importance. Sin hurts God! Sin is a violation of God's holiness and righteousness. Brahma is impersonal. Sin merely increases one's bad karma, it has no direct effect on Brahma. To "know" Brahma is to lose your identity as a distinct and separate individual. To know God is to enter into fellowship with Him as separate individual beings. The Hindu religion lacks the heart of true religion: Covenant fellowship

with Jehovah which is made possible by Jesus Christ.

We must be aware of the fact that Hinduism is a very diverse religion. As is always the case, it is more important to listen than to speak when first trying to understand a Hindu. It is very difficult to reach Hindus because of the fact that the religion is so closely tied to their culture. Cultural pride and sensitivity to the impact on their family will keep many from con-

sidering the truths of the gospel. Christianity is often associated with materialism and the exploiting of others. Regardless of all of these barriers, we rejoice in the sovereign power of God. God knows the heart, and therefore will either harden or soften the individual. God is able to break down these barriers and cause His elect children to see true comfort and joy. We witness with the confidence that God will use our humble means to accomplish His will. □

## Book Reviews

*The Question of Woman: The Collected Writings of Charlotte von Kirschbaum.* Tr. John Shepherd. Ed. and with an Introduction by Eleanor Jackson. Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1996. x + 202 pages. \$16 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

Those who read Eberhard Busch's biography of Karl Barth, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, had to wonder about the relationship between Barth and his assistant and secretary, Charlotte von Kirschbaum. The young woman moved into the Barth home, spent the summer months alone with Barth in a chalet in the countryside, and was his sole traveling companion on various lecture tours. Busch acknowledged that the relationship between Barth and von Kirschbaum brought "unspeakably deep suffering" into the Barth home, estranged some of his children, and inflicted shame and grief on Barth's hardworking, faithful wife, Nelly.

In the long introduction to this collection of von Kirschbaum's writings, the editor, who is sympathetic to von Kirschbaum and her relationship to Barth, admits that there was a "romantic involvement" of the married Barth with

the "strikingly beautiful" von Kirschbaum.

Such was the open intimacy between Barth and his assistant that officials of the World Council of Churches were offended by Barth's living arrangements with von Kirschbaum at the meeting of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948.

There are two astounding aspects to the open, illicit relationship between the renowned theologian and his co-worker. The first is that Barth's wife tolerated the relationship to the point that she was willing to share Barth's arms with von Kirschbaum on the occasion of a public ceremony honoring Barth on his seventieth birthday and that she had von Kirschbaum buried with herself in the Barth grave as Barth desired.

The second is the silence of the neo-orthodox and evangelical scholars who are disciples of Barth. Why does none speak out in condemnation of career-long, unrepented adultery? Does theological fame blot out gross violation of the seventh commandment? A church that exercised the discipline required by Christ would have deposed Barth from office and excommunicated him, and von Kirschbaum, from the kingdom of heaven on the ground of gross public sin.

If the first section of *The Question of Woman* is a testimony to a scandalous life, the second section

propounds erroneous doctrine. In five chapters, von Kirschbaum sets forth the significance and place of a woman in the church in the light of Scripture. Chapter one examines the woman's place in marriage in light especially of Ephesians 5. Chapter two discusses Christ's redemption of the woman with specific application to marriage, although single life is also considered. Chapter three deals with the issue of the ordination of women as preachers. Chapter four investigates the biblical teaching about Mary, the mother of Jesus. The excursus attached to this chapter is a comprehensive description of the Roman Catholic dogmas of Mary. Chapter five is mainly a critique of the existentialist thought on woman of Simone de Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex*. An appendix returns to the issue of the ordination of women to the preaching office in the church.

von Kirschbaum argues that gifted women should be permitted to be preachers and rulers in the church. Basic to this position is her rejection of "any concept of office" in the New Testament. As for the opposition to women's teaching and ruling in I Timothy 2, this is explained away as a reaction to "a particular tendency toward arrogance on the part of the women at Ephesus." Opponents of women preachers are dismissed as guilty



of "a legalistic use of isolated passages" and of "all too human 'prejudices.'"

This is not to suggest that there is nothing worthwhile in von Kirschbaum's treatment of the "question of woman." As her collaboration with Barth indicates, she was an able theologian. Her description of the Roman Catholic doctrine of Mary is helpful, and her analysis of this heresy is penetrating.

von Kirschbaum is by no

means the most radical of feminists. Indeed, she shames present feminists in the Reformed churches. She readily recognizes that headship in Ephesians 5 is "a position of superiority" to which "governing" belongs. She also acknowledges that the submission of Ephesians 5 is due, not to sin but to God's ordering of creation.

Marriage, she contends convincingly, is a "bond" that in its essence is "indestructible and therefore indissoluble." She has

good, even profound, things to say about the marriage of a man and a woman. Barth too has a moving description of marriage in the *Church Dogmatics*.

This strikes an orthodox Reformed Christian as exceedingly odd, in view of their own continuing subversion of Barth's marriage in life and deed.

No doubt, a neo-orthodox theology of paradox results in an equally paradoxical "Christian" life. □

## News From Our Churches

## Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Mission Activities

Rev. A. Brummel, pastor of the Edgerton, MN PRC, left for the Philippines Tuesday morning, December 2. He was scheduled to meet Rev. A. denHartog, pastor of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, in Osaka, Japan. Together from there, the Lord willing, they planned to travel to and visit two locations on the island of Mindanao, then proceed to the island of Luzon for a conference on Calvinism in the city of Daet, and conclude with meeting contacts in Manila. They will have a busy schedule of speaking and preaching for several groups of people with whom we have been in contact for quite some time. They will be giving lectures and preaching in four locations, following up on the visit of the Kortering's earlier in 1997. The men expect to return home on Monday, December 15. This visit is on behalf of our Foreign Mission Committee, as mandated by Synod 1997.

Prof. H. Hanko, from our churches' seminary, recently re-

turned from Singapore, where he had been busy for a month assisting Rev. Kortering with the Bible School that the ERCS has established. However, the professor did not get much time to relax, since he and his wife were anticipating leaving on December 11 for a visit to Northern Ireland to assist Rev. Ron Hanko, especially in the work in Wales. God willing, Prof. Hanko will travel first to South Wales and spend a long weekend there. Then, after the Christmas holidays, he planned to travel to North Wales and spend some time there. Among other things, he will be speaking and preaching about 15 times in the space of a couple of weeks. Between the visits to North and South Wales, Prof. and Mrs. Hanko hoped to spend some time in Northern Ireland to visit with his son, his wife, and their family, and also to meet with the consistory of the Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland and to preach for the congregation there.

### Congregational Activities

Candidate Daniel Kleyn and his wife Sharon were expected to arrive on November 29 in Edgerton, MN. Plans called for him to fill the pulpit, teach catechism, and lead societies in our PR congregation there, while their pastor, Rev. A. Brummel, was gone

for two weeks to the Philippines.

We also note, in passing, that the same responsibilities fell to Seminarian Nathan Brummel, who spent the last few months in Hope PRC in Redlands, CA on part of his internship.

The Men's and Ladies' Societies of Edgerton PRC met on December 8 for their annual Christmas social. Candidate Kleyn was scheduled to give a presentation on the Evangelical Presbyterian Churches of Australia, and also inform the society members about our mission work in Northern Ireland and Wales.

The consistory of the Trinity PRC in Houston, TX has recommended to their congregation that they disband by the end of 1998 if there is no significant growth in the congregation. With sadness, but in the confidence that this is the Lord's will and is for the spiritual welfare of their members, the consistory adopted this recommendation. Grounds for this decision were the decreasing membership and the lack of potential for an ongoing consistory. How can we not remember these members in our prayers as they look for God's leading in the coming months?

At a November 11 congregational meeting, the members of our Edgerton, MN PRC made decisions regarding money left to them in the

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



estate of one of their late members. A five-year financial proposal was approved, with approximately \$102,000 being put in one fund and \$50,000 in another. The smaller fund will pay monthly checks to the church and will be paid out in five years. This will take the place of their subsidy and provide the ability to give to other valid causes. The larger will remain untouched until needs arise.

#### Minister Activities

A few weeks ago, emeritus minister Rev. George Lubbers suffered another heart attack, and a bacterial infection in his blood. Presently he continues to make good progress toward recovery. His infection has cleared up and he has even taken a few steps again with the aid of a walker. It is hoped that, by the time you read this, he will have moved to the assisted living section of Raybrook

Manor in Grand Rapids, MI. We remember him and all our emeriti ministers in our prayers.

Rev. A. denHartog has declined the call he received from the South Holland, IL PRC.

#### *Food for Thought*

"No one can possibly go forward in the strength of the Lord until he has first learned to stand still in his own helplessness." □

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church express their Christian sympathy to Mr. James VanderKolk and family in the death of his mother,

##### MRS. LORRAINE VANDER KOLK.

May they find comfort in these words from Isaiah 54:10, "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

Rev. Audred Spriensma, Pres.  
Cornelius R. Jonker, Clerk

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of Southeast PRC express their deepest sympathy to Mrs. Nell Phillips in the death of her sister,

##### ANN VELDMAN.

May she find comfort in God's Word, "Behold, I shew you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (I Corinthians 15:51, 52).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, President  
Tim Pipe, Clerk

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's and Ladies' Society of First PRC of Holland, MI express Christian sympathy to Henry VanderKolk in the death of his wife,

##### LORRAINE VANDER KOLK.

May he find comfort in the words of Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Cornelius Doezeema, President  
Nancy Bosman, Secretary

#### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 8, 1998,

##### MR. and MRS. FRED HUIZINGA

will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary.

We thank our heavenly Father for them: and for His love, care, and instruction given to us through them.

We pray that God will continue to bless them and keep them in His care. "For the Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- \* Rick and Terri Huizinga
  - \* Jack and Melissa Huizinga
  - \* Dan and Carol Huizinga
  - \* Doc and Jan Kuiper
  - \* Larry and Ruth Burgess
- 22 grandchildren

Grand Rapids, Michigan

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Society of Southwest PRC extends its heartfelt Christian sympathy to members Dirk and Beth Westra and family in the loss of her father,

##### ALLEN FABER.

May they find comfort in these words, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28).

Rev. R. Cammenga, Pres.  
Jill Kamps, Sec'y.

#### SB INDEX

A 600-page, 2-volume, subject/title/textual index to the 73 existing bound-volumes of the SB is almost ready for printing. Per-copy costs for a project like this are in the nature of the case high. (We do not expect our \$49.00 price to cover all of our costs.) But the index will be a valuable tool for individuals, churches, and schools which have a good number of the bound volumes in their library. We plan to print no more indexes than are needed to fill orders received by the end of February. So, don't miss out—write or call the business office today.

Incidentally, we do have a limited number of bound-volumes from 31 to 73. For details, enquire of the business office.

#### REMINDER

Don't forget the deadline for orders for the RFPA reprint (*Believers and Their Seed*) advertised by insert in the November 15 issue of the SB. In order to take advantage of the introductory price, the card must be returned by January 31.