



# *The Standard Bearer*

**A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine**

## **In This Issue:**

Meditation — <i>Rev. Meindert Joostens</i> <b>Christian Apology</b> .....	458
Editorial — <i>Prof. David J. Engelsma</i> <b>The Reformed Worldview</b> <b>3. The Failure of Common Grace (cont.)</b> .....	460
All Around Us — <i>Rev. Gise VanBaren</i> .....	463
In His Fear — <i>Rev. Arie denHartog</i> <b>Decision Making and the Will of God</b> .....	464
Contribution — <i>Rev. Dale H. Kuiper</i> <b>That Parenthesis in the Third Question</b> .....	468
Marking the Bulwarks of Zion — <i>Prof. Herman C. Hanko</i> <b>Sabellius the Unitarian</b> .....	469
Guest Article — <i>Rev. David Higgs</i> <b>Introduction to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia</b> .....	472
Ministering to the Saints — <i>Prof. Robert D. Decker</i> <b>The Elders and <i>Censura Morum</i></b> .....	474
Search the Scriptures — <i>Rev. Mitchell C. Dick</i> <b>McSocieties, McVansma, &amp; You</b> .....	476
News From Our Churches — <i>Mr. Benjamin Wigger</i> .....	478

**Vol. 74, No. 20  
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# A Christian Apology

*"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."*

I Peter 3:15

**L**ike Abraham of old, we are pilgrims and strangers on the earth. We have no abiding place here below, but seek a heavenly homeland. For this very reason we are so different from the world by which we are surrounded. They oftentimes do not understand our actions and behavior. They find it hard to believe we will not run with them in their lustful ways. How could they understand? They cannot even begin to understand the hope that is within us. They operate on the level of the earthly and carnal. They seek the mundane and are not able to set their sights on the higher

things of heavenly bliss and glory which they cannot see. So they look at us askance as we walk seeking the kingdom of heaven and refusing to become involved in their concerns of the flesh.

From time to time the world will even take harsh exception to our way of living and will persecute us. This is, no doubt, what Peter has mind in the context of the verse we are considering together. For just before this we read, "...if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: be not afraid of their terror neither be troubled." When the world takes exception to our life and conversation we must not be afraid or disquieted, but be ready to give an account to those who ask us for a reason of the hope within us! That is a calling which, I fear, we often neglect. It is far easier to walk the way of least resistance, to walk

away and not face the issue. But we do not have that as a legitimate option, though we often sinfully exercise it!

God tells us here in His Word that we must be ready to give an *apology* to those who ask. No, I did not misread what Peter has to say here in this epistle. The word "apology" is what we literally find here! We would immediately protest. As Christians who walk a godly life in obedience to God's Word and in anticipation of heaven, we have nothing to apologize for. But do not misunderstand. We use the word "apology" in a different sense. The word has come to mean, almost exclusively, a confession. We apologize for having done something amiss. We tell our children, when they have mistreated each other or done one another wrong, to say they are sorry. That is how we understand an apology

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or to apologize. If you look in the dictionary, however, you will find the first meaning (even today) to be, rather, an intelligent and rational defense of a certain proposition or truth! That's what Peter had in mind. As children of God in the midst of the world, we do not have to be sorry for who we are and how we live! When we strive after a sanctified life we are not in the wrong, but stand in obedience to God and serve Him as we are called to do. It is the world, in their ungodliness and rebellion against His Word and commandments and in their persecution and mockery of us, that is wrong. One day they will know that and suffer for it eternally! But meanwhile, as they question us, we are required to give an *apology*, that is, a good defense, for the hope that motivates us to live as we do in this world.

The world wants to know why we live the way we do. The whole of our life-style provokes this question! The way we live attracts attention in the midst of this world. This is not because we are of a mind to do things a little differently in order that others may take note of us. It is not our desire to be noticed or to gain some sort of notoriety. We would just as soon lead quiet and peaceable lives here upon earth. But we cannot help but be noticed and marked as different and rather peculiar because of who we are! Now that is not a matter of adopting certain styles and behaviors that make us stand out. There are some who crave that kind of attention. They deliberately go against the norm in society in order that they may stand out. They like the attention! But for us it is a matter of living the conviction of our hearts, and of living according to the principle of the new and heavenly life that has been placed within us. God has made us distinctive! He has made separation between us and the world from a spiritual point of view in that He has changed us in our heart

of hearts and made us citizens of the kingdom of His dear Son. It is not simply a matter of our acting a little strange in the midst of this world, but of our *being strangers* in the earth! It is the spiritual principle of regeneration, which God has wrought in us His chosen children, that makes us wholly distinct and unique. And it is that principle of regeneration that so begins to dominate our living as to make us appear rather odd to others who do not share in that powerful transforming work of God.

The world cannot understand why we live the way we do! Why do we spend glorious and sunny weekends sitting in stuffy old buildings called churches? And then sit still in order to listen to dry sermons for an hour or more! Why do we allocate a large portion of our budget and hard-earned monies to finance the ministry of the gospel and other kingdom causes—to say nothing of Christian school expense? And then some are even so odd as to deny themselves good or better paying and more profitable jobs because they will not move away from a certain church or belong to an ungodly union! The world cannot fathom why we do not live for the things of this world which are so all-important to them. And they consider it so strange that, from time to time, we should be offended by the things they do and say. The world cannot understand our living a life of self-denial and sacrifice. How can they? They are blind to what is important and of true value. They are ignorant of the distinction between what is true and abiding and what is but of the moment and passing. Being wholly carnal in their minds, they follow the philosophy of the world, let us "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die."

The ungodly are not able to see the great treasure and inheritance we have from God in Christ Jesus our Lord and therefore have no appreciation for our longing after that

treasure! They think themselves rich in the frivolity and treasures this world can offer, but in reality they are poverty stricken. They are without the true treasure of Christ in whom we have all things. Soon death will claim them, and their belongings will be passed on to others. More serious, not being clothed with the robes of Christ's righteousness they will face their Maker, who is the Judge of all men!

But as the wicked dance their way to hell, they will often ask of us a reason of the hope that is in us. We are, no doubt, often asked this question? It cannot help but come up when we refuse to run with the world in their rioting and lustful excesses. What answer do we give? Are we ready to make our *apology*? It is required of us! We must give a defense of our life-style as it becomes those who live hopefully.

Such an apology is not simply an emotional response in which we state that we are Christians. Nor may it consist of a lame excuse for being a Christian. But it must be a good, logical, and reasonable defense and reason why we walk as we do here below! To be able to give such a defense we must be well versed in the Word of God, which contains the promise of our future hope. Our Heidelberg Catechism, in Lord's Day 7, reminds us of the fact that an integral part of our faith is knowledge. We must know in order to believe. This is impressed upon young people when they make confession of their faith. Such a confession may not be a mere emotional feeling that has no basis in fact. It has not pleased God so to work salvation in His saints. God brings us through a "certain knowledge" of the truth to a "sure confidence" in the promises of His grace in Christ Jesus. And so, walking by faith, we must be ready to give a reasonable explanation as to why we behave as we do.

Now, don't misunderstand. Not reasonable according to the



wisdom of the world, which is pure foolishness with God. But, recognizing that our faith is eminently reasonable, we must be able to defend our walk by laying out the great design of the wonderful grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Not quickly brushing off the question, we must be able to take those who ask concerning our hope to our Bibles and witness to them of the greatness of God's glory and salvation shown us in Christ which is the deepest motivation of our godly living.

That responsibility doesn't belong just to a few preachers or elders, but this is the duty and obligation of each believer as he is asked to give a reason for the hope within him. Only the knowledge acquired through diligent and ongoing study of the Scriptures will give us the confidence and boldness we need to fulfill this calling!

Peter points us to the way in which this must be done. First of all, we must do this in the way of "sanctifying the Lord God in our hearts." God, in Christ, must be enthroned in our hearts. We must be dedicated to Christ, making Him our Lord and Master. And, notice,

that is a matter of the heart. Peter is not talking about some sort of outward conformity to the demands of the Word of God, but about a desire that comes from the new man in Christ who seeks to live after all the commandments of God. That desire, which is the beginning of a sanctified and holy life, will be seen by others. They will ask us to give an apology. If the request for such a defense is not heard, perhaps we must seriously examine ourselves to see whether we have sanctified our hearts to Christ's lordship! Unless daily submission to that lordship of Christ is evident in a godly walk, the question concerning it cannot surface. When we submit ourselves to the rule of our Lord Jesus Christ, our walk will corroborate our confession and give credence to our apology. Apart from that, no one will believe our apology.

Furthermore, Peter warns us against any haughtiness and pride. We must answer those who ask a reason of the hope according to which we walk with "meekness and fear." We may tend to be arrogant in our witness to the world,

but we have no reason to be proud. In ourselves we find nothing worthy of the object of the hope that is within us. We are, in ourselves, no better than the world which asks of us the reason for our peculiar walk among them. God, in His grace, has set us in covenant lines, or providentially brought us into contact with the gospel, and so instills that hope in our hearts. When we realize this, our reason for the hope within us will not be given with our noses in the air. Rather, our apology will go something like this: "My dear fellow, you ask me why I walk as a pilgrim and stranger in the earth? I am a wretched sinner like you, and if it were not for the Lord and His grace, I'd be walking with you. But the Lord has touched me and shown me the wonder of Calvary! Let me tell you about that.... Therefore, I live in reverent fear and thankfulness before God in anticipation of the great reward He has set aside for me in Christ!"

Such an apology honors God. And it may be according to His good pleasure through our godly conversation and witness to bring others to Christ. □

## Editorial

### The Reformed Worldview

## 3. The Failure of Common Grace (cont.)

Explaining why the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) repudiate Abraham Kuyper's worldview of common grace, the previous editorial contended that the worldview of common grace is neither biblical nor confessional.

A third reason is that, although there are scattered, ambiguous references to a "common grace" in the

writings of John Calvin, common grace in Calvin does not have the meaning, the prominence, or the role ascribed to it by Kuyper. This is to say that for the Reformer common grace is not the foundation and impetus of the Christian worldview.

In his fine study of Kuyper's Princeton lectures on a Calvinistic

worldview, Peter S. Heslam repeatedly calls attention to this remarkable fact. Heslam states that at Princeton Kuyper wanted to confront the Presbyterians with "the traditional teachings of the Reformed faith." He then adds, "the one exception to this pattern was the doctrine of common grace, which was not normally considered



one of the essential or fundamental doctrines of Calvinism, and does not occupy a prominent position in Calvin's theology" (*Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism*, Eerdmans, 1998, p. 140). In fact, Calvin spoke of God's common grace only "occasionally" (p. 178). When Heslam comes to his "final conclusions" concerning Kuyper's efforts at establishing a Calvinistic worldview in the lectures at Princeton, wittingly or unwittingly he passes a devastating judgment, not only upon Kuyper's common grace and the worldview of which it is the foundation but also upon the entire body of Reformed theology that has been affected by Kuyperian common grace. As for the common grace of Kuyper's lectures, Heslam says:

The doctrine of common grace, which is not a major element in traditional Calvinistic theology, became, under the influence of Kuyper's objectives, a doctrine of overriding and central importance. His insistence on the centrality of this doctrine in the Calvinistic worldview was an attempt to make explicit an element that was implicit in Calvin's thought, and to give systematic expression to an aspect of Calvin's theology that had none of the coherence Kuyper ascribed to it (pp. 259, 260).

This is bad enough: the very foundation of the supposedly Calvinistic worldview is constructed from what is at best merely a minor element in Calvin himself. Or, as another contemporary student of Kuyper has recently put it, Kuyper built his elaborate theory of common grace out of mere "hints and pieces" in earlier Reformed theology (James Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, Eerdmans, 1998, p. 165).

That the doctrine of common grace as taught by Abraham Kuyper is not to be found in Calvin, or in traditional Calvinis-

tic theology, is widely recognized today. The liberal Dutch Reformed theologian Hendrikus Berkhof has written, "In theology—*apart from his broad development of the doctrine of common grace*—Kuyper closely followed the Calvinistic tradition, even in its scholastic form" (*Two Hundred Years of Theology: Report of a Personal Journey*, Eerdmans, 1989, p. 109; emphasis added).

The Christian Reformed Church, however, thinks that common grace is an essential, fundamental, and major dogma of the Reformed faith. She has made it official, binding dogma in her fellowship and has deposed consistories for refusing subscription to it.

What is far worse, indeed intolerable, is the effect that Kuyper's theory of common grace had on the whole body of Reformed theology. In the words of Heslam: "Kuyper's treatment of traditional Reformed doctrine amounted to a radical reinterpretation and reapplication of its central tenets" (p. 259). Kuyper set about to modernize Calvinism mainly by means of his doctrine of common grace. The result, says Heslam, agreeing here with critics of Kuyper within Reformed circles, who charged that Kuyper broke with traditional Calvinism, "may justifiably be called 'neo-Calvinism' and cannot be taken as an accurate and reliable guide to the theology of John Calvin" (p. 260).

Mind! The theology that Kuyper reinterpreted and reapplied by means of common grace is not Calvinism, but "neo-Calvinism," and is not "an accurate and reliable guide to the theology of John Calvin."

Why do the Protestant Reformed Churches repudiate Kuyperian common grace and the worldview of which it is the foundation? Apart from any other reason, because Kuyper's common grace is not the teaching of Calvin or the Calvinistic tradition and because it corrupts the whole of Calvinistic, Reformed theology.

Fourth, it is the fatal flaw of the common grace worldview that it calls regenerated children of God, who have the new life of the risen Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, to live their earthly lives *on the basis and in the power of common grace*, the grace that they supposedly share with unbelievers. This monstrous evil of the worldview of common grace is seldom recognized. Kuyper himself, so far as I can tell, did not explicitly state this, or even address this issue, in his lectures. But this is the impression that very definitely is left by the lectures, as it is the clear and necessary implication of the thrust of the lectures. Believers and unbelievers share God's common grace. This common grace is the basis of their cooperation in developing culture. In the ordinances and spheres of creation, therefore, as regards developing culture, *believers must live and work by common grace*.

If there were no other objection to Kuyper's worldview than this, this would be sufficient to expose Kuyper's worldview as erroneous and condemnable. If one thing characterizes the life of the Christian in the world according to Scripture, it is that the believing child of God lives his life on the basis of and by the power of the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ, that is, in the power of (particular) regenerating, sanctifying grace. He lives his *one, entire* life in the power of regenerating grace, not only his life of worship on the Lord's Day but also his life of "culture" throughout the week. If there *were* another kind of grace than the grace of God in Christ Jesus (and there is not), the believer would spurn it as useless and dangerous for his holy life. By the quickening grace of Christ, and only by the quickening grace of Christ (Eph. 2:1-10), do the Ephesians live the holy life in the church, in society, in marriage, and in labor to which they are called in chapters 4-6. By the sanctification of the Spirit, and



only by the sanctification of the Spirit (I Pet. 1:2), do the elect strangers manifest an excellent behavior in the various ordinances of creation as they are exhorted to do in I Peter 2:11ff.

To choose another grace for life and work in the world is to choose another Lord and Savior than Jesus Christ.

Where does the Bible instruct the elect believer that, in addition to the regenerating grace of Christ that raised him from death to life, he also possesses common grace and that this common grace is to be the power of his cultural life? By regenerating grace, he believes, worships, prays, and loves his fellow-saints. By common grace, he builds a family, does his job, submits to civil government, gets an education, and plays the piano. In the "spiritual" realm, he lives out of Christ. In everyday, "earthly" life, he lives, not out of Christ but out of common grace that he shares with Socrates, members of the Teamsters Union, Thomas Paine, John Dewey, and Liberace. This is not only false doctrine, with dangerous consequences; it is nonsense.

Fifth, the PRC reject the Kuyperian worldview in 1998 because, after 100 years of the implementation of the Kuyperian worldview by Reformed churches, groups, and individuals in the Netherlands, North America, and other places, the worldview of common grace has proved to be a colossal failure.

Common grace has failed! It has failed obviously! It has failed miserably! It has failed disastrously!

Where is the transformation of culture in the Netherlands by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, by the Free University, and by all the societies that adopted and carried out Kuyper's common grace worldview? The culture of the Netherlands has the distinction

of being one of the most corrupt, lawless, God-dishonoring cultures in the world.

Where is the transformation of culture in North America by the Christian Reformed Church, by Calvin College, by the Institute for Christian Studies, by all the other Christian Reformed schools, by Princeton Theological Seminary, and by other organizations devoted to the worldview of common grace? North American culture is not far behind the depraved way of life in the Netherlands.

The worldview of common grace has not made Dutch society or North American culture Christian and Reformed. Not one whit! But it has made the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Christian Reformed Church in North America and their schools thoroughly worldly.

Kuyper intended his theory of common grace to be a bridge between the Reformed church and the world over which the Re-

formed believers would move into the world to "Christianize" the world.

Kuyper forgot something about bridges. Bridges allow for two-way traffic. Over the bridge of common grace, during the past 100 years, the world has poured into the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the

Free University of Amsterdam, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, Calvin College, and the other organizations that espouse the worldview of common grace.

Common grace has driven out or silenced the gospel-truth of particular grace. Predestination, limited atonement, and irresistible grace are a dead letter. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands have got rid even of the letter (the Reformed creeds). Universalism in various forms prevails. Universalism is the mind of the world.

Opened up to the world's way of life by common grace, the churches, their people, and especially their schools adopt the world's explanation of origins (evolution); accept the world's demolition of the family (feminist denial of the headship of the husband in the home and church); and approve the world's adultery (divorce on any ground and remarriage for guilty and innocent parties alike). The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands have sunk away into the deepest, filthiest depths of the wicked world. They sanction sodomy and lesbianism. The Christian Reformed Church, having already declared that the homosexual *condition* is not sinful (because she insists on listening to the world), is now reduced to a struggle, on her assemblies, to keep out homosexual *practice*.

Men graced by God with the gift of discerning spirits saw it coming. In the early 1900's Henry Danhof, Herman Hoeksema, and George Ophoff warned the Christian Reformed Church, as Dutch ministers warned the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, that the adoption of Kuyper's worldview of common grace would certainly result in a deluge of worldliness. The entire church world at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can see that the prophecy is fulfilled.

Why do the PRC reject the worldview of common grace? Because God's powerful, frightening judgment in history upon Kuyper's worldview is that it has been weighed and found wanting. It has transformed no culture. It has destroyed the churches and schools that embraced it.

The worldview of common grace is hay and stubble that Abraham Kuyper built on the foundation. It will be burned in the day of Christ.

The worldview of common grace is a worldview that has failed. □

—DJE

*To  
choose  
another grace  
for life and work  
in the world  
is to choose  
another Lord  
and Savior  
than  
Jesus  
Christ.*



## Evolutionists Worry

**W**ould you really think so? Have they not, in effect, won the war concerning origins? The books of science, the museums of the land, the periodicals—all unabashedly promote and maintain evolution. There is simply no room for another view—at least not the view of Scripture. To prove that they are not scientific ignoramuses, many within the churches go along with these views, howbeit with an emphasis that it is “theistic.”

An interesting article about this debate appeared in the *Denver Post*, July 2, 1998. It had the tongue-in-cheek title, “Creation debate continues to evolve.” But the sub-heading was more telling: “Evolutionists worry Bible will veto science.” Some remarkable claims were made in the article.

William Curtis worries that the teaching of evolution in schools is steering young people away from God and the Bible. So the Bible scholar is running an institute here to promote the literal biblical version of creation.

Meanwhile, professor Donald Wise fears that the growing influence of literal creationists like Curtis will deprive children of an understanding of contemporary science. Wise, who teaches geology at Franklin and Marshall College here, is using his science knowledge to debunk creationist views that man and the universe were created in six days, that Noah’s flood killed the dinosaurs, and that the Earth is only 6,000 years old.

Creationists “are a very powerful and influential group,” said Wise. “The scientific community has to stand up and be counted.”

For decades many scientists dismissed creationism as something that faded away not long after the 1925 Scopes “monkey” trial. But now some see it as a renewed threat to the teaching of science, and they are jumping into the fray.

In April, the largest scientific society in the United States, the National Academy of Science, released a new guidebook for teachers explaining how to teach evolution.

...Stanford biologist Donald Kennedy, who headed the group that created the new guidelines, says that pressure from religious groups is having a “chilling effect” on elementary and secondary teachers, who feel pressured to steer clear of evolution.

At stake is far more than a child’s understanding of Darwin’s theory of evolution. The literal biblical version of creation contradicts most of geology, geochemistry, geophysics and paleontology, all of which hinge on the idea that Earth is 4.6 billion years old.

Creationism has a wide following. A 1993 Gallup poll showed that 47 percent of adults favor creationism over evolution and 35 percent agree that the Bible should be taken literally.

Professor Donald Wise decided he would put up a fight. But before doing so, he decided that he must learn something about creationism. He said, “As a geologist I had a great deal of trouble understanding it.”

To help sort it out, he constructed the equivalent of a geologic time line according to the creationist 6,000-year framework, which assumes that most of Earth’s mountains and canyons formed during the single year of Noah’s flood.

For research materials, he turned to the Creation Resource Institute, which is run by Curtis.

Curtis, 68, spent the first half of his career as an aerospace engi-

neer. Twenty-five years ago he enrolled at Capital Bible Seminary near Washington, where he earned degrees in Greek, Hebrew and theology....

...Curtis said he is not influenced by other religious scholars who have been willing to accept evolution, or even by the 1996 pronouncement by Pope John Paul II that evolution is compatible with Christian belief.

“Those people are neither educated nor Christian,” he said. He argues that the central tenet of Christianity—that Christ died to redeem Adam’s original sin—rests on the existence of Adam.

“If Noah isn’t true, and Adam and Eve aren’t true, then Christ is a liar,” he said. Without Adam and Eve, he said, the whole picture falls apart.

Many scientists acknowledge that evolution can be hard to swallow.

In a recent talk in Philadelphia, Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould called evolution a threat to man’s superior place in nature. It shows humans are not the crowning glory of creation, he said, but “a tiny, fragile little twig on this bushy, branching tree of life.”

...The rise of literal creationism is a recent phenomenon, said historian Edward Larson, who won a Pulitzer Prize this year for his book, “Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trials and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion.”

And so the debate goes on. The unbelieving scientist can find no other alternative to creation but evolution, which is itself hardly scientific and cannot be proven. The believing scientist seeks to prove from the realm of the natural that God did, after all, create as the Bible states it. Creationists continue to show the foolishness of the theory of evolution. Robert Doolan, in an article titled “Evolution’s Three Dead Ducks”

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(*Christian News*, July 6, 1998), states:

What does a duck need to get off the ground? Well, it must at least have wings, and it must be alive.

If a majority of people think a dead duck can fly, it won't change the fact that it can't. Those who reject God's creation but accept the theory of evolution are putting their faith in dead ducks. At least three of them.

**DEAD DUCK NUMBER ONE:** If you reject God and miracles, you have no scientific law that allows something to evolve from nothing. If there is no matter in the universe to start with, there is no universe; so nothing can happen to make anything appear. Juggle figures anyway you like, but without a Creator you are not going to get anything, let alone everything.

**DEAD DUCK NUMBER TWO:** If you reject God and miracles, there is no scientific law that can account for living things' coming to life from non-living things. Evolutionists believe that at some time in the distant past, life arose from non-living substances. But biology has no law to support this idea, and the invariable observa-

tion that only life begets life is overwhelming evidence against it.

**DEAD DUCK NUMBER THREE:** If you reject God and miracles, you have no scientific law that would allow one type of creature to turn into a completely different type of creature. Reptiles don't turn into birds, because reptiles don't have genes to produce feathers and wings. The theory of evolution teaches that simple life forms evolved into more complex life forms, which evolved into fish, which evolved into amphibians, which evolved into birds and mammals.

But there is no natural law that could allow this to happen. The best that evolution can do to explain how this might have happened is by mutations and natural selection. But mutations actually destroy genetic information, and natural selection simply weeds out unfit creatures—it doesn't produce new kinds.

...All the evidence is on the side of the Christian who believes the Bible's account of creation—that God created the world and all the major types of creatures to reproduce "after their kind."

Evolution truly is equivalent to a belief that dead ducks can fly.

When you are talking to an evolutionist who rejects God and His creation, bring up the points mentioned above. ...You will notice he ducks for cover when he finds his explanation can't get off the ground.

So the evolutionists are worried. They intend to carry on the battle against the creationists. And the creationist is ready to fight—often on the very ground of the evolutionist. Yet, when it comes right down to it, there is one reason why the evolutionist will never be convinced of the creationist's viewpoint, and one reason why the creationist must understand that he cannot succeed in persuading an evolutionist. That reason is put simply in Hebrews 11:3: "*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*" So then, belief in the scriptural creation account requires first and above all a living faith. Without it, it is impossible to please God. Without it, it is impossible to believe the creation account given in Scripture. □

**In His Fear**

**Rev. Arie denHartog**

## Decision Making and the Will of God

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Three things made me interested in writing an article on this subject. Recently I preached a sermon on the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, in which our Lord teaches us to pray that the will of God be done. This is one of the great petitions of the Lord's Prayer. It has profound meaning and significance for our daily lives. In preparation for this

sermon I read, among other things, a book with the same title as the one I have chosen for this article. The book is by Gary Friesen and Robin Maxon and was published by Multnomah Press. I do not find myself in agreement with everything in this book. It suffers generally from superficiality. But reading the book did stimulate thinking on the subject. Thirdly, as



a pastor I sometimes have Christians come to the study to ask for guidance regarding some major decision in their lives. I appreciate the concern that such Christians have for wanting to make decisions that are in harmony with the will of God. This ought to be the great concern for every child of God when he or she faces the great decisions of life such as the choice of a life's career, marriage, and moving to another part of the country. All of us will, if we are honest, admit that often we make momentous decisions without prayerfully considering the will of God.

I could add another reason for the consideration of this subject. There is current among Christians in general many wrong ideas about how to come to know what God's will is for our lives. One hears glib statements such as "God told me that He wanted me to do this or that," or "I feel this is God's will for my life." This sounds rather pious, but I have found quite a few times that these statements are made based on totally wrong ideas about how God reveals His will to us in our lives. Of even greater concern is that sometimes in our own churches we hear members claiming that they are following the will of God in certain decisions, and they must be told very strongly that their concept of the will of God is just plain wrong.

It is a very common position that God reveals His will to individuals concerning personal decisions in life in ways other than through His Word in the Bible. There are perhaps well meaning Christians who will earnestly pray to God concerning very serious decision in life. Then they will look for all sorts of ways which they imagine God will use to reveal His will to them. Some claim to receive a private revelation from God through a vision or dream. They cite passages of Scripture to support the idea of such private revelations. The supposed biblical basis for these, however, is false.

Nowhere does the Bible teach that God today gives us private revelations. It is true that in the days of special revelation, before the canon of Scripture was complete, God sometimes gave wonderful visions to prophets and others. We must maintain, however, in the first place, that such special revelations have ceased, since we now have the complete revelation of God in the Bible. Furthermore, the biblical examples of such revelations never have to do with mere personal and private matters such as revealing God's will concerning whom you and I should marry, what occupation we should enter upon, or what part of the country we should live in. The special revelations of God had to do with far more mighty and significant things. They had to do with central aspects of the revelation of the covenant of God and the realization of the kingdom of God.

It might be objected that at least in the case of Eliezer, the chief servant of Abraham who was commissioned to find a wife for Isaac, there is a biblical example of personal direction that God gave concerning finding a wife. There are some important lessons that our young people can learn from Genesis 24 concerning finding a life partner. However, in considering this passage one also has to keep in mind that far greater matters were involved than the personal question of finding a godly wife for Isaac. Also in this incident the continuation of God's covenant was at stake. God gave special revelation to Eliezer for that purpose in ways that He nowhere promises in His Word to give to us for mere private decisions of our life.

It is also rather common among Christians to imagine that God will reveal His will to us through certain subjective feelings and impressions. So they become convinced that it is the will of God for them to follow a certain course of actions. Again, nowhere in the Bible is there any proof that God reveals

His will through mere subjective feelings and impressions. Such feelings and impressions could come from all kinds of other sources rather than from God, such as our sinful nature, the prompting of the devil, the temptations of the world, hormones in our bodies, temporary mood swings, etc. Even when we as ministers of the Word of God are faced with a call to go to another charge we must be careful in how we seek to know the will of God. We must evaluate carefully such statements as "the Lord laid it upon my heart" to accept or reject a call. Let's hope we do not imagine that God reveals His will for ministerial calls in some mystical way.

When considering a future course of action the terms "open doors" and "closed doors" are used rather frequently. Perhaps these terms can be used in a legitimate way. The biblical use of these terms is always in connection with opportunities to preach the gospel and not with personal decisions for careers, or changing our place of residence, etc. We believe indeed that God's providence determines all things in our life from the smallest to the greatest. We ought to consider the providence of God in the light of His Word when we are ready to make an important decision in life. On the other hand, even in this we must be careful. We must not imagine that God always gives absolutely clear providential signs for every major decision in our life. There are a lot of subjective elements in reading so-called providential signs. Sometimes, for example, God sends us very difficult providence in our life. He does not always by this tell us to turn from a certain course of action to an easier one. It is the will of God that we endure hardships. He sends us great hardships to try our faith and to sanctify us. What we might interpret as a "closed door" might in some cases instead be a "crook in our lot" that God in His providence sends us to



try us. If this were not the case, Israel might have decided that it could not possibly be the will of God that they pass through the wilderness to the promised land.

None of this means that we ought not to be deeply concerned about doing God's will in our lives. We ought to spend much time in prayer to learn God's will. We should never make any major decision in our lives without praying that God might reveal His will to us.

It is common, and we believe biblical, to speak of a twofold distinction in the will of God. We speak of the will of God's decree and the will of God's command. The will of God's decree is absolutely sovereign. It is always realized. It is all-comprehensive. It includes things as small as the germs that invade our body when we fall sick, to things as great as the movements of the galaxies in the heavens. It includes the course of the history of the nations of the world. God's sovereign decree determined the fall of man. It was by His sovereign determination that our Lord was crucified. God is sovereign over all the evil of this world. Even the heart of man is in God's hands to turn it whithersoever He wills.

Sometimes it is said that the will of God's decree is entirely hidden. There are those who claim that God's purpose of predestination belongs to His hidden will. By no means must this truth of God be preached in the churches, it is said by some. But God clearly reveals in Scripture the truth of His decree of predestination. The sovereign of heaven and earth has declared His will concerning the realization of His covenant, the salvation of His people, and the triumph of the kingdom of His Son Jesus Christ. "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things not yet done, saying my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Is. 46:10).

On the other hand, there are many things about our personal lives that God has kept secret in His counsel. This does not mean that they are not fixed in His counsel. Whom I marry, what occupation I have in life, where I live, whether I am rich or poor, famous or lowly in the world, all these things have been determined beforehand in the counsel of God. But God does not give us private revelations concerning these things ahead of time.

The second aspect of the will of God is His moral will. This is the righteous and holy will of God concerning how we must live in every sphere of our life. God has clearly and absolutely revealed His moral will in the Bible. The absolutely perfect will of God is revealed in His law of the Ten Commandments. For the redeemed Christian this moral will of God is the absolute standard of life. It is the rule for his life of gratitude to God for the salvation He has given. There is no area of our life in which we are exempt from the holy law of God.

Many if not most of the passages of Scripture which speak of the will of God for our lives have to do essentially with God's moral and perfect will for us. Often Christians have tried to find passages of Scripture to support the idea that God will reveal some personal and private will to us and have ignored the fact that the passages which they allege to support this idea are actually admonitions to follow the moral law of God in our lives. If we had the space in this article we would take the time to give numerous examples.

How does God reveal His will to us for the great decisions of our life? First of all, He has given us His law. Whatever we do in life, this is the sum of all things: "Fear God and keep His commandments." Therefore it is entirely impossible that a certain course of action in life can be the will of God if it goes contrary to one of the ex-

pressed commandments of God. Let no one, for example, say that he or she is doing the will of God by marrying an ungodly person simply because "God has brought that person into my life." This is a false appeal to the will of God. Let no one say that God wants him to move to a city far away to take a lucrative job offer or company promotion when such a move will involve moving away from the true church of Jesus Christ where the Word of God is faithfully preached. Let no young person say that he must go to this or that university or college because it has such a good program of study to offer for his course of study and then claim it is God's will. "After all, God gave me this talent and this interest in life and He wants me to pursue it as far as I can by going to a prestigious university. Never mind that going there will involve several years of absence from the church I belong to." Young people who reason this way cannot claim to be following the will of God.

I once heard the claim made by one who belonged to our churches that since God had given certain talents to one of his children, and because these talents could not be used in the worship services in our churches, therefore it was God's will for him to switch to another church. It is a rather common argument in our day that since God has also given talents for the ministry to women, we ought to allow them to be "equal partners in the ministry with men." Never mind that Scripture clearly indicates that men are to rule and be in the special offices in church and not women.

Let no one say that God wants him to take this or that occupation in life when it involves things such as Sabbath working or membership in an ungodly union.

We could give many more examples of such faulty reasoning. Let this be the absolute rule of our life: if anything is contrary to the law of God which He has clearly



revealed in His Word, it cannot possibly be the will of God.

When we pray for God's will in our lives (and we ought to pray for this very earnestly and sincerely), we must pray for spiritual knowledge and understanding of the revealed truth of God's Word and for wisdom to understand His law as it applies to a given area of our life. All the major decisions in our lives involve great moral questions. We need to pray both for knowledge and submission to the perfect will of God in our lives. God does not care so much about whether we are engineers, doctors, or lawyers, or perhaps only a daily laborer in a factory. He cares a lot more whether we are living according to His law and for His glory in whatever our daily occupation might be.

God has made us moral, rational creatures. We have great responsibility to make wise decisions in life. Because we are fallen sinners our minds have been darkened and our wills made hard and rebellious. Our sinful natures are filled with the lusts of the flesh. We must be constantly warned that we must not follow the dictates of our sinful nature, our pride and lust and covetousness when we make the great decisions of our life. This is easy to do. We are prone to do this according to our sinful nature. By the grace and Spirit of God our hearts and minds have been renewed.

The Christian who has such a renewed mind and heart must be constantly praying the prayer of Paul in Ephesians 1:18: "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what is the glory of his inheritance in the saints." A similar prayer is found in Colossians 1: 10 and 11: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." We need the wisdom of God to make the great decisions of our life.

God promises to give us this wisdom when we ask in faith and prayer. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and abraideth not: and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). Spiritual, godly wisdom is necessary for all the great decisions of our life.

So, for example, when we wonder what the will of God is for our life's occupation, we pray for wisdom to choose that occupation where we can best serve God and glorify Him. This is the highest wisdom of life. We have greater concerns than that our earthly occupation promises a high salary and earthly prestige. It is better to be a lowly servant than a king or a wealthy and powerful businessman if being the latter leads us to boast in ourselves and in our own riches. We must pray daily that our occupation in life does not cause us to become materialistic, vain, and ungodly like the world. We need to pray for wisdom to use our resources properly that we are not led to poverty or bankruptcy. We need to pray for an occupation in which we can earn by honest labors money to support our Christian family, and, to pay for Christian schooling for them if available. We need to pray that God will give us the resources to support the causes of Christ's church and kingdom in the world. This is the will of God.

When we seek a life partner, we need to pray that God will lead us to a truly godly young man or young woman. We need to pray that God will keep us from too much preoccupation with externals, such as how handsome the young man is, what career he is headed for, or how beautiful and sexually attractive the young girl is. This is following the will of God. We need to pray for a wife that will be a good helpmeet, to raise a godly family if this be the will of God. This is one of God's great purposes for marriage. This is far more important than looking

for a young girl that will be able to supplement our income with a glamorous career of her own, so that we can live the upper middle-class American life-style with all of its luxuries and pleasures and glory. God does not reveal by some private and secret revelation or inner subjective impression the name of the person we should marry. He does clearly tell the young man to look for the virtuous woman described in Proverbs 31, whose glory and beauty is far above any physical beauty of worldly women. He tells the young woman to look for a husband who will be a spiritual leader in marriage and in the family.

Let me close with one other observation. This is one given to us in the book of James. "Go to now, ye that say to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:13-15).

It is sinful pride and worldly carnality when man does not pray daily for the will of God to guide him in the plans and purposes of life. The Christian must be profoundly conscious every day how all his plans and purposes and even his very life's breath depend on the will of God. We honor God when we live in this consciousness.

The Lord will prosper and bless us each day only when we pray "Thy will be done." This prosperity will not always, however, be in terms of physical and material well-being. Sometimes the Lord sends trials, hardships, and disappointments. He does this according to His own sovereign, wise, and perfect will. We must submit to this perfect will and confess His name and live for His glory. □



## That Parenthesis in the Third Question

When infants are presented for baptism by the church, three questions are asked of those presenting these infants. According to the Form for the Administration of Baptism that we use (p. 86 in the back of the Psalter), the third question reads, "Whether you promise and intend to see these children, when come to the years of discretion (whereof you are either parent or witness), instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power? Answer. Yes."

The words within the parentheses, "whereof you are either parent or witness," raise several questions. What is the historical reason for the inclusion of these words? To what person or group of persons does the word "witness" refer? Ought these words in parentheses be read at each baptism ceremony, even when it is clear to all that those presenting the infant are the parents? If this is the case, what is the reason for the parenthetical marks?

There are those who believe that the word "witness" refers to the entire congregation which witnesses the baptism and benefits from it. There are pastors who, during a baptism sermon, refer to the word "witness" to remind the

congregation that we all have a responsibility to instruct all the children of the congregation in the aforesaid doctrines. Are these ideas correct? We offer these lines in an attempt to put that third question in the proper historical perspective.

It ought to be stated at the outset that no one can deny that every member of the congregation has a calling in respect to all the children of the congregation and not only his own. In fact, this calling extends to the children of believers in other congregations. This belongs to the wonderful communion of saints! As Answer 55 of the Catechism instructs us, "That every one must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members." If a family cannot provide the natural needs of their children, we give that family those needs, either directly or through the diaconate. If someone is not using our schools to instruct their children according to the demands of the covenant, we point them to their calling in this regard, and assist with the paying of tuition if this is necessary. We love our brothers and sisters in the Lord, and we love their children, and we will do what is in our power that things go well with them!

But is it the intent of the baptism form to set forth this truth?

The form was composed by Petrus Dathenus in 1566, shortly after the Reformation. The situation in the churches was one of up-

heaval, change, and disorganization. VanDellen and Monsma write of these times in the *Church Order Commentary*, page 231:

The general principle having been established (that of infant baptism, DHK) a number of practical questions soon presented themselves. From the very outset if became the rule to baptize only the children of parents who belonged to the Reformed Churches. But some parents, who were in sympathy with the Reformation and at heart at odds with the Roman Church, nevertheless failed to make a final break with Rome because they lacked the courage of faith and clarity of conviction. Officially they were still Roman Catholics. Sometimes such parents requested a Reformed Church to baptize their child. The first Synod (Emden, 1571) replied to a question regarding such cases by referring to the opinion of the theologians of Geneva, ministers, and professors. The rule should be, so Beza had written, that only children of Church members should receive baptism. But in abnormal times, as when the Church was in process of being reorganized, or when severe persecutions were raging, exceptions to the rule might be made. Children of weak and fearful parents might be baptized under these circumstances, though not without certain stipulations and promises. But as will be realized, that ruling was by way of concession for the period of transition.

Those "stipulations and promises" were that church members in good standing had to function as wit-

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nesses, guardians, or sponsors. And they had to be in a position to make good on the baptism promises.

VanDellen and Monsma bring up another example on the same page of their *Commentary*. Can children of parents under discipline be baptized? After pointing out that those whose Christianity is in question are in no position to make baptism promises before God, they write,

Yet this Sacrament is too sacred to be reduced to an empty form. Consequently the Church and its office-bearers demand that the parents shall be qualified to explain to the child, as it grows up, the meaning of its Baptism, and that these parents shall also promise to do so. Now if for any reason parents of a child entitled to Baptism are disqualified to take upon themselves these solemn promises, then, if the child is to be baptized, *witnesses* must be found who promise to take the place of the parents to the best of their ability. If such sponsors cannot be secured the child should not be baptized until he is old enough to judge for himself, and to request Baptism upon profession of faith.

The well-known commentators on the Church Order give further advice:

Children born to excommunicated parents are not entitled to Baptism.... Inasmuch as we have no definite assurance in God's Word regarding children of such unfaithful and unbelieving parents, and inasmuch as the instruction of such children by competent sponsors would be much hampered at best, it is better not to baptize children born to excommunicated parents.

An exception might be made if such children

make their permanent homes, say with their God-fearing grandparents who shall be able to explain the meaning of Baptism to them and who shall be in position to give them a good Christian training, then such children need not be barred from Baptism; the parties concerned being willing to serve as sponsors, taking upon them the baptismal vows.

Hence, it is clear from these examples that, historically, the term "witness" in our third question does not refer to the congregation as a whole, but to definite individuals who have agreed to be witnesses, guardians, or sponsors for the child in question. Therefore, it is not normally necessary that these words be read.

The Christian Reformed Church, in their *Psalter Hymnal*

(1976, Board of Publications of the C.R.C.), has three baptism forms available for their use. The first one is the same form as ours, except that the parenthetical phrase is omitted. The second is a modernized version of our traditional form. And the third contains a question to be answered by members of the congregation, after the parents have given their answers. This question is as follows:

The minister addresses the congregation:

Do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive this child in love, pray for him, help care for his instruction in the faith, and encourage him in the fellowship of believers?

The congregation responds: We do, God helping us.

If anyone desires that the congregation respond at baptism to a question regarding their responsibility, that person ought to present an overture to consistory, classis, and synod in order that the necessary changes be made in our form in the proper way. We do not believe such a change is necessary. Until such a time we should use the form we have according to its original intent and meaning. Then we "observe in all things the adopted order" (Art. 44 of the Church Order). □

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

## Sabellius the Unitarian

### Introduction

The ways of God are always perfect and wise. Sometimes we are given a glimpse of this perfection and wisdom; sometimes, not.

So it is in the development of the truth of Scripture from the time of Pentecost. As the truth developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of Christ, we are sometimes given a peek at the astounding perfection of God's ways.

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So it is in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The perfect wisdom of God is revealed in the fact that this doctrine was the first major doctrine of the Christian faith to be developed. When once God shows us that the truth concerning Himself is first, it is also evident to us why this had to be. The truth concerning God as the triune God is the most fundamental of all doctrines. That God is three in person and one in essence is the one great doctrine on which all other truth rests. Without establishing that doctrine near the beginning of her history, the church could not have gone on in that high calling of developing the other great truths of Scripture.

The reason for this is very simply that all truth is the truth concerning God. What God is in Himself, in His own divine being, is first. So it was that God led the church into a confession of that truth first.

There is another angle to this, however. The devil, probably better than we, recognizes how fundamental to all truth is the truth of God. And so it was that he attacked this truth first of all—before any others. If this could be destroyed, this great truth of God, the church would perish in the world.

God is sovereign—also over the devil. God decreed that Satan should launch a powerful attack against this truth first; and the church, called to defend the truth, would develop this truth—first.

The wisdom of God is also displayed in the fact that the truth of the Trinity took many years to develop and to be put in creedal form. It was not really till the Council of Nicea in 325 that the doctrine of the Trinity was set down for all the church. And even after this council, the battle continued for almost a century.

That it took so long is due to various important facts. One certainly was that the doctrine of the Trinity was very difficult to understand. Maybe there is a certain

wisdom even in this. God showed His church that the truth concerning Himself was so great, so profound, so beyond all human comprehension, so utterly different from anything that could ever arise in the heart of man, that it took centuries before the church could even bring itself to say something about it.

But another reason why the doctrine took so long to develop was because it was inseparably bound up with another doctrine: the absolute divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of Christ's deity stand or fall together. And locked up in the doctrine of Christ's deity is our everlasting salvation. If we are saved, then it has to be that Christ is God. Only God can save. And Christ is our Savior.

### The Problem

Actually, from the time the church began in this dispensation the saints never doubted that Christ was Himself God. Some very early second century writings prove this. "Brethren, we ought so to think of Jesus Christ as of God, as of the judge of living and dead. And we ought not to belittle our salvation; for when we belittle him, we expect also to receive little," one saint had written.

Notice how already shortly after the apostolic era, in some of the earliest extant writings of the church, Christ's divinity is tied up with our salvation.

Another quote: "It will be impossible for us to forsake Christ ... or to worship any other. For him, being the Son of God, we adore, but the martyrs ... we cherish."

Even an early pagan report on Christians spoke of these people gathering before sunrise to "sing a hymn to Christ as though to a god."

The problem arose from the fact that the gospel narratives made it clear that Christ ate, drank, suffered, and died. How could God eat and drink, suffer and die? That

was no little problem.

The Gnostics (of whom we spoke in another article) solved the problem by saying that it was really impossible for God to eat and drink. So they proceeded to deny Christ's human nature and to teach that the human nature was only an appearance. He *seemed* to be like us, but really was not.

But a prior question also troubled the church, a question still more fundamental: What was the relation of the Son to the Father?

You must keep in mind that the church lived in a world in which polytheism was the universal religion. The Greeks and Romans, and, in fact, every nation everywhere, worshiped a whole temple full of gods almost too many to be counted. The Christian religion insisted absolutely that all polytheism was wrong, blasphemously wrong. There is only one true God. All other gods are simply idols, men's evil inventions, sinful corruptions of the truth.

But now the problem. The church insisted that God was God alone. But Christ, the One who died A.D. 33, who was sentenced by Pontius Pilate, and who arose from the grave—that Christ was also God! He was the Son of God, truly God. How could one avoid saying that, after all, the Christians had at least two gods?

Various solutions to this problem were proposed.

One solution said that Christ was the *adopted* Son. The status of *sonship* was confirmed on Christ either at the time of His baptism or at the time of His resurrection.

But this was not satisfactory. It denied that Christ was really God.

Another solution said that Christ was derived from the Father. The Father was greater than the Son. Maybe a very high angel; maybe a Spirit, maybe the Logos, maybe just son; but, for all the greatness He possessed, still inferior to the Father. Maybe "divine," but this divinity was not the same as that of the Father.



Nor was this satisfactory—although the greatest battle of all was to be fought over this question. (We will tell of it in our next article.)

And then a third solution was suggested. And this one constituted a real threat to the church in the third century. This theory suggested that Christ was, after all, to be identified with the Father. He was the same as the Father. The names "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" were only three different names for God, three different ways to refer to Him, three different ways of thinking about the one and only God.

This third "solution" is the one we are going to talk about in this article.

### **Sabellius**

There were a number of men in the early church who held to this third "solution." They may have disagreed in some minor points, but they agreed in one basic point: they had to maintain a rigid and strict monotheism at all costs. They could not sacrifice the truth that God is one God for some sort of polytheism or tritheism.

Sabellius is only the best known of the lot. And even he is not all that well known.

Many of these heretics were like meteors that flashed across the ecclesiastical heavens in one great burst of light—only to burn out in a short time, their graves unknown and their lives forgotten.

So with Sabellius.

He was born in North Africa in the area of Pentapolis, probably in what is now Libya. But he did not stay there long. At the beginning of the third century he was in Rome and had begun to ponder the mysteries of the Godhead. In fact, he was bold and brash enough to teach his views there, which brought him into conflict with the bishop of Rome, Calistus. Apparently Sabellius was not about to change his views, and he was excommunicated by Calistus.

He ran into much the same troubles when he went to Egypt and began to propagate his views there. Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria, called a council meeting of the city in 260 or 261, which council also saw fit to excommunicate Sabellius. One would think that two excommunications would have given the man pause; but his views were beginning to have influence on others, and apparently his growing following, as with so many heretics, fed his pride.

Dionysius, however, over-reacted in his fear of Sabellius' teachings. As a kind of antidote to Sabellianism, Dionysius so emphasized the distinctions between the Father and the Son that he nearly denied their essential unity. And, in emphasizing the distinction, he taught that Christ was subordinate to the Father—a view which was a kind of forerunner to Arianism—a heresy which we will discuss in our next article.

But all of this showed the confusion over the doctrine of God which prevailed in the early church. No one was sure what was the solution to the difficult problems which faced the church.

Sabellius saw in the over-reaction of Dionysius an opportunity to get his views approved in Rome after all. And so he appealed to the bishop of Rome against the views of Dionysius.

But his ploy did not work. The bishop of Rome called a synod in 262, the result of which was: 1) Sabellius was condemned for his views; 2) Dionysius was condemned for teaching tritheism (three gods) and subordinationism (Christ was inferior to the Father). This decision in Rome effectively settled the controversy—at least for a few years.

To the credit of Dionysius, when his errors were pointed out by the bishop of Rome, he gladly retracted them.

### **Sabellius' Teachings**

The views of Sabellius have be-

come known as Monarchianism.

While many different heretics taught Monarchianism, and while these heretics differed somewhat from each other in certain emphases and peculiarities of their teachings, generally speaking they all taught firmly that there was only one God. They clung tenaciously to their monotheism. But they insisted that the only way to protect the view that God is one is to deny any kind of "personal" distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I put the word "personal" in quotes because at this stage of the church's development the theologians possessed no vocabulary to define the doctrine in the way we do today. Indeed, this was part of the problem, because Scripture itself gives us no vocabulary to use in connection with the doctrine of God. We speak of God being one in *essence* and three in *person*; but the early church had no biblical idea of the concepts essence and person and never thought to use these terms in connection with the doctrine of God.

But, however that may be, Sabellius, in order to explain the fact that Scripture spoke of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, explained these names as only three different *ways* or "modes" in which God revealed Himself. The one God, also one in person, revealed Himself as a Father, as a Son, and as a Spirit.

God revealed Himself as a Father in the work of creation, as a Son in the work of redemption, and as a Spirit in the work of sanctification in our hearts.

And so the Trinity was denied.

### **The Response of the Church**

The church knew that these views were wrong. It was with good reason, therefore, that Sabellius was disciplined in whatever place he attempted to propagate his views.

But there are some things that have to be remembered.



Generally speaking, the church did not, at this early day, know what the truth of Scripture really was on the question of the doctrine of God. That would take another 50+ years, and many bitter controversies. It knew what was wrong; it did not know what was right. It was prepared to say to Sabellius and his henchmen: "You teach what is contrary to the Scriptures." It was not prepared to say, "The Scriptures teach this and this."

But what I have just said is not entirely true.

The Western part of the church was ahead of the Eastern part in those days. This was evident from the fact that the bishops of Rome understood exactly the error of Sabellius, while the Bishop of Alexandria himself strayed into other errors in his fear of Sabellianism.

But what the West saw more clearly than the East could not be easily shared with the East because of the huge language barrier: the

West wrote and talked in Latin; the East, in Greek. The East did not know what the West was thinking and doing for the most part, although the West was more informed about the East because Greek was more common throughout the Mediterranean world than Latin.

The advanced ideas of the West on the doctrine of the Trinity were due, in large measure, to the work of Tertullian. Our readers will recall how this great church father disappointed us all when he drifted into the error of that early form of Pentecostalism which has become known as Montanism. But Tertullian had come very close to defining what was to become the doctrine of the Trinity, and had given the church a vocabulary which included in it words like "Trinity," "person," "essence."

In fact, Tertullian was the first to define the error of Sabellianism in a graphic and unforgettable way. "These heretics," said Tertullian,

"have crucified the Father and deposed the Holy Spirit."

These were all preliminary skirmishes in the great battles that were yet to be fought before the issues were settled. But they would have to be settled because the doctrine of God is the basis of all truth.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not the abstract, difficult, icy cold doctrine of theologians. To mention only a few instances of how important the doctrine is, we must remember that the whole doctrine of the covenant rests upon the Trinity and the triune covenant life God lives in Himself. The absolute divinity of Christ rests on the truth of the Trinity; and on that doctrine of Christ's divinity rests all our salvation. The divinity of the Holy Spirit is the rock on which is to be built the whole blessed concept of our union with Christ—and union with God Himself through Christ. □

## Guest Article

Rev. David Higgs

# Introduction to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (1)

**I**t has been four years now since we returned from your country to our own, and just over three years since I was ordained to the office of minister of the Word and sacraments. Life in the ministry is always busy, but never so busy that

we forget you as churches, or the many friends that we made in your midst. Indeed, rare is the occasion when we do not pray publicly for you in our congregations—for you as denomination; for your ministers and other officebearers; for the seminary of which I was a part for three years; or for individuals whom we have heard are experiencing some trial from the hand of God.

It was a delight, therefore, to receive an invitation from the Edi-

tor of the *SB* to write some articles on the life of our churches in Australia. It is my desire that we are in your hearts as you are in ours. I am anxious to do anything that will foster mutual remembrance, knowledge, and love of each other as denominations. We have in common the central issues of our most holy faith, foremost of which is sovereign, particular grace. Not only do we hold these things in common, but we stand almost alone in the world today in sound-

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*Rev. Higgs is a minister in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia.*



ing them forth. If these articles on the life of our churches will foster mutual respect for each other, then God's name will be honored and Christ's kingdom advanced. And there is nothing more important than that.

Let us begin, then, with some history.

In recent years there has been much controversy, and therefore some confusion, concerning who exactly discovered Australia. What we do know with some degree of certainty is that a Dutch navigator, Dirk Hartog, sighted the barren shores of Western Australia in 1616. Also we know that the Dutch sea explorer Abel Tasman discovered the island state of Tasmania in 1642.

It was not until over 100 years later, however, that any serious consideration was given to settling Australia. One of the reasons for this was that one third of Australia is desert, and another one third is semi-arid. Any seafarer who sighted or landed upon the shores of Australia, therefore, rarely saw anything that gave him cause for excitement.

It was in 1770 that the English captain James Cook sailed up the east coast of Australia. This is the fertile section of our country. (Today approximately 90 percent of our population lives along the eastern seaboard.) Accordingly, Cook took home a more favorable report of New Holland, as it was called in those days.

In 1783 Britain lost its American colonies. Now, that has affected you as a country greatly. But it also affected us as a country, and still does! One of the consequences of your independence from Britain was that no longer did the British have anywhere to send their convicts. It is true that the English did not send convicts to your country often. But they did do this. And they would have done it far more in the late 1780s-90s because the Hulks (old ships used as prisons on English rivers)

were seriously overcrowded by then.

So it was, in 1787, that the First Fleet sailed from England to Australia, arriving on January 21, 1788, with about 750 convicts. The next year another fleet arrived with approximately 1,000 convicts. By 1810 there were some 12,000 people living in Australia, and about one third of them were convicts. Between 1820 and 1850 over 100,000 convicts were transported from Britain to eastern Australia.

Many of these convicts were sent to Australia for petty crimes. Often the crimes that were committed occurred because the people were starving. It is not uncommon to read accounts concerning convicts who were transported for stealing a loaf of bread, or some such thing. There were, however, also many hardened criminals who were transported to New Holland for their crimes.

All very interesting, you may say, but what has this got to do with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia? Nothing, directly. But it may give you a feel for our country, and a knowledge of some differences that it has with your own.

If my understanding of the history of your country is correct, the United States of America began, largely, due to colonization by refugees fleeing religious persecution in Europe. You have a religious heritage which, while it may be lost in large degree today, has influenced your culture. And by this I do not mean to suggest any form of common grace. My meaning, rather, is that your religious heritage, as a country, has been used of God to control and limit the progress of sin, to use Hoeksema's terminology.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, our country began, largely, for the purpose of providing a penal colony for the criminals whom Britain did not want. Now, of course, there was more to it than this. However, one of the main purposes, if not the

main purpose, for settling Australia was to provide a place for the excess of criminals whom Britain could not easily imprison in their own country. We, as a nation, have risen up out of the seedbed of masses of convicts.

Now, I do not mean by this that the church was not present in Australia, even from the earliest time of settlement. It was. The history of our country, however, reminds me of something that our confessional standards say concerning the catholic, visible aspect of the church: "This catholic church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure..." (WCF 25:4). In the history of Australia, in the early days, the church was so small that barely could she be seen. Not only that, she was less pure rather than more!

Let us examine this briefly.

Accompanying the first fleet was the Rev. Richard Johnson. He was an Anglican minister, and chaplain to the convicts. He saw himself as being the minister of all the men and women of the colony, however, and in this seems to have been a faithful man. He writes: "It is my duty to preach to all, to pray for all, and to admonish every one."<sup>2</sup> Other Anglican ministers were to follow Johnson.

It seems, though, that the strongest early influence on religious life in Australia sprang from the Wesleyan Methodists. By as early as 1831 "there was established in Australia, and in the islands of the South Pacific, nine circuits of the Wesleyan Methodists, fourteen missionaries, 736 communicants, and 1,000 children in schools."<sup>3</sup> It was not until the end of 1822 that the first Presbyterian minister arrived in Australia.<sup>4</sup> And we had to wait until the 1840s before synods of Presbyterian churches with decidedly Reformed heritage were established.

This is the history of the land in which I live. It is a history of



settlement for the prime purpose of creating a national jail for convicts. It is a history which, for the first fifty or sixty years, shows the true church to be hardly visible, and, when she is, to be much less pure than she ought to be.

It is this history which has shaped our nations. We are, I believe, more godless as a nation than the United States. Our culture is more radically humanistic, pagan, and devoted to sin. We Australians, as a generalization, hate authority, or seeing others succeed: but we love to shock, or to defy, or to "escape" through any means at our disposal — be that drunken-

ness, laziness, idolatry, or any other excesses of any type.

We must not get a distorted idea from this generalization, though. God has had His church in our land from the beginning. At times, even in the early days of settlement, there was evidence of remarkable workings of the Spirit of Christ within His church. But, due to our history, the national sins and characteristics of our people, as I have described them, are sadly predominant.

It is from within this general milieu formed by our history that God, in His grace, raised up the EPC as a denomination. It is

within this general milieu formed by our history that we have to work as churches, today.

Next time, D.V., I will talk about history again. However, I will write then more directly on the history of our churches. □

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1 Cf. Hoeksema, *Ready to Give an Answer: A Catechism of Reformed Distinctives*, pp. 111-112. Cf., also, pp. 116-117.

2 Cited in Murray, I.H., *Australian Christian Life from 1788: An Introduction and Anthology*. The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1988; p. 3.

3 Murray, p. 49.

4 Murray, p. 74, 75.

## Ministering to the Saints

Prof. Robert Decker

# The Elders and *Censura Morum*

Article 81 of *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (hereafter, the Church Order) requires that, "The ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons shall before the celebration of the Lord's Supper exercise Christian censure among themselves, and in a friendly spirit admonish one another with regard to the discharge of their office." Officebearers in the churches know this to be the practice of *censura morum*. In some Reformed churches the practice is called *censura fraterna*. This latter terminology speaks of "brotherly censure," and the former speaks of

"censure of one's conduct or life." Both are derived from the Latin.

The practice of *censura morum* has an interesting history. John Calvin first introduced mutual censure among the ministers four times per year.<sup>1</sup> The ministers, Calvin proposed, should meet once per quarter for a mutual examination of their conduct. The Church Order adopted by the national synod of Dordrecht in 1578 stipulated that the "ministers of the Word, elders and deacons shall exercise Christian censure or examination with one another concerning doctrine as well as conduct before the celebration of the Lord's Supper and shall accept Christian admonition in love."<sup>2</sup> Similarly the Church Order adopted by the national synod of Middleburg in 1581 required that "ministers of the Word, elders and deacons shall ex-

ercise Christian censure among themselves before the celebration of the Lord's Supper and inquire into doctrine as well as into life."<sup>3</sup> Among the several questions put to and answered by that same synod was this one: "Whether it is profitable and advisable that ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons exercise censure among each other before the celebration of the Lord's Supper?" The synod's answer was, "It is most profitable and advisable."<sup>4</sup> In the Church Order adopted by the synod of 'sGravenhage in 1586 the requirement was significantly changed to read, "Ministers of the Word, elders and deacons shall exercise Christian censure among themselves and admonish one another in a friendly way concerning the exercise of their offices."<sup>5</sup> According to this version the censure must concern

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"the exercise of their offices," not "their doctrine and life." Also the requirement that this censure be done "before the celebration of the Lord's Supper" was dropped. This latter requirement was reinserted by the Christian Reformed Church in its 1914 edition of the Church Order. And this latter is the version we have in our Church Order.

It should be noted in this connection, however, that this censure has nothing to do with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The question is not whether any of the officebearers has any grievances against one or more of his fellow consistory members, grievances which would make it impossible for them to celebrate the Lord's Supper properly. No one, whether he's in office or not, may go to the Lord's table with grievances against a fellow member of the church. This would not require special censure among officebearers. If an officebearer has a grievance against a fellow officebearer he must deal with that immediately. And if that grievance involves error in doctrine or gross sin in conduct the procedure for suspension, deposition, and discipline outlined in the Church Order must be implemented immediately.

The question naturally arises, then, why did the Christian Reformed Church reinsert the reference to the celebration of the Lord's Supper? Monsma and Van Dellen speculate, "Perhaps it was to give the churches assurance that mutual censure will be exercised in all Consistories at least four times a year."<sup>6</sup>

No doubt the reason why the 1586 synod of 'sGravenhage stipulated that this censure and mutual admonition should concern "the exercise of their office" rather than "their doctrine and life" is because the latter would make an officebearer subject to church discipline. If an officebearer teaches false doctrine or heresy or commits public gross sin he must be sus-

pended and deposed from office. If he is impenitent he is subject to the discipline of the church and even the "extreme remedy" of excommunication (Articles 76 - 80 of the Church Order). And certainly one may not wait for *censura morum* to initiate suspension/deposition and discipline. Hence Article 81 is not speaking of what we commonly call "censurable sin" either in doctrine or life.

How then must we understand *censura morum*? According to Article 81 *censura morum* requires the officebearers to "exercise Christian censure among themselves, and in a friendly spirit admonish one another with regard to the discharge of their office." The word "censure" in contemporary English usage is a negative term. It means: to find fault with, to condemn as wrong, to blame, to express disapprobation of, to criticize adversely.

No doubt this is part of what the fathers had in mind. A minister might display certain weaknesses in his preaching and teaching. Perhaps he neglects certain doctrines or aspects of the Christian's calling. The minister might develop certain bad habits in the delivery of his sermons. Perhaps his congregational prayers are too much the same or full of "vain repetition." It could certainly happen that the minister neglects certain aspects of his pastoral duties. A minister might dress slovenly and thus dishonor the sacred office to which Christ calls him. Certainly matters such as these could be brought to his attention at *censura morum*.

Likewise an elder might be weak in certain aspects of the duties of the office of elder. Maybe an elder in certain aspects of his life is a poor example to his fellow believers. Or perhaps an elder fails properly to "comfort and instruct the members, and also to exhort others in respect to the Christian religion."<sup>7</sup> This being the case his fellow officebearers ought to bring these to his attention and admon-

ish him concerning these weaknesses when *censura morum* is conducted.

So it could happen as well with the deacons. One might not be diligent in the collecting of the alms and in the distribution of them to the poor.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps one of the deacons fails to visit faithfully the widows and widowers or shut-ins of the congregation. When *censura morum* is conducted, such a deacon ought to be admonished concerning those weaknesses.

There certainly is a place for negative, constructive criticism in *censura morum*. The motive, however, of the critic must never be to hurt his colleague in office. His motive must be to help his fellow officebearer in order that the precious flock of God may be the better cared for and edified.

Let the officebearers never forget the *manner* in which this censure and admonition must be done. It must be *Christian* censure. This means it must not be censure in the ungodly, worldly sense. In the world of unbelief, the critic seeks to hurt and destroy. He's motivated by hatred against God and his neighbor. This must not be so in the church, and certainly this must not be the kind of censure that takes place among the officebearers of Christ's church. Let the censure be done in a Christian manner out of love for God and one's neighbor. The admonishing too must be done "in a friendly spirit." God's friends, and this is what we are as Christians, seek to help each other. The admonishing must never be harsh and bitter. If God's people in general must not "bite and devour one another," certainly the officebearers must not be guilty of this sin (cf. Gal. 5:13-15).

But there is more involved with *censura morum*. In its original, Latin sense the word "censure" means to form or express a judgment in regard to, to estimate, to judge. This too is what the fathers had in mind when they placed this article in the



Church Order. In other words, while there certainly is a place for negative criticism, *censura morum* ought also be positive. It ought to be a time when the officebearers encourage one another. It ought to be the occasion for officebearers to point to the good work that their colleagues are doing and exhort them to continue in this for the edification of the congregation.

In sum, let *censura morum* not become a mere formality among the councils of the churches, something that's accomplished in three

minutes or less four times a year. Let it be meaningful. Let it be the time for constructive criticism given out of love for God and for one another and God's church. Let it also be a time when the officebearers prayerfully strive to improve in the discharge of the duties of the sacred office of Christ in which they are given the privilege to serve His precious flock. □

1 Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), pp. 54-63.

2 Richard R. De Ridder, translator, *Translation of Ecclesiastical Manual Including the Decisions of the Netherlands Synods and Other Significant Matters Relating to the Government of the Churches* by P. Biesterveld and Dr. H. H. Kuyper (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), p. 93.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 153.

6 Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), p. 333.

7 *The Church Order*, Article 23.

8 *The Church Order*, Article 25.

## Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

# McSocieties, McVansma, & You

**M**cEverything. So one has described this age. A fair description, I think. We live in an age where almost everything is and must be quick and easy. And to go. Whatever it is we want we want it short, simple, sweet, quick, yummy, and cheap. Hot'n Now. Your way. For people on the go. McEverything. Our kind of age. Our kind of place.

Well then, the question is fair: have you ever gotten a cheeseburger, fries, and coke...at Bible Study? Which is to say: have you ever not gotten much, or gotten indigestion? Almost worse: have you yourself *ordered* such fast Bible-food? Have you done this by going to Bible Study without having studied in preparation, and with-

out prayer, seeking only to get something spiritual quickly, just to have something "to go," and to ease conscience pangs brought on by your daily misplaced priorities?

Yes. McSocieties. McBible Studies. That is what can happen in these perilous times, in these perilous fast and easy times. Causes? Culture, certainly. I mean the fast-paced kind. From the mark America has been set to go, to go fast, to grind up the ground, to go on. Result? There are Made-In-America Bible Studies that cover the most ground, maybe, but fail to dig anywhere at all into the depths of the truth of God. Another cause? Cash, to be sure. It is a prosperous time in our nation. With money we can buy toys. With our free (non-working) time we like to relax, and be nigh like unto vegetables (couch-potatoes) or outright hedonists. The prosperity has a cost—to get and stay ahead, or just even, we must, we think, work, work, work. But no time for Bible Study, no possibility of deep

thought about the things of God. If we do take some time for devotional exercises, we Mc it—the one minute Bible study before we drop off to bed. And our consciences are soothed once again. Another cause? Computers. Not just the machines. But the computer-mind-set. It is Mc, to be sure. Indeed, with the proliferation of computers and the propaganda of the most megahertz out the windows-95 has gone much of our willingness quietly to meditate, diligently to study, and patiently to wait for the Spirit's light when it comes to that which we cannot compute: the Word of the living God. Computers and our Bible societies? Well, from mitchelld@juno.com it is not hard to think "societies@internet.com." In other words, thinking computer-like we can easily be led to want societies to deliver as quick as possible, to give us a kind of spiritual "fix" in our busy lives. Any society that does not so deliver, that does not give me something quick and easy, is snail-mail.

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



McSocieties. McBible Study. Due to an on-the-go Culture, beaucoup Cash, and crazy Computers (and ten other things). But these things are not ultimately to blame. Sin is the problem. The perilous fast times in which are these strange societies are due to sin. And the escalation of it. Sin. The failure to take God seriously. The failure to *sit* and ponder God's Word. The loss of appetite for spiritually good food. That is the reason for McSocieties.

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We are not surprised that the McChurch mimics McDonald's. It is not surprising that where the preachers are but short-order cooks (McPreachers) and entertainer-clowns, there will be, perhaps, billions and billions served (*saved*, they tell us), but billions of bloated stomachs still. Nor are we surprised, really, that where Calvinism has gone strangely Irish (changed into McCalvinism—Calminianism?!), where a McCross gospel is preached (golden, without the red), there will be McSocieties galore. For all these perversions of doctrine and Christless gospels can produce are McChristians—fashionable, '90s' Christians who want societies like themselves: short, simple, sweet, yummy, and cheap, I guess.... The good news they want to hear is news they can use—and fast! God to go. Christ to go. Doctrine on the run.

I say, we can understand all this *there*—in the church-hamburger joints. But how so in the *true* church? How can we, who are graced to love God and God's Word, honor God so cheaply, and treat God's Word like hamburger? All of this *perversion* of Bible Study makes us nauseous. We hate the very thought of McSocieties. We would go to God, and to His Christ, and *meditate* on truth—stay there a while, digest it. What is, and what can be our problem? Why do we

want just sort of to grab at God's truth and to go on in our life content only with a form of godliness?

Sin again. The world's sin is just our sin. We can sin worse than any worldling or McChurchling. Knowing what is good food, we can desire just this world's garlicks and leeks. Recipients of the gospel, we prefer the World to the Word. We lunge after this earth's goodies, and dabble in the things of the kingdom of heaven. We are devoted to sportology. We are dillatantes of theology. Our sight of the invisible God and blessings of the covenant of grace has dimmed. Our delight in God and spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus has diminished. Our trust in the revealed promises of God is lacking. We have good intentions, somewhere deep in our hearts, but the spirit of the age of Mc has done its fast and destructive work....

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Shall we have good societies? Believing ones? Societies of the Holy Spirit? Societies of the Word? Societies in the society of God? Societies well attended with those young and old who hunger and thirst after the true righteousness as it is in Jesus?

What will it take? Always grace, and God, we know. Without God gracing us we would be McEverything, living always and loving life in the fast, broad lane. Without grace in societies there might be some socializing, some mindless regurgitation of truths no longer felt, but that is all. But where there is grace there is the beginning of the new life of the children of God individually, and the hope of the good societies of these children.

Grace and the *means* of grace. The God of grace gives grace, also for societies, through the means He Himself has ordained.

Which is to say: there must be preaching. Do it, preacher! You

do not have to do it, but you may, in the society room. But for God's sake do it from the pulpit anyway! Hear it, believer! In the precious moments of preaching—*then* is the voice of God sounding forth. Then is God working faith, and confirming it. This is when the love and passion for the Word is kindled and rekindled. This is when the heat, the oxygen, the fuel of the Divine is applied to the dead wood and the sputtering flame. This is when the heart is made hot. Hearing this Word-preaching with true, humble, receptive faith is why we are *compelled* (willingly!) to spiritual devotedness to our Maker and Redeemer, and to come together as believers in societies to commune with each other around the Word. Let there be preaching, and there will be societies. Let there be good preaching, and there will be good societies. Let there not be preaching, let there be those who think there is no need for church but that it is a nice thing to study the Bible together, and there will not be true societies of God. Let there be bad preaching and there will be bad societies. Which will we have?

Preaching makes prayer. Preaching works prayer ... or the preaching and/or the preached-to are dead. Prayer is necessary for good societies. The hearer of the Word prays to know and to drink deeply from the Word of God. He wants God above all—just God! He knows that God is not simply "God to go," a god who is for me, and to help me to get by and to have fun. He knows that God is to be worshiped, to be dwelt with, to listen to, and to become like. He prays fervently for the grace and Holy Spirit of God to establish and enrich the church's Bible Studies with God-centered study promoting resting-in-God people. And God answers! Where there are praying people there are prosperous, rewarding, God-honoring societies!

Prayer, then work. *Ora et labora!* The believer who truly



prays will then *study* in preparation for society. He will examine the passage or subject to be discussed, comparing scripture with scripture, discerning the gospel, growing and seeking to grow all the while in the knowledge of Jesus the Christ, *the* revelation of God. He will truly study. He will make notes—mental or written, of significant points of doctrine, and insights into the practicalities of godliness. He will have questions, and jot them down and ponder them. He will consult a concordance to engage in a meaningful word-concept study. He will read a good commentary for further insight into the truth of the Word. He will reason through the truth God has shown him.

Which is close to what the Bible calls “musing.” Musing is also a vital means to attaining good Bible societies. With musing I include meditation, contemplation, rumination, pondering, calling to remembrance, and the like. Musing is a holy speaking to oneself of the things of God. It is taking the received food, the Word of God, and thoughtfully chewing on it for a good, long while, so that it is digested properly, fully assimilated. Musing is the opposite of being *amused*. Being amused is being stimulated by something so that we are entertained by it and feel good about it. But musing is what we

do when we are stirred in our *thoughts* about God’s Word, to re-examine it, to think it *through*—to be both confirmed in what we know, but also challenged to grow deeper in our knowledge and understanding. The result is higher thoughts of God, humble honesty about ourselves, with reverence and godly resolve to have our *living* transformed according as our musing minds have been. Musing and societies? Do you have musers in yours? These are the ones to whom people of God listen. They may not speak much. But when they speak, pins could drop and be heard. This is because when musers speak they tend to muse aloud; they take us with them to the heights and to the depths.

One other thing. The McAge is me, me, me. McSocieties are filled with individuals spouting off their views, hardly hearing or waiting to hear what others have to say. Good societies are promoted by our appreciating *these* means of grace: other Spirit-in-dwelt people. They are places where pray-ers have prayed in love and thanks for the brother and so when in society with him they are eager to hear what he has to say. They are places where students of the Word do not come to show off, but to learn together with all the saints at Jesus’ feet. They are places where musers

listen to other musers with respect for the depth of insight God has given them.

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It’s a fast and furious world. Somehow we have got to get *both* feet off this world’s treadmill and walk more in the way of faith.

Even the world tells us to “stop and smell the roses.” It sings “slow down, you move to fast.” It knows something is wrong, and that the food is bad, and the pace is dehumanizing.

Shall we not listen when God speaks? Be still. Be believing. Be taken up with the gospel God has sent down. Be under no tyrant, now in these devilish McDays. Shake off the yoke of lord Dollar! Come away from the breast of mother Earth! Resist the tyranny of the Urgent! Turn from the Gim-mick, and from this Fix and that, unto the living God!

As *societies* of the people of God! As people of God who search the Scriptures together! Blessed fellowships! Shall we not have them, my friends? For such an age as this? Preach, and drink preaching as panting deer. Pray. Study. Muse. And come together in love. For good meals at the Bible societies. Meals of the covenant-home, the church of Jesus Christ. Such societies! Our kind of place! □

## News From Our Churches

## Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Congregation Activities

**W**e include here some information on the recently disbanded Trinity PRC in Houston, Texas, provided thoughtfully by Mrs. Trudi Hopkins, a member there.

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

“June 7, 1998 was the last service of the Trinity congregation in West Houston, Texas. The consistory passed the motion to disband on June 8, 1998. Pastor Mahtani and family moved that week to Michigan and another member followed shortly thereafter. Three families remain waiting on the Lord. Our desire is to join with one of our fellow congregations, as

soon as the Lord makes the way clear.

“On July 1, the historic church building was relocated, about a half-mile south to the LH7 Ranch, which is a designated historic landmark in Texas. Our church building joins the general store/post office, also rescued from demolition, that was part of Barker, a frontier town which served the ranchers





*Trinity PRC becomes a historic landmark*

Wyckoff, N.J. sponsored a lecture on the subject, "Jesus Christ: The Builder of the Church."

#### **Young Peoples' Activities**

This year's PR Young Peoples' Convention was held July 20-24 on the campus of Grand Valley State University in Allendale, MI, with the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids serving as host. The theme of this year's convention was "Living the Antithesis." Prof. D. Engelsma, Rev. J. Laning, and Rev. J. Mahtani were the speakers. Hopefully the young people were spiritually edified through the fellowship and activities of that convention.

#### **Minister Activities**

Rev. J. Slopsema has received the approval from his doctor to begin working part time. He is currently preaching once a Sunday and will continue on that basis through the end of the summer, D.V.

A welcome was planned for July 8 by our Loveland, CO PRC for the arrival of Seminarian Garry Eriks, his wife, Jen, and their daughter, Abbie. Mr. Eriks will be serving his internship there through the end of the year, under the care of Loveland's consistory and pastor, Rev. G. VanBaren.

The Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, as calling church for a home missionary to Pittsburgh, PA, formed a trio of the Revs. A. denHartog, J. Mahtani, and R. Moore. On July 19 they extended a call to Rev. J. Mahtani. He accepted that call and was installed as missionary on Sunday, August 9.

#### *Food For Thought*

"The nature of the divine goodness is not only to open to those who knock, but also to cause them to knock and ask."

—St. Augustine □

and cotton growers of the area. Today there is not a town. The LH7 Ranch was once a large cattle ranch which still breeds Texas Longhorns, but on a much smaller scale. Perhaps the ranch will someday open to the public as a museum.

"The church building was built in 1949, replacing a run-down church. The only salvageable items were the cathedral windows, which were installed in the new church.

"Rev. Lubbers worked as home missionary in the Houston area in the early 1960s and passed through again in the early 70s to encourage the saints who were interested in forming a congregation. The late Rev. R. Harbach began work in Houston, and Trinity was organized February 15, 1977 under the supervision of Hope PRC in Walker, MI. The people first met in a community center. After about a year the building was purchased from a Presbyterian church that had been meeting in Barker since 1906.

"To God be the glory. His work will not return unto Him void. It shall accomplish that which pleases Him and it shall prosper in the thing whereto He sent it (Is. 55:11)."

The consistory of the South Holland, IL PRC organized eight

classes for their young adults to study the distinctives of our churches. They especially encouraged the attendance of seniors in high school and above who were perhaps contemplating making confession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Two of the topics covered this past summer were "The Holy Walk of Life of a Reformed Believer," and "Highlights of Reformed Theology."

On July 12 Rev. A. Brummel was installed as the ninth pastor of the South Holland, IL PRC. After a couple weeks to settle in and complete some prior commitments, Rev. Brummel took up his labors full time in South Holland, preaching his inaugural sermon on July 26 entitled, "And Pray for Me," based on Ephesians 6:18-20.

The consistory of the Hudsonville, MI PRC has recently set up a voice-mail communication line to help keep their congregation better informed and updated on the sick in their congregation. The phone number can be called 24 hours a day for up-to-date information provided by the families involved.

#### **Evangelism Activities**

In late June the Evangelism Society of the Covenant PRC in



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of Edgerton PRC express their Christian sympathy to Allen Hendriks in the death of Allen's brother,

#### HENRY HENDRIKS.

May the resurrection promise of I Corinthians 15:54, 55 comfort our Christian brother's heart. "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

John Hilton, Clerk

### NOTICE!!

The Fall meeting of the Eastern Men's and Ladies' League will be held Tuesday, September 22, at 8 P.M., in Southwest PRC. Rev. C. Hanko will speak on the topic: "The Spiritual Life of the Family after the Children are Grown." All Men's/Ladies' Society members and anyone interested in this topic are urged to attend.

### NOTICE!!

The Annual RFPA Meeting will be held in Grace Protestant Reformed Church on September 24 at 8 P.M. Rev. Steven Key will speak on the topic "Reading, Writing, and Heretics." Also, election of new board members will be held from a nomination of John Buiter, Jon Engelsma, Dave Kamps, Ron Koole, Clare Kuiper (SW), Steve Langerak, Tom Schipper, and Matt VanOverloop. Members and non-members, young and old, men and women are invited to attend this meeting.

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 23, 1998, our parents, **JIM and CAROL SCHIMMEL**, celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We thank God for the beautiful example of a Christian marriage and a happy home you have given us. All the years of your total devotion to us, raising us in our Christian schools, have indeed been a blessing from God. May God continue His work through you in the years to come.

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38, 39—wedding text).

- \* Erin and Sarah Windemuller
- \* Naomi Schimmel
- \* James and Stacey Schimmel
- \* Rebeka Schimmel
- \* Joseph Schimmel

Grand Rapids, Michigan

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 17th, we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

#### MR. and MRS. CORNELIUS KAMPS.

We are thankful to our heavenly Father for the faithfulness He has shown us through their love, covenant instruction, guidance, and prayers. May our gracious God continue to bless them in their life together.

"The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:5, 6)

- \* Carey and Lois Kamps
- \* Dave and Karla Kamps
- \* Terry and Lavonne Kooienga
- \* Jim and Sandra Westing
- \* Dave and Ruth Gunnink
- \* Larry and Lynn VanOverloop
- \* Jonathon and Tricia Kamps

29 grandchildren

Grand Rapids, Michigan

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hope PRC (Walker) expresses its sympathy to members Marinus Kamps and Dan DeMeester in the death of their daughter-in-law and sister-in-law,

#### LISA KAMPS.

May they experience God's comfort as they deal with the loss of this young mother.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber" (Psalm 121:1-3).

John Buiter, President  
Michael Lotterman, Secretary

### LECTURE

Grandville PRC  
Evangelism Committee  
will present a lecture by  
**Prof. Russell Dykstra**  
on the topic

"God's Priceless Gift—The Family"  
September 25 at 8 P.M.,  
in Grandville Middle School  
(former high school).