



The Standard Bearer

***A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine***

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The Blessed Reformation Doctrine of Total Depravity

One of the doctrines of Scripture that became very important to the fathers of the Reformation was the doctrine that man was totally depraved. This was a doctrine that was not very popular in the days of our Reformation fathers, and it is certainly not popular in our day. And yet this doctrine we must maintain as essential to our assurance of salvation as the children of God. Besides, one cannot maintain the glory of God's name if he does not also understand this doctrine. If we are to glorify God as we ought as the children of God, and if we are to have any assurance of salvation, we must maintain the Scripture's truth of total depravity.

Today there is less and less preaching that concerns itself with the devastating nature of our sin, and more and more emphasis placed upon the welfare of man. The needs of man are emphasized, while the glory of God takes a back seat. This ought not to be; for

where there is a lack of instruction concerning the natural state of man, there is also a lack of assurance of salvation. Further, only where and when the total depravity of man is confessed and where man lives his life in the light of this confession shall God be magnified as He by sovereign grace saves us.

The doctrine of man's depravity was preserved for our churches in the Canons of Dordt as they were formulated in 1618-19 over against the heresy of Arminianism. In the Canons we find a defense of the faith over against those that would deny the natural depravity of man. The Canons rightly maintained that man is totally depraved and that this has been the teaching of Christ in the church of the ages. Any qualifications set upon this doctrine to weaken its teaching are shown to be merely a human invention. Scripture maintains that man in himself is dead in sin and utterly dependent upon God's grace for salvation.

The church, on the basis of Scripture, has always maintained that God's will is sovereign, and likewise that man's salvation is

uniquely and entirely in the hand of God. In the 1600s, as is also true today in so much of the church world, it was taught that man can merit before God, that salvation is dependent upon the choice of man for salvation, and that God's will to save is conditioned by man's will. The Scriptures do not so instruct us, but rather teach that God's will is always sovereign. For instance, we read in Acts 15:18, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." And the psalmist teaches us, "But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3). We therefore believe that God is sovereign and omnipotent, He accomplishes with perfection all that He purposes. Now because God is not man, but is the infinitely perfect God, we must confess that there are no mistakes in God's will or His purpose, and that He accomplishes all that He purposes.

This certainly is true of God's will concerning the moral rational creature, whether man or angel. God teaches us, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I

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

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. David J. Engelsma
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail:
engelsma@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Don Doezeema
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49468-0603

PH: (616) 531-1490
(616) 538-1778
FAX: (616) 531-3033

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

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

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland

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will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. 9:15). And further, in the 18th verse of this same chapter, the Spirit teaches, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." We are given to understand therefore that it is God, ultimately, that determines the salvation of His elect and the damnation of the wicked, and does so according to His sovereign good pleasure. But to understand fully how this can be we must understand that by nature we are all worthy of damnation, for there is no good in us, apart from His work of salvation. If we were to maintain that man is not totally depraved, that there is some good in natural man whereby he can seek God in his own strength, so that in part our salvation is dependent upon our work, we must then deny God's sovereignty and take some of God's glory to ourselves. To deny the total depravity of man will lead to a denial of the absolute sovereignty of God, and will in the end rob Him of all glory.

Yet today, when God is proclaimed to be sovereign in the work of salvation in Christ Jesus, this preaching is despised by the unregenerate. As Christ is preached to be the only ground of our salvation by the will of the living God, there is come to pass the saying of Peter. It is said of Christ in I Peter 2:8 that He is become "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient; whereunto also they were appointed." Understand that natural man despises this doctrine, because it means that our wills are completely bound to Satan and death as the fruit of the fall. It means that we are so depraved that we cannot obtain salvation apart from God's work in Christ.

Man naturally hates the doctrine of God's sovereignty. He finds that it leaves him no room for boasting, it denies all worthiness on man's part. The fruit is

that many rebel against this truth and often do so by denying our own depravity. Natural man despises the doctrine of double predestination, he cannot tolerate the God who instructs, "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Is. 6:9-10). This hatred for the doctrine of the sovereignty of God causes man to deny his dependence upon God for salvation and to deny his own natural and total depravity. He thus exalts himself and explains that he must decide whether to be saved or not, he must make the move before Christ's sacrifice can have effect. If we follow this path we will take from God His glory and will lose all assurance of salvation. How necessary for us that we jealously guard the truth of the total depravity of man.

As churches we maintain the truth of the total depravity of man over against errors with respect to the doctrine of man. This has really been the case from the beginning of time. The lie concerning man's natural ability became the occasion for the fall. Satan tempted Adam and Eve, saying that they could be as God. Satan taught that they could determine what was good and evil, and Adam and Eve fell. From that moment on, natural man denied the fruit of the fall, that he died. Again and again man exalted himself above God, making images of God, serving gods of his own imagination. The Pharisees taught that they had the ability to save themselves by their own works' righteousness, and denied their own natural depravity.

The Pelagians continued this evil denial of the judgment of God upon the sinner and denied that man was so depraved that he could bring forth no good work. They

did this by teaching that man is not totally depraved as a fruit of the fall, that man is not dead in sin, but merely sick. Man could still by an exercise of his own will seek the balm of healing grace and be instrumental in his own salvation. They taught that God had prepared salvation for all men, and offers that salvation to all men, and now it is up to man what he will do. This same error was brought to the foreground again by the Arminians, and is prevalent in the church world today, as salvation is repeatedly conditioned upon the will of man. However, this is and always has been the attempt of Satan to destroy the glory of God and to bring to destruction all of mankind.

Over against this lie of darkness, the Scriptures teach that man by his own sin is become totally depraved. This is the point that Paul makes when he teaches us that before we were quickened we were dead in trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1). The fruit of the fall is that man died spiritually and became totally corrupt, so that the imaginations of his thoughts were only evil continually (Gen. 6:5). Thus we may read that legally death passed upon all men with the fall of Adam (Rom. 5:12), and spiritually we are conceived and born in sin and iniquity (Ps. 51:5).

Thus we must have nothing to do with the distinction sometimes made between total and absolute depravity, which is an attempt to deny this doctrine. That we are depraved means that we are dead, and as Scripture so clearly points out, this means that by nature we are dead and can bring forth no good thing. Romans 3: 10-12 characterizes fallen man as follows: "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

So we should be reminded of two things. First, God's Word clearly teaches that man is totally depraved, and we must not come to understand man's natural state by what we feel is just or right, but by what God *declares* to be true. God says that man is dead in sin, and with the prophet we exclaim, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9).

Secondly, we must then see apparently good deeds on the part of natural man as just that, "apparently" good deeds, one kind of lust suppressing another, for "there is none righteous, no, not one." "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." When man uses all things in the service of man and in the service of sin, his works cannot be considered good in the eyes of God. The world of natural man stands in enmity against God and hates His cause and uses all things to advance the cause of darkness and his own sinful desires.

To maintain this truth serves the glory of God's name and gives assurance to God's children of the salvation that is certainly theirs. This doctrine that many find so

hard is exactly a doctrine that is God glorifying and gives to us peace. Let us explain. If one denies man's depravity, then he must teach that man's salvation is conditioned upon man's response, and election is conditioned upon that response of man, it is determined by a foreknowing by God of what man would do. Therefore it is man that in the end determines whether he is saved or not. Deny man's total depravity, and one must teach that atonement is universal, and that all men have the ability and the opportunity to take hold of a salvation that is offered to all. Thus atonement is questionable, and dependent again upon man. Deny total depravity, and the grace of God and the work of the Spirit are taught to be resistible by man. Man can therefore destroy the work of God or prevent the work of God from running its course.

Understand, then, there is absolutely no comfort for God's children if salvation is dependent even in the smallest part upon us. Man may then boast, but that boast will not stand in the day of judgment. For we all have sinned and come

short of the glory of God. Deny total depravity, and we must teach that we are subject to the falling away from grace. Then all comfort is removed and we have no peace.

On the other hand, to hold fast the teaching of Scripture concerning man's natural depravity assures that God shall receive all glory in our salvation and we shall have the exceeding great comfort of our confession that we are saved by grace alone. For when this doctrine is proclaimed we come to know ourselves to be undone sinners, there is no room for any pride in ourselves, all boasting is made impossible. This is the work of God by His Word and Spirit in us whereby we are led in all humility to trust alone in God for our salvation—a salvation that is to be found only in the obedient death of Jesus our Savior on the cross.

We then are filled with rejoicing as the righteousness of Christ is declared to be our righteousness, and we are assured of salvation, for it is of God's grace alone. Hence, when God's children enjoy the blessings of salvation, all the glory is rendered unto God. □

Editorial

The Compromised Theology of Charles Hodge

Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company has recently published an abridged edition of Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge's three-volume *Systematic Theology: Systematic Theology (Abridged Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Gross (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 585 pages, \$22.99 (paper).

Professor Gross' use of Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology* in teaching and his love of the theology that it contains have helped him skillfully to abridge the original three volumes in one thick book. The abridged edition retains the essence of Hodge's theology, from introduction to eschatology. In addition to shortening the exposition that is retained, the editor

has in the main left out the passages that demand "scholarly exegetical analysis of the reader"; the sections of historical theology; much of the polemics; and all the quotations in foreign languages. Sections of the original that are omitted are indicated by referring to them in the appropriate place in the text within brackets. The numbering of parts, chapters, and sec-

tions correspond to the three-volume original so that the reader can readily check the abridgment against the original.

This work will be helpful to the pastor, as well as to the reading layman, both in familiarizing himself with the enormously influential theology of Charles Hodge (and 19th century Princeton Seminary) and in instructing himself in the fundamentals of the Reformed faith.

The book includes a subject index, a Scripture index, and study questions for each chapter.

It is painfully evident that the theology of Charles Hodge is a compromised theology.

Hodge's theology contains two heresies that are fatal to Reformed Christianity. They have already destroyed the Presbyterian Church in which Hodge was a professor of theology. One is the accommodation of Scripture to the attack by evolutionary science on the biblical doctrine of creation. Occurring ominously in a passage in which Hodge extols the place and power of reason in religion is a warning to the theologians that "it is unwise ... to array themselves needlessly against the teachings of science." Hodge continues: "let science take its course, assured that the Scriptures will accommodate themselves to all well-authenticated scientific facts in time to come, as they have in the past" (p. 59).

What Hodge has in mind becomes clear in the chapter on creation. Admitting that belief of God's creation of the world in six days is "the more obvious interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis" and that this has been "the common belief of Christians," Hodge, nevertheless, allows for the possibility of what today is called theistic evolution over billions of years: "This interpretation, however, must be controlled not only by the laws of language, but by facts. *This is at present an open question.* The facts necessary for its de-

cision have not yet been duly authenticated" (emphasis added).

Hodge feels the pressure exerted by the geologists against the biblical revelation of creation. The only way to accommodate Scripture to these scientists is to give up the days of Genesis 1. Hodge is forced to recognize that "taking this account (Gen. 1—DJE) by itself, it would be most natural to understand the word ('day'—DJE) in its ordinary sense." Then he adds:

but if that sense brings the Mosaic account into conflict with facts, and another sense avoids such conflict, then it is obligatory on us to adopt that other. Now it is urged that if the word day be taken in the sense of an indefinite period of time, a sense which it undoubtedly has in other parts of Scripture, there is not only no discrepancy between the Mosaic account of the creation and the assumed facts of geology, but there is a most marvelous coincidence between them.

Hodge's conclusion is a marvel of desperate boldness and hopeless naiveté:

If it should be proved that the creation was a process continued through countless ages and that the Bible alone of all the books of antiquity recognizes that fact (by Hodge's changing its "days" into geologic periods and by Hodge's correcting its testimony that each creature was called into existence "after his kind"—DJE), then the idea of its being of human origin would be utterly refuted (pp. 205-211).

Charles Hodge delivered up the biblical doctrine of creation to the tender mercies of evolutionary science. The result is the idea of the utterly human origin of the Bible in many Presbyterian churches.

The other false doctrine that bedevils Hodge's theology to the destruction of the Reformed faith

is his teaching, in radical contradiction of predestination, that God is gracious to all in the preaching of the gospel. Hodge speaks of this as the offer of the gospel. This necessarily leads Hodge to affirm that in an important respect the death of Christ was for every human without exception. In the chapter entitled, "For Whom Did Christ Die?" Hodge maintains that "the death of Christ had a relation to the whole human family as well. It is the ground on which salvation is offered to every creature under heaven who hears the gospel.... There is a sense, therefore, in which He died for all, and there is a sense in which He died for the elect alone" (pp. 388, 389).

According to Hodge, Presbyterians (called "Augustinians" by Hodge)

do not deny that Christ died for all men. What they deny is that He died equally and with the same design for all men. He died for all that He might arrest the immediate execution of the penalty of the law upon the whole of our apostate race; that He might secure for men the innumerable blessings attending their state on earth, which, in one important sense, is a state of probation; and that He might lay the foundation for the offer of pardon and reconciliation with God on condition of faith and repentance.... This is what is meant when it is said, or implied in Scripture, that Christ gave Himself as a propitiation not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world (pp. 392, 393).

In keeping with this doctrine of universal grace grounded in the death of Christ as propitiation for the sins of every human, Hodge teaches that "the covenant of grace is made (by God) with all men," although it has "special reference to the elect." Just as is the case with Hodge's doctrine of universal atonement, the basis of the teaching that God makes His covenant of grace with every human being is Hodge's notion that God

is gracious to all in the preaching of the gospel, that is, "the offer."

Salvation is offered to all men on the condition of faith in Christ.... In this sense, the covenant of grace is formed with all mankind.... Salvation is offered to all men on the condition of faith in Christ. To that extent the covenant of grace is made with all men. Another crucial fact is that those who, having heard the gospel, refuse to accept that covenant place themselves without its pale (p. 342).

Three things are undeniably true about this theology. First, its universal grace is the grace of salvation, not some non-saving grace, for it is the grace expressed in the gospel; the grace that desires the salvation of all; the grace that has its source in the death of Christ; and the grace that belongs to the covenant of grace. Second, this grace of salvation is resistible, non-ef-ficacious, ineffectual, and frustrated. Third, the entire theory rests on a view of the preaching of the gospel as grace to all who hear.

This doctrine of universal, in-effective grace in the preaching of the gospel, necessarily grounded in a death of Christ for all without exception, destroyed the Presbyterian Church in which Hodge taught this heresy to thousands of pastors and missionaries. It first opened the church up to open, avowed Arminianism. This happened while Hodge was still living. The end of the process was the falling away of the church to sheer modernism.

Happily, if surprisingly, when Hodge is accounting for the promiscuous preaching of the gospel and its indiscriminate (external) call in light of predestination, he does not have recourse to any such notion of universal grace in the preaching. Hodge asks the question, "Inasmuch as some men are not saved, the question arises, Why should the call be addressed to every one? Or, What is the design of God in making the call of the gos-

pel universal and indiscriminate?" His explanation is:

(1) The most obvious answer is found in the nature of the call itself. The call of the gospel is simply (a) the command of God to men to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ together with (b) the promise that those who believe shall be saved. It is the revelation of a duty binding upon all men....(2) The general call of the gospel is the means ordained by God to gather in His chosen people.... That only these particular people are made willing to perform the duty binding upon all men does not in any way conflict with the propriety of the universal proclamation. (3) This general call of the gospel with the promise that whoever believes shall be saved serves to show the unreasonable wickedness and perverseness of those who deliberately reject it. The justice of their condemnation is thus rendered the more obvious... (p. 425).

This is the confessional Reformed explanation of the external call of the gospel to the many who are not chosen (Matt. 22:14). There is no mention of grace to the rep-

robate. The explanation does not contradict and thus overturn predestination. It is evident from this sound explanation that it is possible to preach the gospel to all and to call all to repentance and faith without supposing, or proclaiming, that God loves and desires to save all.

Most of the reputedly conservative Presbyterian and Reformed churches of the present day will condemn *this* Hodge—the Hodge who accounts for promiscuous preaching without referring to a grace for all in the preaching—as a hyper-Calvinist. The *other* Hodge—the Hodge of universal, ineffectual grace in the gospel, cross, and covenant—they enthusiastically embrace.

Such is always the result in the churches of a compromised theology. □

—DJE

Correction

The reference to Henry Stob in the editorial of the September 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer* should have been *Summoning Up Remembrance*, Eerdmans, 1995.

Could there be a greater blessing
Ever given mortal man
Than to know he has a calling,
One that's even higher than
That of angels, who attend him,
(Though they heav'nly creatures be),
They protect sons of the Father—
Sons and daughters—you and me.

Called To Be Saints

Oh, how great a love has bought us
While in filth, depraved, we stood.
He has cleansed us through the life-blood
Of His Son, the only good.
What a glorious, holy calling:
To be saints, who sinners are:
Let us strive to walk each moment
Consciously within His care.

If we truly seek to serve Him
We will turn from sinful ways,
And the words we speak will ever
Echo our Redeemer's praise.
Every wicked thought dispelling,
Let's proclaim His grace abroad,
For we have a high vocation—
Called to be the saints of God.

Thelma Westra

Arius and the Council of Nicea (1)

Introduction

"I believe ... in one Lord Jesus Christ ... begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father...."

So read the lofty cadences of the very first creed adopted by the church of our Lord Jesus Christ: the Nicene Creed. It sounds so familiar to us; yet it was born out of fierce and bitter struggle which nearly tore the church to pieces.

Our readers will recall that in an earlier issue we talked about an error in the church promoted by Sabellius. It was an error concerning the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sabellius taught that Jesus Christ was only one way, among three different ways, in which the Father revealed Himself. The church did not consider itself ready to formulate a precise statement concerning the doctrine of Christ—although from the beginning of the history of the church, the church confessed without reservation that Christ was divine. And so, in effect, the church said about Sabellius: "We are not sure how to express the truth correctly and according to Scripture; so we are not going to say anything at this time about it. But you are wrong; of that we are sure." And they condemned him.

God always leads His church to a knowledge of the truth by way

of controversy. So it was also in the latter part of the third and the first part of the fourth centuries. And the controversy, lasting over 50 years, was fierce and bitter.

There were many complicating factors.

For one thing, the church had no agreed-upon vocabulary to express the truth, and Scripture itself does not give us such a vocabulary. This lack of a vocabulary confused and complicated the problems, especially because sometimes heretics would confiscate terms which the orthodox could otherwise have used and which they in fact wanted to use.

For another thing, heretics attempting to solve the problem of Christ's divinity were everywhere spouting their views and gaining a following.

But one of the most influential heretics was a man by the name of Origen. He was a strange man. When he was still a boy his mother had to hide his clothes because, when his father was taken away to be killed for his faith, Origen wanted to be a part of this martyrdom and could be kept in the house only because he was too modest to appear naked in the streets. When he became a young adult he mutilated himself, thinking that in this way he would be obedient to Christ and would become a eunuch for the kingdom's sake.

He was an extremely brilliant man who, in his theology, was far ahead of his times. But though brilliant, he was also erratic, and many of the heresies which appeared in later years in the church could be traced back to Origen.

He had a direct role to play in the controversy which surrounded

Arius. He was a man to whom the orthodox and the heretics appealed — and with justification. The orthodox appealed to him because he taught the absolute divinity of Jesus Christ and insisted that Christ was very God. But the heretics, including Arius, appealed to him because he said that Christ's generation by the Father, though eternal, was an act of God's will. This was a serious error because, obviously, this made Christ less than the Father. If Christ was begotten by an act of the Father's will, then Christ's will, according to His divine nature, could not be the same will as the Father's. And so God had at least two wills, something which is a flat denial of the unity of God. Although Origen was the first to speak of eternal generation, he remained the occasion for a heresy that denied the divinity of Christ.

Another factor in the troubles which plagued the church, though not directly related to the doctrinal aspect of the controversy, was jealousy and competition between the two major seminaries in the Eastern part of the church. In the course of the years, two seminaries had dominated in the Greek-speaking church: one in Alexandria, and the other in Antioch. Alexandria was in Egypt; Antioch was in Syria, and was the city from which Paul and Barnabas had been sent in their first missionary journey. Both were prestigious schools, Alexandria because of its important position in the empire; and Antioch because of the prestige of the city in which it was founded.

It may appear somewhat strange, but Alexandria was probably the most orthodox. This was

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

not true when it came to biblical interpretation. Alexandria used the allegorical method of biblical interpretation, which gives direct spiritual meaning to every single part of Scripture and treats Scripture as if it were composed of countless allegories. Antioch, on the other hand, was much more sober, and, in fact, the method of interpretation which we still use today and teach in our seminary was developed early in Antioch's seminary.

But, whatever the case may be on this matter of biblical interpretation, when it came to the doctrine of Christ, Alexandria was much nearer Scripture than Antioch. This was partly because the outstanding theologian of Antioch, Lucian by name, was a believer in a form of Sabellianism (the heresy which we described in our last article).

This jealousy not only played an important role in the controversy which swirled about the person of Arius, but it was a jealousy which was to affect the church and play a role in her struggles for another 200 years.

Against all this confusion the Arian controversy began, and in the very center of it was the man for whom this heresy is named: Arius.

The Life of Arius

The birthplace of Arius is not known, although it is thought to be the province of Libya in North Africa and bordering on Egypt. Arius first appears on the stage of history in Alexandria, and as a member of the church there. The bishop of the church of Alexandria was a man named Alexander, a firm and unwavering defender of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ.

Even though Arius appears first in Egypt and in the church of Alexander, there is much evidence to suggest that he was under the influence of Lucian from Antioch—so much so that, if it had not been

for Lucian's teachings, Arius would never have thought of his heresies.

Whatever may be the truth of this, Arius was himself not a profound thinker. He was a tall and very thin man with a look of deep asceticism about him; he was learned and eloquent, charismatic in speech and personal relationships; but he was also proud and artful, restless and disputatious, not above devious dealings to attain his ends.

But his more distasteful characteristics were not widely known when he was ordained a deacon in about 311 and when he rose to the position of presbyter (elder) in 313.

His views came to the light of day when he was attending a class of presbyters, other bishops, deacons, and interested laity which was conducted by Alexander. Alexander was speaking at length on and emphasizing as strongly as possible the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Suddenly, in the midst of the discourse, Arius interrupted his bishop and began to charge him with heresy. In support of this challenge, Arius stated his own views. With an obvious reference to Origen, Arius said that because Christ was Son, He was begotten. Because He was begotten, He had a Father. Because a begetting Father is before a begotten Son, so God was before Christ. Because God was before Christ, Christ could not possibly be equal with God the Father. Because Christ was not equal with God the Father He was less than the Father.

This sort of heresy could not possibly be tolerated, and Alexander called a synod of Alexandrian and Libyan bishops to consider the matter and deal with it. One hundred bishops came together and, in 321, condemned Arius' teaching, deposed him from office, and excommunicated him.

As is so often the case with heretics, Arius paid no attention to this discipline by the church, but continued to meet with his followers and supporters and to teach at wor-

ship services and religious assemblies.

This conduct could not be tolerated either, and so, in keeping with practices in those days, he was driven from Alexandria, while a circular letter was sent to all the bishops in the empire warning all the bishops to beware of the teachings of this heretic.

In spite of these warnings, Arius moved to Palestine and Nicomedia, where he taught his views widely and gained a considerable following—even among some of the most influential bishops in that part of the world. He even incorporated his views into a sort of prose-poem called "The Banquet," parts of which are still extant in the writings of others who quoted him.

All of this turned the church, especially in the East, into an ecclesiastical battlefield. Bishops were set against bishops, churches against churches, people against people. And in the middle of it all stood the proud Arius, oblivious to the horror of a divided church, intent on having his own way.

His errors became increasingly clear as he wrote in defense of his position. He did not as such deny the divinity of Christ, and was prepared to admit that Christ was indeed divine. But he also insisted that Christ was not eternal, that He was, in fact, created, and that, therefore, there was a time when Christ was not. Arius was prepared to say many nice things about Christ: He was higher than all creatures; He was before time and existed long before the worlds were created; He was divine in a way in which no other creature was divine, the greatest of all under God. But He was not God; He was a creature. He was less than the Father and subordinate to Him. Arius was a dreadful heretic.

Into all this stepped the emperor Constantine.

Constantine had come to the throne of the empire at the beginning of the fourth century. He was

supposed to have seen a sign of the cross in the sky just before the crucial battle which gave him the emperor's throne in the West. The cross was supposed to have had inscribed on it the words: *In hoc signo vinces* ("In this sign conquer"). Constantine interpreted that sign as an indication of the fact that Christianity would conquer and that he would do well to become a Christian. This he did—although most probably in name only, for even after his "conversion" he committed some atrocious crimes.

But we are not writing about Constantine. Whether the man was a Christian or not, he brought persecution to an end, formally accepted the Christian religion, and proceeded not only to give Chris-

tianity his approval, but also promoted it in various ways.

Constantine touches on our narrative because the colossal controversy launched by Arius was a bitter disappointment to Constantine. There is reason to believe that his adoption of Christianity was for political purposes, one of which was to bring unity and some moral energy to a divided, morally bankrupt, and decadent empire. Relying heavily upon Christianity as a political and unifying force in the empire, he now discovered to his astonishment and dismay that even the Christians could not get along, but were fighting fiercely and locked in controversies which threatened to tear the church apart, and with it, the whole fabric of so-

ciety. His last hope was fading. What to do: that was the question.

Constantine showed his failure to understand Christianity by attempting to heal the rift by diplomacy. If he had known about ecclesiastical affairs, he would have known that church controversies are not settled by diplomacy or political involvement—that, in fact, such interference would only make matters worse.

When finally he realized the hopelessness of treating church matters as if they were matters of state, he decided to call a general council. And that he did.

It was the great Council of Nicea.

But we shall have to talk about that in our next article. □

Special Article

Mr. Marvin Kamps

The Son of God Eternally our Mediator (cont.)

Dr. Abraham Kuyper now turns to the matter of Christ's foreordination and the blessed reality of the *mystical union* of Christ and His people, in order to disprove the notion of *Christus pro omnibus*. The truth and reality of the mystical union of Christ and His people rests upon the truth that specific persons were eternally known to God in love and given to Christ as His responsibility for their redemption, sanctification, and preservation. This mystical union may be expressed as the "sweet whisperings" of the Spirit of Christ to His own. The Spirit testifies to the repentant sinner, and to him alone, "There is therefore now no condemnation in Christ Jesus"; to those who pa-

tiently endure His just chastisements, "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons"; and to the weary in well doing, "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Dr. Kuyper asks the question: When does this mystical union begin? After faith, or long before faith? We might understand his point if we ask ourselves, when does the bond begin between mother and daughter? Only after birth and after the child has developed self consciousness? Or did the mother have a bond with this child before birth and before the child's self consciousness? Every mother knows the answer: The mother took responsibility for the child long before, loved her long

before, and did all that was possible to make the child's entrance into the relationship one of health and unspeakable joy. This is but a faint picture of God's loving care of His own chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world. Let us now follow Dr. Kuyper's defense of *particular grace*.

In the second place, after having demonstrated that the doctrine "Christ for all" is an attack on the being of God, Dr. Kuyper next turns to the subject of the person the Mediator. He shows that the person of the Mediator is impoverished and the matter of Christ's *foreordination* is neglected by those who promote the notion of general grace. Dr. A. Kuyper writes:

As often as we seek in quiet reverence to understand the *person of the Redeemer* in the depths of His

Mr. Kamps is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church.

being, we have to deal, naturally, not only with His divine and human nature, but also with His *foreordination*.

People understand by that "foreordination" of the Christ, the firm and unshakable stipulations which from all eternity have been made in God's counsel, concerning the calling which the Christ would have to accomplish, the task which He would have to fulfill, and the place which He would have to take in history.

...But both crib, and cross, and crown were directly the consequences and the working out of a devised plan, of a previously established decree of the will, of a foreordaining God.

...we do not for a moment hesitate, on the basis of the Sacred Scriptures, to express very firmly, and very explicitly, that to present a Redeemer who only *accidentally* would be suited to His work of redemption is a thoroughly false, ungodly, and absurd idea; and that no Christian who lives uprightly can or may confess any differently than, that the Mediator's *person* and the Mediator's *work* inseparably belong together; from all eternity are foreordained for each other in the "decree"; and from the beginning in connection with the execution of this "decree" were prepared for one another (p. 61, 62).

Dr. Kuyper, having reminded his readers of this foreordination of the Son of God to be the Christ, then asserts "that grace can be nothing other than particular" (p. 63). He advances his argument with the question:

Does the Mediator walk with the redeemed in communion just now at exactly the moment that their faith breaks through to reality; or does there exist between the Redeemer and His redeemed a link even before they were born, taking its origin in God's eternal decree?

If one pleads for a general grace, then, of course, only the first can be true. Then it is first decided and established through someone's own faith, in the mo-

ment that he enters into faith, *whether he is and that he is a redeemed person*. Until that moment, it could just as well have happened that he never would have come to faith and, therefore, never would have been "one redeemed in Jesus...."

Meanwhile, we know from the most explicit statements of prophet and apostle, and also from what is caught from Jesus' own lips, that the redeemed "are given him by the Father" and that only such "can come" to him!

Clearly and forthrightly it is said, that the bond of love, the relationship between Christ and His members, lies grounded in the eternal and is rooted in the decree from before the foundation of the world.

So that by this already we can come to no other conclusion, than that the *person* of the Mediator is foreordained and prepared for these specific persons, who one day would appear as His redeemed people (p. 63).

Dr. Kuyper goes on then to explain that Christ is the Head of His body the church. And that Christ Jesus was prepared for certain specific persons, with specific names, who together constitute the body of which He is the Head. Kuyper rejects with all his soul the idea that the Mediator was prepared for a certain number of persons unnamed. He writes: "The person of the Mediator becomes a phantom, an imaginary image, an abstract conception without reality, if you make Him a Redeemer of N.N., and He cannot come to His rightful position unless you frankly confess that He is the Mediator, Guarantor, and Redeemer of A, B, C, etc." (p. 64). Kuyper then proceeds to tell us why this is so important:

People fail to appreciate, very recklessly, the tenderness and depth of the Christian faith, if they remove from our confession, in a supernaturalistic manner, the mystical union with Christ, i.e., "the soul's communion and fellowship of life of the redeemed with their Lord."

This mystical union, this communion, this togetherness, and this belonging to one another of Jesus and the redeemed must be acknowledged, professed, confessed, and firmly maintained, or your Christianity is gone.

But what is this mystical union? A handful of undifferentiated straps and ties and cords that Jesus displays, so that you can grasp this one, and I that strap or tie or cord according to our own choosing, in order to attach to Jesus for an anchor?

No, that is not the idea.

But everyone has his *own* tie, wherewith he is bound unto his Jesus. *You* would have nothing to the strap that I grasp, to the tie which surrounds *me*, to the cord that binds *me*, and I would not be able to gain anything from the tie which binds *you* to Jesus.

Everything in the work of redemption is personal, individual, and prepared for each man. Everything has its own address and name and title. It is not a retail store, where things are sold, and therefore everyone takes according to his own choosing, but a palace wherein gifts are distributed and the gift is designated therefore for each one for whom it is given.

The bond of the mystical union with Jesus *has to be* personal, also for this reason, that this bond in regard to us penetrates to the depths of our life, of our character, and of our existence.

And just because this bond of the mystical union with Christ is so completely personal, so also there must be in Jesus' person, in the person of the Mediator, *one's own, special point of contact* for each redeemed person. That means there must be something in that person for me, that only I can find in Him, and so also for you an attracting power, which again draws not *me*, but which draws *you* only (p. 64).

After having established the fact of Jesus' foreordination of specific elect persons, with specific names and needs, Kuyper contrasts this biblical fact with the superficiality and unbiblical character of a

“general grace doctrine.”

In this way is conclusively proven, that the doctrine of general grace can in no way be reconciled with the true reality of the person of the Mediator.

Upon that untenable position, the redeemed exist first by a choice of the will in the moment that he comes to faith; there first begins to be born a relationship from that moment on between him and Jesus; there is neither in him anything that previously was prepared for him as to the Mediator nor anything in the Mediator personally and specifically prepared for him....

With this notion not only all foreordaining is lost, but likewise the reality, the fullness, the glory of the person of the Mediator, and people produce a representation of the Savior so offensive, annoying, and scandalous, that it is for us truly comforting to be able to add, that not even one Universalist ever has dared to present this blasphemous image of the Mediator, and all, to the very last one, have remained superficial and illogical, rather than to cause the image of their Mediator to appear to be so empty and shallow... (pp. 65, 66).

Then Kuyper turns with great urgency to his reading audience

who have been misled by general grace preachers and who have been inclined to disregard the counsel of God, the decree of election, and the foreordination of the Christ to be the Mediator of specific persons with specific needs, and asks:

But if the Bible shows you a more excellent way and history says to you, that your own fathers have walked that excellent path, why, why, I pray you, is that much more glorious way always brought into discredit as an errant path of abomination and avoided? (p. 67). □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

Heidelberg Catechism Preaching

The ministers shall on Sunday explain briefly the sum of Christian doctrine comprehended in the Heidelberg Catechism so that as much as possible the explanation shall be annually completed, according to the division of the Catechism itself for that purpose.

Church Order, Article 68

Heidelberg Catechism preaching—a time-honored tradition in Reformed churches.

Over the years sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism have been a regular part of the spiritual diet of Reformed Christians around the world. Generations of men and women have lived out their 70 or 80 years listening to forty or more Catechism sermons each year. Nearly half of all the preaching done by Reformed preachers—preachers still faithful to the Church Order, that is—is Catechism preaching.

But if Catechism preaching is going to survive into the future, it must be more than merely a “tradition” among us, more than

merely compliance with Article 68. Pulpit and pew alike must understand the basis for Heidelberg Catechism preaching.

Only then will there continue to be appreciation for sermons that expound the Catechism.

Only then will there continue to be regard for the outstanding benefits derived from this method of preaching.

History of the Homiletical Use of the Catechism

Nearly from the time of its first publication in 1563, the Heidelberg Catechism was preached. Besides serving as a confession and an instructional tool for the youth, it also became early on the text of sermons.

The first documented use of the Catechism for preaching was by Peter Gabriel, minister in Amsterdam, in 1566. It is apparent that

he was not alone in this practice, but one of several Dutch Reformed ministers who preached to their congregations regularly from the Heidelberg Catechism.

It was also in 1566 that the Catechism was published for the first time with the questions and answers numbered and divided into fifty-two “Lord’s Days.” It was precisely the purpose of this organization to facilitate the Catechism’s use in preaching.

The practice of preaching from a catechism did not originate with the Heidelberg Catechism. Already before the publication of the Heidelberg Catechism, other existing catechisms were used in preaching. Among Lutheran ministers sermons were often made on the basis of Luther’s Catechism. And after the Heidelberg Catechism made its first appearance, some ministers still preferred to

Rev. Cammenga is pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

use other catechisms in their preaching, as, for example, the Catechism of Geneva. Gradually, however, the Heidelberg Catechism won out over these other catechisms, largely because of its superior suitability for preaching.

Several synods of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands encouraged the Catechism's use in preaching before the synod of the Hague, in 1586, made preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism mandatory. Already a question was put to the synod of Dordrecht, 1574, regarding the advisability of Catechism preaching. The synod decided:

The answer to the question of Walcheren whether it would be good that good homilies based on the Catechism be made is as follows: This shall be left as it is [that is, optional, RC], but it would be good if the ministers in an orderly manner take turns in the classical meeting to explain in summary form a question or two from the Catechism and in this way teach and sensitize each other and also learn to explain the Catechism thoroughly to the congregation in an orderly and edifying manner.

The synod of Dordrecht, 1578, encouraged the preaching of a sermon based on the Heidelberg Catechism in the afternoon service after the administration of the Lord's Supper.

The synod of Middelburg, 1581, was asked to produce an exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism that might aid the ministers in preparing Catechism sermons.

Question: Whether it would be good to make some explanations of the Catechism in the form of homilies or something similar for beginners?

Answer: Jeremias Bastingius and the Classis of Walloon are considering this and, working on the Catechism of our churches, shall bring together and shall produce not homilies but exegesis which,

having been examined by the Classis of Brabant and Walloon, shall be distributed.

It was the synod of The Hague, 1586, that was the first Dutch Reformed synod to make Heidelberg Catechism preaching mandatory.

Ministers shall on each Lord's Day, generally, in the afternoon sermons, briefly explain the sum of Christian doctrine contained in the Catechism, which at present is accepted in the Netherlands churches, in such a way that it may be finished annually, following the division of the Catechism itself, made for that purpose.

The Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, after carefully examining the Heidelberg Catechism, opposed any changes in the Catechism, changes for which the Remonstrants had been agitating. In its 148th Session, May 1, 1619, the Great Synod passed a resolution affirming that the Heidelberg Catechism

... formed altogether a most accurate compend of the orthodox Christian faith; being, with singular skill, not only adapted to the understanding of the young, but suited also for the advantageous instruction of older persons; so that it could continue to be taught with great edification in the Belgic churches, and ought by all means to be retained.

Out of this conviction, the Synod of Dordrecht reaffirmed the decision of the synod of The Hague requiring weekly Heidelberg Catechism sermons.

From the beginning of their existence the Protestant Reformed Churches have been committed to regular Heidelberg Catechism preaching. It is the requirement of our Church Order. It is the practice in our churches. It is the unquestioned duty of our ministers.

The churches are serious about safeguarding the practice. At every annual church visitation the

question is put to the consistory: "Is the Heidelberg Catechism regularly explained in the services for divine worship, so that no doctrine is left untreated?"

A difficulty sometimes arises when a congregation is vacant. It is not always possible to have regular Catechism preaching when a congregation is led in worship by different ministers each Lord's Day. But even when a congregation is vacant, it is advisable that the elders make arrangements to have Catechism preaching as regularly as possible.

A question sometimes arises about the advisability of Heidelberg Catechism preaching on the mission field. It must be granted that Article 68 applies to the preaching in established congregations. Nevertheless, the Heidelberg Catechism is eminently suited for use on the mission field. It was designed as an instructional tool for the young and for recent converts. The fifty-two Lord's Days cover all the fundamental doctrines of Holy Scripture. Our missionaries ought to be encouraged to preach the Catechism on the mission field.

Heidelberg Catechism Preaching as the Preaching of the Word of God

Over the years numerous objections have been raised against Heidelberg Catechism preaching. We are not going to take the time to answer all of these objections. There is, however, one objection that we ought to face. That is the accusation that Heidelberg Catechism preaching is not preaching of the Word of God.

This is the most serious of all the objections. If it is true, the Reformed churches have been guilty of the most heinous sin a church can be guilty of—not preaching the Word of God. And they have been guilty of this sin for over 400 years!

The charge that Heidelberg Catechism preaching is not the preaching of the Word of God is

fallacious. The accusation can quickly be put to rest.

Heidelberg Catechism preaching is the preaching of the Word of God inasmuch as its contents stand in full agreement with the Word of God—as every Reformed minister avows who signs the “Formula of Subscription.” The Catechism is itself a faithful explanation of the Word of God. This makes preaching on the Catechism preaching the Word of God.

The fact is that much of the Catechism is taken directly from the Bible: the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer are examples. There are over 650 Scripture references throughout the 120 questions and answers of the Catechism. Copious Scripture references line the outside margins of every page. All of Scripture has been consulted, and its teaching on every fundamental truth has been incorporated into the Lord’s Days. There really can be no doubt that faithful Heidelberg Catechism preaching is preaching of the Word of God.

This is the testimony, too, of Reformed believers who live under Heidelberg Catechism preaching. They hear this preaching as the Word of God. Christ’s voice, the voice of the Good Shepherd, is heard in the Catechism sermons. They experience the good use of this preaching by the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives and in the lives of their children.

How the Catechism Is to be Preached

An important question is, “How is the Catechism to be preached? What method ought to be followed in preaching the Catechism?”

The Church Order answers this question: “The ministers shall on Sunday explain briefly ... the Heidelberg Catechism....” The Catechism is to be preached. The Catechism is to be explained. The language of the Catechism is to be exegeted. Very really, the particu-

lar Lord’s Day or part of a Lord’s Day is the “text” of the sermon. In his sermon the minister must deal with the words, phrases, sentences, and thoughts expressed in the Catechism.

The method that is to be rejected is that of preaching on a text of Scripture and only referring to the Catechism. Or, what is worse, using the Catechism as a jumping-off point for the sermon, to which point the preacher never really returns in the course of his sermon. This is to pay mere lip-service to the requirement of Article 68 of the Church Order.

Although the Catechism itself must be preached, this does not prohibit the judicious use of a text or passage of Scripture in connection with the exposition of the Catechism. This certainly may and ought to be done. Concerning this, the late Prof. H.C. Hoeksema writes:

The minister must not forget to leave the impression with the congregation that even in Catechism preaching he administers the Word of God ... we make the point that this ought to be explicit in the preaching. It is a good custom, therefore, that at the beginning of the sermon the minister quotes a few pertinent texts and points the congregation to them as the basis of the instruction contained in the particular Lord’s Day on which he is preaching. And while it is not always equally possible to be explicit on this in (the) course of one’s sermon, the minister should certainly let his sermon as much as possible be controlled by the Scriptures. We may remark, too, that frequently it is appropriate as well as enriching to make room in the sermon for a brief explanation of this or that related passage of Scripture (p. 43).

VanDellen and Monsma state:

It may be said in this connection that Catechism sermons should be so constructed that the Congregation sees very clearly that the truths embodied in the Catechism

are indeed but reproductions of God’s own Word (*The Church Order Commentary*, p. 277).

Always the Catechism must be preached in the light of Scripture. Each time the Catechism is preached, it must be shown that its contents are based upon and derived from Scripture. Ultimately the faith of God’s people must be made to rest in Jesus Christ *as He is revealed in Scripture*.

This may be done, as has been suggested, by reference at the beginning of the sermon to various Scripture passages on which the teaching of a particular Lord’s Day rests. Often ministers conclude the reading of these references with the formula, “On these and similar passages of Holy Writ is based the teaching of Lord’s Day....”

Another approach is to make use of the passage or part of the passage used for the Scripture reading in the course of the sermon. The passage, then, underlies the main truth set forth in the Lord’s Day or an important aspect of that truth.

Some freedom must be granted here, each minister doing what he is most comfortable with and what, in his judgment, is most edifying for the congregation.

Preaching Through the Catechism in One Year

Article 68 of the Church Order stipulates that the preaching of the Catechism shall “... as much as possible ... be annually completed, according to the division of the Catechism itself, for that purpose.”

The fact of the matter is that it is impossible to complete the Catechism in a year’s time.

One reason for this is that there are often “special” services at which the Catechism is not preached: baptism services, Lord’s Supper, and various Christian holidays, like Easter and Pentecost. Often a minister is forced to be absent from his pulpit due to classical appointments, vacation, atten-

dance at synod, and so forth.

Besides, it simply is not often possible to cover all of the material in a given Lord's Day in one sermon. A hasty treatment of the Catechism does not do justice to the Catechism. Many of the Lord's Days contain an abundance of material. Although a minister need not attempt to exhaust each Lord's Day every time through the Catechism, often more than one sermon is necessary before he is ready to move on to the next Lord's Day.

We ought to understand the rationale for the requirement of Article 68 that as much as possible the preaching through the Catechism be completed annually. The intent was not so much to assure that within one year all the fifty-two Lord's Days of the Catechism would be preached, as to insure that there would be regular, uninterrupted preaching on the Catechism. If the ministers were required to preach through the Catechism in a year's time, they would be forced to "stick with it" and not preach on the Catechism only sporadically.

It is good, therefore, that there is a certain amount of flexibility in Article 68: "... as much as possible...." The minister ought to take proper advantage of that flexibility.

But this flexibility must never become an excuse for a minister to become irregular and negligent in preaching Catechism sermons. The minister may not weary of Catechism preaching and so begin to ignore his duty. Usually this begins gradually. The minister does not preach a Catechism sermon every Sunday he could or should. This laxity has crept into several denominations today where once Catechism preaching was a recognized institution. Already in 1902 the synod of the Christian Reformed Church was cognizant of this laxity and issued the following exhortation to the churches:

With a view to dangers from without that threaten sound doctrine, and in consideration of the great need of, and the very meager interest in the regular development of dogmatical truths, Synod emphasizes the time-honored custom

of Catechism preaching, and the Classes are urged to give proper attention to this matter, that the regular consideration of the Catechism may be observed.

Here elders and church visitors have a responsibility. Elders must see to it that their minister is faithful in carrying out the duty of Catechism preaching. They must see to it that he preaches the Catechism and that he preaches the Catechism regularly. Church visitors must not fail to inquire into this at the annual church visitation, admonishing those who may be negligent, and reporting such negligence to the classis.

May Catechism preaching not only survive, but thrive in our churches. May God give to our preachers the ability to make good Catechism sermons. And may He use Catechism preaching for the instruction, growth, and comfort of His people, young and old alike.

Thus the church will be saved—preaching's great goal.

And thus God's name will be glorified—preaching's still greater goal. □

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

Our Readers Contribute

One thing particularly enjoyable in preparing this rubric for almost each issue is that you, the reader, often send in articles which can be used—and often are. Some of these articles are of religious significance (or concern); others are informative; some can be rather humorous. I can assure those who send in articles, that these are read with interest. If every article is not used, it is not because it is unimportant. I often have more material than I can use in the articles. Some articles, though interesting and thought-provoking, are not al-

ways suitable to the purpose this writer has in mind.

This time I do want to share several articles recently sent to me. And thank you all for sending them.

■ "Powerful, Imperfect Bible"

The first article I present is from *The Church Herald*, July-August 1998. The magazine is of the Reformed Church in America. The author is the Rev. J. Samuel Hofman, RCA missionary in Chiapas, Mexico. Though the author makes some valid points concerning difficulties in translating the Bible, at the same time his presentation appears to belittle the idea of an infallible Bible—particu-

larly after its translation from many sorts of manuscripts. He writes of hearing a television program one Sunday:

One featured a conservative evangelical minister who described "how a perfect God used imperfect people to write a perfect book." He said that God through the Holy Spirit enabled the writers of Scripture to write a perfect book without error or mistake. He spoke firmly about "the inspired, inerrant Word of God."

He clarified that this infallibility and inerrancy applies only to the original manuscripts. Then he affirmed that although we have only copies of copies of copies of those manuscripts, God preserved the reliability of the Scriptures throughout the centuries.

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

This brought back memories to me of the theological debates on the subject of the inspiration of the Scriptures when I was in seminary forty years ago. The conservatives insisted that God had verbally dictated the thoughts of the writers, but added that the words were definitely theirs, pointing out that the personalities and cultural backgrounds of the various authors are reflected in what they wrote. On the other extreme, the liberal theologians referred to the Bible only as "great religious literature."

For years there has been strife over just how and how much of the Bible is inspired. Forty years ago I would have sided with the conservatives in asserting that the Bible in its original manuscripts is infallible and inerrant. But it is no longer an issue for me now, due to our working on the revision of the Bible in the Tzeltal Indian language. This translation experience has shown me how irrelevant is the claim of infallibility and inerrancy.

The author goes on to explain that in translating, and comparing also various other translations, he repeatedly encounters footnotes as, "The Hebrew is unclear." He noted also how translations differ and the explanation is appended, "Some manuscripts say this and other manuscripts say that." Therefore the author concludes:

All of which tells me that Christians have wasted a lot of energy and words arguing about whether the original manuscripts of the Bible were infallibly and verbally inspired by God. The fact is that those manuscripts no longer exist. The copies of copies of copies that we have are not without error. And our translations, no matter how well they are done, are not perfect either.

So instead of holding up a Bible and proclaiming that it is infallible and inerrant, perhaps we need to be a bit more realistic and say that it is authoritative and trustworthy in what it teaches. And we can affirm that whoever believes its message will find eternal fellowship with God.

Two things stand out. The author admits forsaking the convictions which were his in his early training. Secondly, the presentation of the author serves to create doubt and question in the mind of the reader. What are we to believe now with respect to the Bible? May we only say that it is "authoritative and trustworthy in what it teaches?" But if it is not infallible and inspired, how can we believe in its trustworthiness? What the author says of "copies of copies of copies" is true. What he declares about the difficulties of accurate translating is undoubtedly true. But does he not minimize or ignore the guidance of the Spirit not only in "inbreathing" the writers of Scripture, but also in guiding translators (whose resolve is to maintain as literally as possible the presentation of the manuscripts judged closest to the original writings into a new language)?

It is very foolish to present the Bible other than infallible and inspired. Scripture claims this for itself. The doubt created ultimately results in disbelief of any of the Word.

■ Bring Back the Original

From Southern California, out of the *San Bernardino County Sun*, August 1, 1998, comes the following:

A slickly designed black-and-yellow press packet appeared on my desk the other day trumpeting a new Bible.

"It's here!" the words on the folder seemed to shout.

What's where? The "WWJD? New Testament." In bookstores now.

The "WWJD?" or "What Would Jesus Do?" movement continues to, well, move into new markets.

First came "WWJD?" bracelets and necklaces. The slogan began to spread to T-shirts, key chains, hats and pens. It was only a matter of time before a "WWJD?" Bible appeared.

Many Christians will praise the

"WWJD? New Testament" ... because the modern translation will be easy for people to understand, especially the kids. They'll also probably enjoy the analysis of Jesus' words and deeds in the "What Would Jesus Do?" sections.

For example, authors Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz expand on Jesus Christ's teaching. Writing about good conduct, they say: "Doing what Jesus would do may make you different. You may end up doing the opposite of everyone else. Jesus wants you to do the right thing—even if your friends are offended."

That's all well and good. But I'm getting weary of Bibles that offer advice, analysis, and revised wording. Often, these Bibles are written in up-to-date language that differs from Bibles of 30 years ago.

Whatever happened to the old-fashioned King James version, like the one I received as a gift in the 1960s from the chapel in Minnesota where I attended Sunday school?

To this day, it's my favorite Bible.

...The "WWJD? New Testament" will serve youth well. But to adult Bible readers, I recommend tackling the analysis-free King James version. Decide for yourself what the Bible means.

It is interesting that a religion writer in a secular newspaper admits to a preference for the King James version of the Bible. The writer points out its beautiful and poetic way of expressing God's Word. But more important still is the fact that the translators were concerned about accuracy in translation. Even the "old-fashioned" "thees" and "thous" conform to that. So, yes, give me too the most accurate as well as poetic King James.

■ Study Links Religion, Obesity

A slim young lady submitted an article which borders on the humorous. It is a study of the relationship between religion and

obesity. It could not have been a study sponsored by the government, I presume, since religion is involved. Of course, the government would separate itself from all religion—though it does sponsor other nonsensical studies of divers sorts.

The article, appearing in a paper called *Spotlight*, stated:

People who are firmly religious are much more likely to be flabby than those who are soft on God, according to a study.

"Overeating may be one sin that pastors and priests regularly overlook," concludes Kenneth Ferraro, a Purdue University sociology professor who is author of the study.

Ferraro analyzed data involving 3,615 Americans and found a "surprising" tendency that the most faithful, regardless of denomination, are obese. The study gauged religiosity by asking questions about attendance at services and reading of religious material.

One reason for the correlation, he says, is in a society that worships thinness, "overweight people find comfort in religious settings."

He found the percentage of obesity highest in states where religious affiliation was most prevalent, such as Michigan, Mississippi and Indiana, and lowest in states with the least religious populations—Massachusetts, Hawaii and Colorado. Ferraro also compared denominations.

He found that Southern Baptists in the South are most likely to be obese, followed by fundamentalist Protestants and mainline Protestant groups, such as Methodists and Baptists outside the South. Thinnest are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Jews. People who said they had no religious affiliation or belief ranked near the middle.

...Although religion reduces deadly stress, that may be offset by the health risks of obesity, Ferraro warns.

Well!! The next time my wife complains about my overeating....

And thanks, readers, for your contributions. □

Contribution

Mr. Pete Miedema

The High Cost of Building New Churches

Hearing of the high cost of building the new churches in Holland and in Georgetown leads me to believe that as churches we must look at different ways to fund church expansion. I am told that it will cost around 1.7 million dollars for Georgetown's building. Holland's building, without the auditorium, cost approximately \$950,000. A like sum will still be needed to complete their sanctuary. This is an astronomical amount. With the escalating costs of construction, the day will come when no one will be willing to

leave the mother church to form new congregations if the new group is expected to fund the majority of the cost by themselves. If you take the amount which the new group receives when they leave as compared to the value of the facilities, it appears that those who form the new church are left saddled with a very great debt. This is not said to point fingers in any way at those who stay, but it appears to be a fact of life. When one divides the total worth of the present facility by the total number of members to determine the value per member, the amount which is given to the members who leave to start the new church is something less than 50% of the actual value per member.

When people from other churches join in with the group

forming the new congregation, the obligation of these other churches (from which these people have come) to contribute is sometimes forgotten. Perhaps it is mistakenly believed that this is the obligation solely of the mother church. A more equitable method of distribution and assistance is necessary.

Because the entire denomination benefits when a new congregation is formed, I suggest that the entire denomination participate in the funding. There is the increased enthusiasm that is generated by the new congregation which is a joy to behold. It is contagious, and this enthusiasm manifests itself in the active participation of the members. Look at the large number who take part in the work and the number who attend the societies when they are formed. There is a

Mr. Miedema is an elder in the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, MI. He has served as a delegate to synod.

feeling of unity and purpose by those members which draws them closer together.

Providing additional pulpits is another benefit. At present, we do not have any vacancies, which in itself is not a healthy situation for the denomination. When new congregations are formed, they provide pulpits for our seminary students, which is another positive.

Anyone who has been to the mission field in Northern Ireland knows firsthand the need of our brothers and sisters there for different facilities. We hear of needs in Singapore, Myanmar, and other places. What a wonderful thing to be able to assist these fellow saints also.

Making our existing buildings larger is not the answer. Congregations of more than 120 families place too great a burden on the pastor and the consistory. The "closeness" which is experienced within a smaller group is lost, as can be

seen in the mega-churches around us. Society life suffers, and supervision by the elders is not as good. It becomes impossible for the pastor to teach all the catechism classes.

The financial benefits for our churches in having a *special line item* on their annual budget for future new church expansion are easily recognized. When a mortgage is taken out by the new church for a period of 30 years, every gift which is given to help that church *multiplies around threefold*. A gift of \$75,000 to that church, which has a mortgage at 8%, would have a realized benefit of *around \$250,000*, since this is the amount which the church would have to pay when the interest is included for 30 years. This gift eliminates those dollars which would have to be borrowed for the entire 30 years and, of even greater impact, the *interest* on those monies.

A line item for this purpose by all our churches would have a tremendous impact because a "little help" from each church adds up to a substantial amount. And, since each congregation participates on its own, its autonomy is not affected, as it would control the disposition of its funds. Many creative methods of funding are available, and our churches could use them for projects such as these.

When less money has to be borrowed, it makes more funds available for our schools, benevolence, and missions. There are many, many worthwhile causes which cannot always be funded because these causes sometimes compete against each other for the same dollars. By implementing a program such as this, their needs can also be met. *This is good stewardship.*

May God continue to bless the efforts of our people to form new congregations and give us the means to do so. □

RFPA Address

Rev. Steven Key

Reading, Writing, and Heretics

Brothers and sisters in Christ, friends of the Reformed Free Publishing Association,

It is indeed a privilege to be here tonight and to address this assembly.

It is my purpose in the next few minutes to remind you what an important place the RFPA occupies in the spiritual warfare that must mark the church in these last days. I will do that by reversing the or-

der of my theme, and treating, first of all, the urgency with which we must approach the work, as we do spiritual battle with the forces of darkness; secondly, the specific place of writing in the battle that we face; and finally, the importance of promoting, also among our own people, the reading of the faith-building literature which the RFPA publishes.

Departure from the Truth

That we live in a time characterized by departure from God's Word is clear. In fact, that departure from the truth has advanced to the point of being shocking at

times — not with respect to the *world*, for nothing is shocking there; but shocking with respect to the *church* and what finds acceptance in the church of our day.

I speak of this departure from God's Word as *heresy*. Allow me to make some remarks about that term.

In the first place, we must make a distinction between heresy and an imperfect understanding of the truth, which characterizes all of us to some degree, and much of the church to a significant degree.

We all need to grow in our understanding of the truth.

We believe, and have no doubt,

Rev. Key is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Randolph, Wisconsin.

that God has given us as Protestant Reformed Churches precious riches of His truth. We believe that the Spirit has led our churches, as children of the church of all ages, into the clearest understanding of the truth of Scripture.

We say that without boast, but with deepest humility, knowing that it was not of us, nor of our ability, nor of our goodness, but entirely of God's sovereign grace and mercy that we were led by His Holy Spirit into those spiritual riches — riches, I might add, which greatly add to our accountability before God for what we *do* with those riches.

But we need to continue to grow spiritually, knowing that no matter how long God gives us on this earth, we will never begin to reach the depths of the riches of His revelation in Holy Scripture.

To that end, the publications of the RFPA are spiritual helps to us. The *Standard Bearer* and the books that you produce are vitamins, as it were, for our spiritual health. Still more, those writings are used by God to strengthen the understanding and increase the faith of many outside of our churches who had once embraced certain errors because of their imperfect understanding of biblical truth.

But when I speak about heresy, I'm *not* talking about errors that exist in the church because of an imperfect understanding. Heresy is a deliberate corruption of the truth of Scripture, an *insistence* upon holding to something contrary to Scripture. Heresy has its origin with the devil, "the father of the lie." That is exactly why our Reformed fathers, in the Canons of Dordt, did not hesitate to refer to Arminianism as bringing again out of hell the old Pelagian error. That was not a wild statement of some contentious radicals in the church. That was a recognition of the fact that heresy has its root in the very lie of Satan, the adversary of God's truth.

And Satan's motive, let us un-

derstand, is to destroy the true church. The truth, after all, is the foundation of the church. Satan knows that if he can get those in the church to chisel away at the truth, he can bring about the downfall of the church as an institute. For if she loses her foundation, it is only a matter of time and she crumbles and falls. That is her end. And many denominations, we are well aware, have gone exactly that way.

But although heresy has its origin with the devil, the father of lies, the fact remains that it is *men* (and women) who are the promoters of heresy in the church. We must understand that *their* motives are often not so easily understood.

We may say that heresy always arises out of the refusal to bow before the sole authority of the Scriptures. But then again, so does our own sin.

Heresy also comes oftentimes when men want to impose their own ideas upon Scripture. They come under teaching of the truth, but they don't want to be learners; they want rather to teach. So they would become wiser than God. For example, God reveals to us that His grace is particular. His grace is bestowed through *Christ*, and *only* through Christ. It is grace, therefore, only for those who are *in* Christ. But there are those who would embrace heresy, insisting that God is gracious to *all* men. They want a God who embraces everybody. They would be wiser than God.

Then there is heresy which arises out of a desire to be popular with the people. No one likes opposition. No one likes criticism. And even our flesh would rather be praised by men. But if we allow our teaching to be influenced by the "faces of men" and give to "itching ears" what *they* want to hear, rather than what *God* will have them hear, we become heretics.

There may be other motivating factors as well when it comes to

those who are promoters of the devil's lies. But if you examine all the motives, you will find that they are all rooted in pride. That is why we have constantly to guard against the sin of pride, and pray for grace to root all pride out of our life. I speak especially with reference to those of us who hold such positions of influence. Pride will lead us into conflict with the Scriptures. Pride breeds heretics. And let us understand, heretics run rampant in the church world of our day.

Concerning the broad departure from God's truth that is evident in our day, we ought to bear several things in mind.

In the first place, the apostasy and the broad influence of heresy that we observe is not surprising at all, when we examine the situation more carefully. All we have to ask is, "Where is the place of God's truth in the church world today?" The truth of God's authoritative Word, the very foundation of doctrine and life, has been eradicated from the church in our day, as if the truth itself is some kind of detestable weed.

We ought to face it, the truth of Scripture does not find wide acceptance — either with respect to doctrine or with respect to the practice of godliness. (And, you will understand, those two cannot be separated.)

We do well to remember that in our labors for the advancement of that truth. We may expect that our books and our *Standard Bearer* will not find wide acceptance. The only way we would find wide acceptance would be to depart from everything that we stand for presently as the *Reformed Free Publishing Association*. If we should change our whole approach, and depart from our doctrinal foundation, and belittle the truth of God, and speak that which people would like to hear, *then* we would gain acceptance. May God forbid that such should ever be the case with us.

In the second place, we should remember that the rise of false doctrines and an ungodly walk on the part of certain church members is neither new, nor unanticipated. Many times in the New Testament we are told to beware of these things. The Judaizing controversy which began at Antioch soon after Pentecost and which plagued Paul throughout his ministry was a forerunner of many other errors that have existed in the church ever since. When Paul gave his farewell speech to the elders at Ephesus, as we read in Acts 20, he warned them that after his departure grievous wolves would enter in, not sparing the flock; and from among their own number men would arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. In Paul's pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus he emphasized the importance of doctrinal correctness and adherence to the Scriptures, and announced that there would be those who would fall away from the faith, listening to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils (I Tim. 4:1). Furthermore, he prophesied that the churches themselves would degenerate to the point where they would not endure sound doctrine but, having itching ears, would follow their own lusts and fables of their own imagination, turning away their ears from the truth.

That trend which became apparent in the first century is open and obvious today to anyone with a spiritual sensitivity for the truth and for God's holiness. God forewarned us of these things. And He also gave us instruction.

We must not be disheartened at the rise of heresy and opposition and worldliness. Nor must we be afraid of controversy over scriptural truth. In fact, we must enter into battle. In that battle, our weapon is the Bible, God's Word—which means to us that the materials that we produce must be distinctly, evidently, and unapologetically biblical. The battle that

we wage must not be a battle of mere rational thought or of human opinion, but a battle of faith. And a battle it is indeed!

Called to Contend for the Faith

That we must stand nose to nose with heresy, and boldly enter into battle, is evident also from what Jude wrote in the third verse of his brief epistle. That little epistle written by Jude under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit has some things to teach us in this regard. He exhorted the beloved Christians to whom he wrote that they "should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

He wrote that while pointing at a conflict that was evident at that very moment. "For there are certain men crept in unawares" — notice that; not "will attempt to creep in," but *have* crept in. Ungodly men! Men ordained to condemnation, whom God purposes to destroy in the way of their own ungodliness! Men who are turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and who are denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ! Those are the kind against which we do battle!

I'm not going to use precious time developing the identity of those heretics to whom Jude referred in that historical setting. Evidently those wicked ones were "libertines," those who corrupted the idea of Christian liberty into a self-serving denial of God's precepts. They turned the grace of God, that spiritual virtue of beauty, into the hideous monster of iniquity. But they came with nothing new. Their attack upon the faith once delivered to the saints was the same attack waged by the enemy thousands of years before! The point I would make here is that those same heretics take on many different forms, teach many different doctrines, have many followers, and affect multitudes in different ways.

And we must recognize, there

is something attractive about heresy, something that *draws*. Else it would not be such a threat to the church. And what is usually attractive about it, no matter what the point of departure, is that it is more *broad* than the narrow and concise definitions of truth.

If you study the history of Israel in the Old Testament, you will find that through all their apostasy the Israelites showed themselves very "broad-minded." Jehovah was God to them; but the gods of the other nations were also to be respected and served. They would worship Jehovah; but just let them be like the nations around them, where many other gods and philosophies were also recognized. The Israelites took the attitude that they must not be so narrow-minded as were their fathers. They accused their ancestors of being "out of touch" with the world. They were "too conservative"!

How much of the same spirit don't we see today? How much of the same spirit do we see among ourselves and in our own churches? *That*, after all, ought to be our focus.

The departure from God's truth in the church world around us is very evident to the discerning Reformed believer. I trust it is evident to you. It is evident in the writings that are found in many so-called Christian bookstores today, as well as in magazines that are published in a wide variety of circles. It is heard on the radio and seen by many on television. That departure is perhaps even more evident by the plethora of heretical teachings that can be found on the internet. And all of these seeds of the devil find a ready entrance into our homes and the homes of our church members.

Still more, there is the dreadful heresy ushered in by what is denoted as *postmodern thought*. While the modernist, thrilled with the theories of science and the advancing knowledge of man, rejected the authority and sufficiency

of biblical revelation and claimed that truth is that which is demonstrated by science to the satisfaction of human thought, postmodernism is the world-view that tries to do without truth altogether. For postmodernism, truth is merely a choice of the individual, a "construct" of the human mind. What is true for me may not be true for you. Truth is relative. Logical contradictions are okay. The meaning of words is not fixed, but can be "reinvented" to fit the situation.

Our church members may not know what postmodernism is, but their minds are assaulted by that kind of thinking *daily*. The lie reigns in our society.

Over against the specific heresies which were seen in the early church, and which are seen today; over against *all* opposition to God's truth, Jude 3 calls us to contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.

You may notice that Jude speaks of contending for the *faith*. The faith referred to here is faith as to its substance, its content. It is the heavenly doctrine which God has delivered to the saints through the prophets and apostles. Jude speaks of faith in the same sense Paul referred to it when he wrote to the Galatians (1:23), that he now preaches the faith which once he destroyed. We use the word in the same way sometimes. We speak of the Christian faith, occasionally of the Protestant Reformed faith.

We speak of the faith of our fathers that continues to be the faith of the church.

Faith is the truth of the Scriptures, the truth as it lives in the hearts of those who are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.

One might ask, "Why does not Jude use the word *doctrine* or *truth*?" He refers to the same, but there is particular emphasis here on the *importance* of that doctrine, on the importance of the *contents* of our Christian faith, to our life.

Do you think that the truth of Scripture is not so important? Do you say of even the most basic doctrines of Scripture (as I have heard others say before), "Leave that stuff to the preachers and the seminary professors"? You are dead wrong!

Far from being unimportant, that doctrine is something worth contending for. Far from being worthless, as it is considered to be in many circles today, Jude writes that that doctrine, the faith, is worthy of a diligent defense.

That holy doctrine found in the Scriptures, that doctrine which is the gospel, is called *faith* because it is the very instrument used by God to work the activity of faith in us. The faith of which Jude writes here is the very gospel which Paul called the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Rom 1:16). Take away that gos-

pel, or let that faith be taken away, and you remove all hope of salvation for future generations.

Furthermore, Jude uses the term *faith* here because he speaks of that which is the only worthy object of our faith, and that in which we lay hold of Christ Jesus our Lord. It is so important, because the name of Him who is holy and true is bound up within it!

In other words, you cannot attack that faith without attacking Him who is the Author of it! He is the true and faithful witness in Jesus Christ, God Himself who cannot lie.

By that gospel God's heart is opened to us. The secrets of Jehovah are revealed to you and to me, and we are brought into the fellowship of His covenant. The doctrines of the Scriptures are given us by God as the light which shines unto salvation, which reveals to us the Lord's justice and mercy. We would never have known our misery, nor the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, had God not delivered unto us His Word of truth, this doctrine and rule of faith. We would never have known how to worship God, nor how to enjoy His fellowship, had it not been for His sovereign work of grace whereby He gave to us the faith.

And shall we let it lightly slip away?!

He says unto us, "Keep that which is committed to thy trust."

... to be continued. □

Annual Report

Mr. Henry Kamps

Dear RFPA Members and Friends,

The Reformed Free Publishing Association has as its express aim and purpose to publish the truth of God as *specifically* maintained and developed within the Protestant Reformed Churches. Our association, organized almost three quarters of a century ago, still exists today by the grace of God for the same purpose. Our name emphasizes that purpose and aim. *Re-*

formed indicates what we desire as to the contents of our publications. *Free* means that we are under no institutional supervision or control. That we are a *Publishing Association* reveals that our purpose and intention is to make propaganda as a body of Reformed Christians, particularly as witnesses to the truth of God.

The RFPA labors, therefore, as an *association of believers* who wit-

ness to the Reformed faith in distinction from the official preaching and missionary task of the instituted church. The witness of the RFPA is free and not institutional. That the RFPA is a free witness means that it can never come under the power or be used in the influence of a corrupted institution. Consequently, the RFPA is the believer's witness over against all corruption and unfaithfulness. It

is free. The individual believer, therefore, through his interest and involvement in the RFPA, has a most beautiful opportunity to exercise the office of believer.

In this connection, it is important that we gain new members to join our association. One priority of the board is actively to promote the RFPA for this purpose. To help accomplish this goal we have planned a semi-annual newsletter called the *RFPA Update*, 4,000 copies of the first issue having been recently completed and mailed. The purpose of our newsletter will be to inform our readership regarding the RFPA itself, our activities and plans, and to promote membership in the association.

The *Standard Bearer* magazine continues a healthy subscription base and prospers under the capable editorship of Prof. Engelsma. Currently we mail 2,481 copies of each issue, of which 56 percent are Protestant Reformed subscribers. Gifts for the *Standard Bearer* this past year totaled \$52,000, reaching an all-time high. We take this opportunity to give our heartfelt thanks to our many subscribers and friends for their generous gifts and support again this past year. Correspondence from our readership indicates that our magazine continues to be a great blessing to many, and obviously there is much appreciation for its distinctive character. More and more it is evident too that our *Standard Bearer* is unique among the religious press as a faithful testimony to the creedal Reformed faith. We are greatly encouraged by the interest in and hunger for the pure word of truth.

Book planning and publishing have a large role in our activities and require much effort for the board and staff members. Accomplishments this past year include one new book entitled *Ready To Give An Answer*, the reprinting of two books, *Believers and Their Seed*, and *Marriage, the Mystery of Christ and the Church*. Also completed was the publishing of a new, ex-

panded, hardcover index to the *Standard Bearer* volumes 1-73. Our goals for the coming year include several more book projects. The republishing of our flagship volume, *Reformed Dogmatics*, is already underway. In preparation for this project, input was solicited from our professors and ministers, and to our delight we received many valuable suggestions for improvements that will be made to this volume. New books scheduled to be published are: the Romans series of 96 sermons of H. Hoeksema, the translating and publishing of *That Grace Is Particular* by Abraham Kuyper, the first volume of *Old Testament History* by H.C. Hoeksema, the Commemorative 75th Anniversary History of the PRC by Prof. Hanko, and several reprint projects, including *Genesis* by Rev. Harbach, *Come Ye Children* by Gertrude Hoeksema, and *Reformed Education* by Prof. Engelsma.

We have made significant improvements in our facilities and equipment this past year for the purpose of increasing efficiency in our operations, and with a goal to making publishing of books faster and easier. We remodeled and enlarged our office and our packaging-mailing-storage areas, with four modern workstations purchased and installed for our staff personnel. A Macintosh G3 Computer system was purchased and has been installed, enabling us to perform typesetting, page layout, and book design of publishing projects in-house. We also purchased new copying equipment, upgraded our PC workstation computers, and installed our own phone system, fax machine, and e-mail address. In addition, we have designed our own Web Site, where our books and *Standard Bearer* magazine are attractively displayed for transmission worldwide. Ordering of books has now been made much simpler and faster for customers because of our installation of Electronic Ordering via IC Verify Software, which allows us

to process credit cares via the internet. This has greatly enhanced our ability to market and sell our publications, especially in foreign countries.

Books offered in the RFPA catalog number 50 titles. A new, updated catalog is currently being planned and is scheduled to be out next spring for your review. Our books are literally going to the ends of the earth. Orders come from all across Canada, in the British Isles, Africa, Peru, Japan, Denmark, Korea, Brazil, Australia, and many other places throughout Europe and Asia. Book sales have been robust again this past year. No fewer than 8,000 volumes have been sold and shipped. Our Book Club Membership Program, through which new titles are launched and our initial publishing investment recovered, has increased 25% again this past year and now includes 700 club members. This is an increase of over 300 new members in just two years!

We express our sincere thanks to Prof. Engelsma for his devotion as Editor-in-Chief and for the excellent work done on behalf of our *Standard Bearer*. We realize the tremendous effort it takes to write worthwhile articles for our magazine. We therefore express our thanks and appreciation also to the regular department editors and contributors for the many fine articles and contributions again this past year that make our magazine worthy of its name.

We also thank our *Standard Bearer* Business Manager Don Doezeema and our Book Publications Manager Evelyn Langerak for their hard work and persevering spirit again this past year. Truly they are a tremendous asset in making the many decisions day-to-day in order to carry out the details involved in bringing our *Standard Bearer* and books to print. We also thank our capable assistants and staff members: Judi Doezeema, for her work in keeping financial records and typesetting each *Stan-*

dard Bearer, and Natalie Jefferson, who provides book editing/proof-reading, general assistance, and the copy for our newsletter. We give special thanks to Mr. Tim Hanko, who has given many hours designing our Web Page, and who continues to perform the work of maintaining and upgrading this site regularly.

We look forward to beginning our 75th year, marking a milestone

that is occasion for thanksgiving. As we think of it, we are amazed that God has privileged us to continue abiding in the faith of our fathers these many years. We give God praise and thanksgiving for His grace and faithfulness. Our prayer is that He will give us the will and grace to persevere in being an effective witness to our Reformed heritage in this age of indifference and apostasy.

A reader recently wrote to tell us of his thrill with our *Standard Bearer* and reminding us of what our posture must be: "Man-centered religion is false and deadly. Salvation is of the Lord! To Him be the glory!" Let that be our conviction and the theme of all our work as we continue to go forward together in the work of the RFPA.

In Christ's service,
Henry Kamps, Secretary

Report of Classis East

Mr. Jon Huiskens

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, September 9, 1998 at the new location and new church building of the First PRC of Holland, Michigan. All the churches were represented by two delegates; Rev. M. Dick was the chairman for this session.

In routine business, classis heard the reports of the stated clerk and of its Classical Committee.

Most of the business of this session was done in closed session. A discipline case was considered, as were protests against a decision

taken at the May 13, 1998 session of classis.

Expenses for this session amounted to \$1,128.89. Classis will meet next on January 13, 1999 at the Byron Center PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Denomination Activities

In late August our seminary began another year of instruction. We add our prayers to those of all our churches, when we pray that the faculty and students might both receive strength from our Heavenly Father for their work and that the fruit of this work might be seen in godly, Reformed ministers preaching in our churches for years to come. Three men are currently enrolled in our seminary with a view to entering the ministry in our churches. Senior seminarian Gary Eriks is on his internship in Loveland, CO PRC for the first semester. Rodney Kleyn and David Overway are beginning their first year of study. Korstiaan den Engelse, Angus Stewart, and Mark Shand are beginning their second year as non-licentiate students.

And a number of students from the Puritan Reformed Seminary of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Church are taking courses as special students.

This year's Seminary Convocation was held at First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI on September 9. Prof. D. Engelsma gave the address entitled, "Our Seminary as Military Academy."

The Mr. & Mrs. Society of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI served as this year's host society for the annual League Mass Meeting. All Mr. & Mrs. Societies in the west Michigan area were invited to hear Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, speak on the subject, "Mission Work in a Hostile Environment."

The Hope Heralds, an all male choir from the west Michigan churches, were able to give two concerts recently. August 30 they gave a concert at the Grandville, MI PRC, and about three weeks later, on September 20, they re-

peated the concert for the congregation of the First PRC in Holland, MI.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Society of the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL sponsored a lecture on September 17 entitled, "Withhold Not Correction: God's Word vs. Civil Government." Rev. S. Key, pastor of the Randolph, WI PRC, spoke on "Biblical Directives for the Discipline of Children." Attorney James Lanting, a member of the South Holland, IL PRC, spoke on "Legal Issues in the Discipline of Children." Bethel hoped that this lecture would give valuable instruction and encouragement to parents, teachers, grandparents, teenagers, and all who would follow the directives of the Scriptures in this crucial area of loving, consistent, effective child rearing.

Through the combined efforts of the Evangelism Committee of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI and

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

P.R. students attending Grand Valley State University, the organization known as Christianity on Campus began a new season in mid-September. Young adults either attending or not attending GVSU were invited to attend a lecture-discussion about the need to bring their religion out of the closet and into the open. The topic for that first week was, "Attic Religion: The Death of Evangelism."

The Reformed Witness Committee, made up of men from the Doon, IA; Hull, IA; and Edgerton, MN PRC churches, once again is the driving force behind a Bible Study at Dordt College. Their meetings began in mid-September as well, their first discussion dealing with the matter of Christian witnessing.

It is also interesting to note that, due to the large number of young adults from our churches who are attending Dordt College again this year, the members of our Doon, IA PRC are inviting them to stay after church and enjoy Sunday dinner along with good Christian fellowship, with different families.

The R.W.C. also approved placing the *Standard Bearer* in libraries in Doon, Hull, and Rock Rapids, IA.

In conjunction with the Reformed Free Publishing Association, the Evangelism Committee of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA is also working at distributing free copies of the *Standard Bearer*. Copies of each new issue are being placed in racks in various area bookstores.

Mission Activities

At our 1998 synod, a decision was made to send two delegations to the Philippines to investigate further the possibility of our denomination beginning a mission work there. Our churches' Foreign Mission Committee will be sending, D.V., Rev. A. den Hartog, pastor at Hope PRC, Redlands, CA, and Rev. R. Smit, pastor in the Doon, IA PRC, to the Philippines

from October 12 to October 28. Please pray for this important and exciting work of our denomination.

This past Labor Day weekend, six young adults from different Michigan churches drove down to Pittsburgh, PA to spend time with Missionary Mahtani and his family and get better acquainted with the group that our churches are working with there. Besides attending church services on Sun-

day, they were also able to spend some time in various members' homes and do some sight-seeing in and around the area.

Food For Thought

"The assured Christian is more motion than notion, more work than word, more life than lip, and more hand than tongue."

—T. Brooks □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NOTICE

The Committee for Contact With Other Churches wishes to inform the readers of the *Standard Bearer* of the urgent need of our sister church, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. The CERC has been notified by the Singapore government that its temporary-use permit will not be renewed. The congregation has one year to locate a new place of worship and vacate their premises. This puts the CERC in a very difficult position. Real estate to meet their needs will be difficult to find and expensive to purchase. But they are going forward in faith, believing that the Lord will supply their needs. They are interested both in securing low-cost loans and receiving love gifts. Anyone interested in either of these possibilities is urged to contact:

Mr. Ishu Mahtani
21 Tessensohn Rd.
Singapore 217652
Rep. of Singapore.

Rev. Ron Cammenga,
Secretary

TAPES AVAILABLE

Tapes of Southwest's Summer Seminar, "Angels, Demons, the Devil, and the Occult," are available. The four-tape set can be ordered either as audio (\$12.00) or video (\$24.00). Orders should be sent to:

Southwest Protestant Reformed Church
Evangelism Committee
4875 Ivanrest Avenue
Grandville, MI 49418

YEARBOOK CORRECTIONS!

On page 216 of the 1998 Yearbook, Prof. Dykstra's telephone number should be: 791-7250; and on page 217, Rev. Houck's number should be: 895-7974. Rev. Mahtani's study telephone number, reported incorrectly in the October 1 SB, is (412) 371-2299.

Please note also that the bulletin clerk for First PRC (GR) is now Mrs. Linda Young, 2017 Lafayette N.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49505. Telephone: (616) 364-0240.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 8, 1998 our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents,

PETER and ALICE KNOTT,

celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. We, as family, thank the Lord for the many happy years He has given them together. It is our prayer that God will continue to bless them in their life together. We thank them for their godly example, Christian upbringing, and love they have given to us.

"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).

- ❖ Andy and Mary Brummel
- ❖ Don and Jackie Offringa
- ❖ Bob and Kathy Knott
- 11 grandchildren (one in glory)
- 5 great-grandchildren

Hudsonville, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hope Protestant Reformed Church (Walker) extends its sympathy to its members: Rich Bloem, in the death of his sister-in-law,

JULIA KORHORN;

Al Rau, in the death of his sister-in-law,

THELMA DE WALD;

and Harry Rutgers, in the death of his mother,
SUE RUTGERS.

May they find comfort in the words of Christ, through whose resurrection is all our hope: "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40).

John Buiters, President
Michael Lotterman, Secretary

NOTICE

With gratitude to God, the Theological School Committee recognizes 25 years of dedicated service by Prof. Robert D. Decker in our seminary. God has blessed his work over these years both as professor and rector in the seminary. We pray that God will continue to use him in the years to come as a faithful servant working diligently in the training of future pastors and missionaries.

Theological School Committee
Jon J. Huiskens, Secretary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 28, 1998,

MR. and MRS. MICHAEL VAN BAREN

celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

We thank our heavenly Father for the Christian guidance and instruction and the wonderful love and care He has enabled them to give us.

We pray the Lord will continue to bless them and, if it is His will, enable them to guide us for years to come.

"Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children" (Deuteronomy 4:10).

- ❖ Bob and Jan Koontz
- ❖ John and Alice Dykshorn
- ❖ Frank and Sharon VanBaren
- ❖ Mike and Char VanBaren
- ❖ Mark VanBaren
- 15 grandchildren
- 1 great-grandchild

Crete, Illinois

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of the Doon PRC Men's Society express their deepest Christian sympathy to fellow member Perry VanEgdom and his family in the death of their stillborn daughter,

EMILY DAWN.

May their comfort be from the Word of God found in Psalm 29:11: "The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace."

Rev. Richard Smit, Pres.
David Wiersma, Sec'y.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 10, 1998, we celebrated the 40th wedding anniversary of our parents,

MR. and MRS. GERALD DEVRIES.

We thank our heavenly Father for the years He has given them together and pray that He will guide and bless them in their life together.

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

- ❖ Daniel and Carol Monsma
- Natalie, Andrea, Lydia
- ❖ David and Carol DeVries
- Kimberly, Matthew, Jamie

Grand Rapids, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory of Hope PRC of Redlands, CA expresses its sincere sympathy to members Donald Feenstra, Everett Van Voorthuysen, and Ron VanVoorthuysen in the passing of their mother and grandmother,

JEANETTE FEENSTRA.

The congregation grieves this loss of one of our charter members, who went to be with her Lord on September 17, 1998 at the age of 96. We express our Christian sympathy to the Feenstra family.

"For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8).

For the consistory,
Pastor A. denHartog, Pres.
Doug Pastoor, clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Lord, in His wisdom and grace, has taken from this earth to Himself in glory

JEANNETTE FEENSTRA.

The Mary Martha Society of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands expresses their Christian sympathy and love to her daughter, Audrey VanVoorthuysen, her daughters-in-law, Beverly Feenstra, Janice Feenstra, and Shirley Feenstra, several granddaughters, and to their families. May they find comfort in the words of I Thessalonians 4:14. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

Pastor A. denHartog, Pres.
JoAnn Pastoor, Sec.

NEEDED

Pictures and More Pictures

Pictures, slides, movies are needed for the production of a booklet and a video for the 75th year anniversary of our churches to be celebrated in the year 2000, the Lord willing.

If you have any old pictures relating to the history of our churches, ministers, church buildings, picnics, special events, schools, etc., please send them to

Mr. Ken Elzinga
4465 100th St.

Byron Center, MI 49315.

There are probably hundreds, maybe even thousands, of these, stored away in musty old boxes and albums.

These pictures should, if at all possible, be sent by January 31, 1999. That gives you about three months.

Please include your name and address on the back of each picture so that everything can be returned to you promptly.

If it's not important that the pictures be returned to you, they will be given to our denominational archivist, Mr. Jon Huiskens, to be added to our permanent collection of archives.

Justification By Faith

Prof. David Engelsma Speaker

Prof. of Dogmatics
and Old Testament Studies
in the
Protestant Reformed Seminary

B.J. Haan Auditorium
on Dordt College Campus
Sioux Center, Iowa
November 6, 1998
7:30 p.m.

Come and hear this Reformation doctrine expounded, with special attention given to the Roman Catholic-Evangelical Accord.

We invite you to attend and bring a friend!

Sponsored by the
Protestant Reformed Churches of
Hull, Doon, IA, and Edgerton, MN