



**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

The Standard Bearer

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The Messenger of the Covenant

"...and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in...."

Malachi 3:1b

In this prophecy Malachi speaks of the coming of the Messenger of the covenant. That Messenger is Christ.

The first part of this verse is an obvious reference to another messenger, John the Baptist. We read, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me...." John the Baptist was the messenger of God who was sent by God to prepare the way for the coming of Christ. Christ quoted the first part of this verse in reference to His forerunner. We read in Matthew 11:10, "For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,

which shall prepare thy way before thee."

Since the first messenger mentioned in the verse prepared the way for the second, the Messenger of the covenant must be Christ. Christ is called something similar in Hebrews 12:24, "And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant...." The Mediator of the covenant and the Messenger of the covenant are the same.

In Malachi 3:1 He is called the "Messenger" of the covenant. The word "messenger" is the same word which is so often translated in the Old Testament by the word "angel." Angels are messengers of God. That Christ is called the "Messenger" or "Angel" of the covenant identifies Him as "the Angel of Jehovah" who appeared throughout the old dispensation. He was not a regular angel but *the* Angel of the Lord.

As the Angel of Jehovah, Christ walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. He appeared to Abraham with two regular angels of God. As the Angel of Jehovah, Christ led the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt and through the Red Sea on dry ground. He led them through the wilderness and brought them into the promised land. He appeared before them as the cloud of God's glory which led them by day and night and which filled the tabernacle.

We have a beautiful reference to the Angel of Jehovah in Isaiah 63:9: "... and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." The Angel of Jehovah was the Angel of God's presence because in that Angel, God was present with His people to save them. That was Christ in His pre-

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incarnate manifestation. He was God's Angel, God's Messenger.

But notice in this verse He is not called the Angel or Messenger "of Jehovah" but the Messenger "of the covenant." That teaches us Christ's relationship to the covenant. The covenant of which this verse speaks is the one covenant of God which He establishes with all of His elect people. It is the covenant which God made with Abraham and his seed. It is the covenant which He established with the people of Israel and which He makes with us believers of the new dispensation. That covenant is the bond of friendship and fellowship which God has with His people. It is the relationship in which He is our God and we are His people. It is salvation itself, for God's people partake of God's eternal life.

What does it mean that Christ is the Messenger of that covenant? Normally, when we think of a messenger we think of someone who delivers a message. That is what the angels did in the old dispensation. That is also what John the Baptist did as the messenger of God. But as the Messenger of the covenant, Christ does much more than simply deliver a message. In the covenant, Christ is the One who stands between us and God and unites us to God. Specifically, Christ is the Messenger of the covenant in three ways. He is the object of the covenant, the basis of the covenant, and the One who establishes the covenant.

As Messenger of the covenant, Christ is the object of the covenant. Christ is "the seed" of Abraham. When God established His covenant with Abraham and his seed He established it with Christ. We read in Galatians 3:16, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many: but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Ultimately Christ is the only one with whom God establishes His covenant. God makes His covenant

with us only because we are united to Christ. Thus, Christ is the Messenger of the covenant in the sense that He is the recipient of the covenant. God is His God and He is God's Son. Christ has intimate fellowship with God. He knows and loves God and is known and loved by God.

Christ is the Messenger of the covenant also in the sense that He is the basis of the covenant. Because God is holy and we are sinners, the only way that we can have covenant fellowship with God is through the forgiveness of our sins. Christ accomplished that by His suffering and death on the cross. That is why the blood of Christ is called "the blood of the covenant" (Heb. 13:20). There can be this everlasting covenant of grace between God and His people only because of the blood of Christ.

Christ is the Messenger of the covenant because He is the One who establishes the covenant with us so that we experience it in our lives. He causes us to have fellowship with God and to know His love and grace. That was true all through the old dispensation. Christ caused Adam and Eve to have fellowship with God as He walked and talked with them in the garden. Christ appeared to Abraham and had communion with him. The same is true of the new dispensation. Christ regenerates us through His Spirit. He gives us faith and repentance. He unites us with God. As

a result, we experience covenant friendship with God directly through Him. We walk and talk with God and He with us. Thus the Messenger of the covenant does not merely bring us a message about the covenant but He brings us the covenant itself.

In this verse God declares that this Messenger of the covenant is coming. We read, "...and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall sud-

denly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts." Jehovah of Hosts, the God of His people, solemnly declares the coming of Christ. First He says that the Lord shall suddenly come to His temple. He explains that by saying that the Messenger of the covenant shall come.

The Old Testament is full of passages which look forward to Christ's coming. The coming of the Messiah was so central to the old dispensation that we find hundreds of passages which speak of it. These prophecies were themselves part of the preparation for the coming of Christ. They pointed God's people to Christ and His coming. They not only informed God's people that the Messenger of the covenant was coming but they produced in God's true people a longing for His coming. That is what the old dispensation was all about.

John the Baptist was the last of a long line of prophets who spoke of Christ's coming and thus prepared the way for that coming. He was privileged actually to see Christ when He came. That is what made him the greatest of all the old dispensational prophets.

What a glorious day that was when Christ came. The Angel of the covenant came not as an angel but as a man. What a glorious day

when the virgin conceived in her womb. The power of the Highest overshadowed her. The Holy Ghost came upon her. What a glorious day when in that lowly stable the Christ child was born. The Messenger of the covenant became flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone.

He became like you and me in all things, sin excepted. What a glorious day when He began His public ministry, when He was seen by John the Baptist and others, and when He

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declared Himself to be the promised Messiah by His word and works.

That coming of the Messenger of the covenant was the most significant event in all of history. For when Christ came, God came. We read, "... and the Lord ... shall suddenly come ... even the messenger of the covenant...." This verse speaks of the Lord coming. That can be none other than God. Yet that Lord is identified as "the messenger of the covenant." The meaning is clear. In the coming of the Messenger of the covenant, God came. The Messenger of the covenant is God come in the flesh. That is why this Messenger of the covenant was given the names "Jesus" (Jehovah Salvation) and "Immanuel" (God with us). In the coming of Christ, Jehovah God came to save us.

That is further indicated by the fact that the Messenger of the covenant came to His temple. We read, "... and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple." When Christ came, He did not come just anywhere. He came to His temple. Just as the Angel of the covenant, the cloud of God's glory, came to the temple and tabernacle in the old dispensation, when the Messenger of the covenant came, God came to His temple. These words refer to the physical temple which had been rebuilt by Herod. Jesus came to and cleansed that temple which was His Father's house. He healed the sick in that temple. He preached in that temple.

But that physical temple was only a type of the real temple. The real temple is the body of Jesus Christ. That's why Christ could say in John 2:19, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." He spoke of His body, which the Jews would destroy, but which He would raise up on the third day. Thus we have a declaration that when Christ came, the Lord came to His body. The second person of the Trinity in His

divine nature took upon Himself a human nature.

The result is that the Word of God tabernacled among us. John 1:14, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...." The word "dwelt" means "to tabernacle or tent" among us. God came to live in His house among us. That house is the body of Christ. That is the wonder of the incarnation. The infinite God, who knows no bounds, who cannot be limited by space and time, came to dwell in a body. All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in that body. That is the way God will manifest Himself to us throughout all of eternity. Forever and ever we will see God in the human nature of Christ. Is that not a great wonder?

But that means that the Messenger of the covenant came to dwell with His people, the church. The church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). The church is also called the temple of God in I Corinthians 3:16, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God...?" When Christ came, God came to live in His church. In the body of Christ, God and man are united together. Thus the coming of the Messenger of the covenant brought about the realization of covenant fellowship with God. In the body of Christ, God is our God and we are His people who live with Him.

That brings us to the reception which Christ received when He came to His temple. Notice the verse, "... and the Lord, whom ye seek ... even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in...." Here we learn that the coming of the Lord was sought by the people of Israel and that they delighted in the Messenger of the covenant. This cannot mean that the people of Israel as a whole were seeking after the Lord and His coming. That is not so. Israel cared nothing about the true Messiah and His coming. That is demonstrated by the fact that they killed the prophets who were sent to prepare the way of the Lord.

Even at the time that the Lord came to His temple, Israel did not seek after Him and delight in Him. The Messenger of the covenant was born in a stable because there was no room for Him in the inn. That indicates that there was no room for Jesus in Israel, nor in the world. Even though large crowds followed Jesus at first, they soon forsook Him. Most of Israel hated Him. Finally they could not tolerate His presence anymore. They crucified the Lord of glory. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11).

Rather, the statement of this verse refers to the elect remnant. The Lord came to His church and she delights in her Messiah. She rejoices in her Lord. She finds her peace and comfort in the Messenger of the covenant.

Thus all through the old dispensation the true church sought the coming of Christ. The godly waited for that great day of the Lord. They lived for the coming of Christ. They sought the seed of Abraham, the Son of David. The same was true at the birth of Christ. Think, for instance, of Zechariah, Elisabeth, and John the Baptist in the womb of Elisabeth. Think of the shepherds who went to see the newborn King and the wisemen who came from the East. Think of Anna and also of Simeon who waited for the Lord's Christ and who saw the Lord's salvation. God's people looked for and delighted in the Messenger of the covenant.

And so it must be today. Oh, there is much which seems to be a seeking after Christ which is not. We see that especially at this time of year. There are lights in the streets. People are shopping and buying gifts. Homes are filled with Christmas trees and other ornaments. But we know that in spite of all of that, most people are like the majority of the Israelites. They care nothing about the true Christ. If He were here, they would crucify Him just as the Jews did. Even

now they persecute the prophets of the Lord. We must not be fooled by all of this "Christmas" activity. The world hates and rejects the Messenger of the covenant.

But we who are of the elect remnant must seek Him. We may not get caught up in all that the world offers as Christmas. We are to rejoice in His birth. God came

in our flesh! The Messenger of the covenant came to His temple! That is a wonderful truth. Do not take it for granted. Do not let it become common. It was a miracle, a great miracle. It is the central miracle of the whole plan of salvation. Rejoice in it and thank God for it.

What is more, we ought to seek the Messenger of the covenant in

all of our life. We may not live for this world. Christ is to be our life. We are to seek Him in all that we do. We ought to delight in the fellowship and friendship which we have with God in Him. That ought to be so important to us that we want it more than anything else. For that fellowship with God in Christ is eternal life. □

Editorial

The Coming of the Head of the Covenant

How many of us will celebrate Christmas as the coming of God's Christ for the covenant?

The non-Reformed churches certainly will not. The worst of them will rejoice that Jesus came to free the poor, blacks, women, and homosexuals. The best will herald Jesus' birth as simply God's gift of a Savior for sinful men and women. All ignore the covenant.

But what of us who are Reformed? Do we see the birth of Jesus in light of the covenant, indeed as fulfillment of the covenant promise? Do we embrace Him who was born of the virgin as the Christ of the covenant? Is the benefit of His birth, over which we make merry, enjoyment of the covenant? Do we proclaim the baby born in Bethlehem as head of the covenant of grace?

Is this our proclamation of Him, not only within the congregations but also to the whole, wide world in missions? Surely, sound preaching of the *misery* of men and

women, which makes the Savior necessary, tells the people of the covenantal nature of their guilt and depravity. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Likewise, faithful preaching of the Savior and His salvation must set forth their covenantal nature: "by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19).

If the note of covenant is missing from our Christmas song, our celebration is weak, if not false.

What kind of celebration of a husband's birthday is it, that is oblivious to the unique relationship in which he stands to the celebrating wife? Even though she is thankful for his gifts—food, clothing, a house, perhaps jewels and trips—who would praise a wife's celebration, if she ignored the marriage itself whence the gifts spring and which they are intended to strengthen?

As gift of the triune God, Jesus was sent into the world on behalf of God's covenant. What accounts for His birth is God's remembrance

of His "holy covenant" (Luke 1:72). What brings the conception about is the covenant promise: "the oath which he swore to our father Abraham" (Luke 1:73). Isaiah 42:6 prophesies Him as God's gift "for a covenant of the people." From this passage Simeon drew his inspired welcome of the Christ-Child in Luke 2:32: "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."

Covenant defines Jesus Christ and describes His mission. One can no more explain Jesus Christ apart from covenant than he can understand Charles de Gaulle apart from the glory of France.

Jesus' birth is the coming of the "messenger of the covenant" (Mal. 3:1). Lying in the manger in Bethlehem was no merely private person, nor a highly gifted individual who would captivate many, nor even simply the one who was to save sinners in God's name. But He was the Servant of Jehovah in history—the Servant of Jehovah. And His service would be that of the "mediator of the new covenant" (Heb. 12:24). By Him, the triune, true, and living God would

make a new covenant with the human race of election (Heb. 8).

The eternal Son of God came into the world in the incarnation in order to restore friendship between fallen, guilty, corrupt, and hostile people and God. This is salvation. This is life. This is bliss. This is glory.

He will mediate between God and the elect race that has faithlessly deserted Him and that hatefully opposes Him. His mediation will consist of the redemption of the cross, that obtains the right to fellowship with the blessed God, and of the renewing of the Holy Spirit, that unites these men and women with God by faith.

In this way, Jesus Christ will reveal to the covenant people the eternal friendship of God towards them.

The friendship of the covenant is of the highest order. It is that of family: adopted sons and daughters living with God. It is that of children who know and enjoy God as the God of goodness in Jesus Christ.

What love permeates this life!

What intimacy characterizes it!

What benefits of salvation are part of it!

What a disclosure to them of the being and counsel of the Father is the privilege of the children! Adam and Eve never knew God so!

What a glorious work is the calling of every child: service of the heavenly Father. The Christian life of holiness and good works is *covenant life*.

This is the truth about the birth of Jesus. This must be our celebration. Our singing of the Psalms is such a celebration.

For him My mercy shall endure,
My covenant made with him is sure,

His throne and race I will maintain

Forever, while the heavens remain
(Psalm 89).

*Celebration
of the birth
of Jesus,
therefore,
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God only,
and extols grace,
grace
only.*

Jesus Christ is more than the servant of God, to realize the covenant. In His two natures, divine and human, united in His one (divine) person, Jesus *is* the covenant. He is Himself the covenant between God and man. For the covenant is the union and communion of God with man, and Jesus is in Himself this union and communion.

The Word of God names Him "Emmanuel," that is, "With-Us, God" (Matt. 1:23; cf. Is. 7:14). The name does not merely reveal what He will do. But it reveals who He is: God-taking-us-humans-into-fellowship-with-Himself.

Or, simply, Covenant.

What remains is that He make His human nature spiritual and glorious through the crucifixion and resurrection and that He unite all of His own to Himself by the gospel and the Spirit.

Celebration of the birth of Jesus, therefore, magnifies God, *God only*, and extols grace, *grace only*. Mary magnified the Lord (Luke 1:46). Zacharias blessed God, attributing the Savior and His salvation to the work of God (Luke 1:67-80). The angels praised God (Luke 2:13, 14).

God realizes His covenant with His people. God realizes His covenant by the wonder of incarnation.

Where is man?

What slightest role does his work or his will play?

How does the covenant—let us say, Covenant—depend on man's worth?

Who dares to stand before the pregnant womb of the virgin with his, "Yes, but there are conditions that we must fulfill," and, "Yes, but we must accept the well-meant offer," and, "Yes, but we must bargain

and contract with the covenanting God as a real, though perhaps lesser, party to the transaction," and, "Yes, but we must cooperate"?

Christmas, that is to say Covenant, is grace, all grace, only grace. Whoever will not see this cannot celebrate. Celebration of grace, by mouth and by hand, is the real work in the covenant, and this too is of grace.

Singing the Psalms directs us rightly in this aspect of the celebration of the birth of Christ also.

Who is there like to Thee, throughout this vast creation,
Jehovah, Lord of hosts, the God of our salvation,
Arrayed like Thee with power and faithfulness astounding,
Constraining saints to praise Thy wondrous grace abounding?
(Psalm 89)

All of this depends upon God's sending of the Christ as the *head* of the covenant.

The covenant of grace is not *headless*. God forbid! In this case, all the members are so many unrelated individuals. At best, God brings each person into the covenant purely as an individual, on his own, altogether apart from any head. Since membership in the covenant is salvation, in this case salvation is a purely individualistic matter.

At worst, each member of the covenant comes in as a head unto himself. He himself earns for himself the right to the covenant and its blessings. He himself works up in himself the life that befits the covenant.

That "holy thing" that was conceived by the Holy Spirit was the "federal (that is, 'covenant') head" of the new human race. He came into the world as the legal representative of the people of the covenant. His obedience will be imputed to them for righteousness. Accordingly, He will be the living source

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of their spiritual life. With Him, with Him personally in the human nature, God has established the covenant (Psalm 89:3, 4, 28). To Him, to Him personally in the human nature, God has made the promise of the covenant (Gal. 3:16, 29).

The man whom God the Creator formed from the dust was the "figure" of the man formed from David's daughter (Rom 5:14). Just as the first Adam was created as the legal representative of others in the covenant of creation, so that his disobedience would be imputed to the others as their guilt, so the second Adam was given by God the Redeemer as the legal repre-

sentative of others in the covenant of grace, so that His obedience would be imputed to the others as their righteousness. And just as the first Adam justly transmitted the depravity of his nature to all whose representative he is, so also the second Adam shares His own holiness and life with those whom He represents (Rom. 5:12ff.).

Made with Christ as head, the covenant extends to all those, but those only, who are in Him by sovereign, eternal, divine election.

Thus the covenant is sure, to the comfort of every one who believes in Christ. This too is our Christmas celebration in the Psalter.

Ye seed from Abraham descended,
To whom His favors were extended,
And Jacob's children, whom the Lord
Has chosen, hearken to His word.
He is the Lord, our Judge divine;
In all the earth His glories shine.

Jehovah's truth will stand forever,
His covenant-bonds He will not sever;
The word of grace which He commands
To thousand generations stands;
The covenant made in days of old
With Abraham He doth uphold
(Psalm 105). □

— DJE

Letters

■ Family Planning

Though I routinely enjoy the *Standard Bearer* and find it to be instructive and encouraging, I am troubled by some statements touching our responsibilities regarding our children in the article entitled "Arrows," by Rev. D. Kuiper, in his rubric, "A Word Fitly Spoken," (Oct. 1, 1998). In his attempt to warn us against worldliness, the reverend actually steers us away from responsible decision-making! After quoting the text of the "happiness of the man that hath his quiver full of them" (Ps. 127), he writes:

Clearly, the number of children that we have is in view here. We take the quiver to stand for the home, and the home is to be filled with children. Normally, when God chooses to bless a man, He does so by giving him children (Ps. 128:3, 4). Quivers are of different sizes, and God decided that size, and when the quiver is full.

With some it is full with one child, with others not until five or six, ten or twelve, are born. The God who killeth and maketh alive decides this, not man. Abortion is ruled out here, of course. The pill and other contraceptive devices are ruled out here, of course. Family planning, the decision of husband and wife as to how many children they are going to have, and just when they are going to have them, is also ruled out by this Psalm.

A few points are well supported by Scripture: children a great blessing (no true Christian parent would have difficulty with that) and the abomination of abortions ("Thou shalt not kill"). The difficulty I have is with your commentary regarding our "planning" of children. Though ultimately the "planning" or decision-making is God's (Proverbs 16:9; "A man's heart deviseth his way; but the LORD directeth his steps"), nevertheless, God in His wisdom has given (poured forth) the Spirit of Christ unto His dear children, enabling them, not to walk with blindfolds on, hoping all goes well, but to make important (dividing)

decisions in life. This is especially true of the New Testament saints, and let us never desire to be back in the shadows of the old dispensation, under the law as it were a schoolmaster, but enjoying the true freedom, as free-born sons of Sarah, to meet the daily decisions head on. As God brings trials in our lives, so also He leads us to make decisions, even as regards to children.

Make no mistake: we must make these decisions carefully, very carefully. We must be thoroughly knowledgeable of God's will, as He has set it forth in Holy Writ and as He has taught us through the preaching and example of our parents, pastors, and others. We must be sure to make decisions which are directed to God's glory, conform to His will, and are to the spiritual benefit of ourselves, our families, and the church. Though this is not easy, it is possible, by God's grace.

Do these decisions involve how many children and when? How can they not? If the reverend is consistent, he would have to admit that, with his position, a man could not

be separate from his wife for any amount of time, lest he interfere with God's plan. Even the apostle Paul permits such decisions (for a season, and with consent, I Cor. 7:5). Ought we to doubt a believer's decision in circumstances such as these: a mother finds her life in danger; a father is suffering mental depression; or a marriage is breaking at the seams and undergoing counsel?

Indeed, as the reverend wrote, we do not condone "the world's low view of children as a bother, as an unnecessary expense, as a hindrance to the good life; the world's low view of child-bearing and the labors of the mother in the home; the world's usurping of divine right in regard to the issues of life and death—all this may not influence or control believing parents in regard to their having children." These are the lame excuses of the world. On the contrary, a believing husband and wife have a deep yearning for the blessing of children; yet God may choose to give us personal limitations and bring us into circumstances in which He indeed calls us to make decisions in the matter of our family.

We need guidance to make these decisions, not advice to shirk our responsibilities by all-encompassing rules set by others. Let us pray for wisdom that we may make the decisions we ought to make, and may live only to His glory.

Brian Rypstra
Lynden, WA

RESPONSE:

To what I have written in the brief article entitled "Arrows," let me add the following for your consideration.

1. There certainly are exceptions to what was written, as you pointed out. The emotional and/or physical health of the mother is a legitimate consideration, and the advice of the medical professionals ought to be considered.

2. In I Corinthians 7:5 Paul is

not advocating abstinence for a time and with consent as an aid to "family planning" but as an aid to spiritual life. Indulgence in the use of God's good gifts may, at times, cause our prayer life to suffer. Abstinence and fasting are suggested as means to improve this.

3. New Testament, Spirit-filled children of God ought to have the same high regard for children as did the Old Testament saints. I know of no laws that were abrogated by Christ in this regard. So no attempt is being made to put us back in the shadows of the old dispensation.

4. Indeed, we must do all things according to God's will as set forth in Holy Writ. The article interpreted, briefly, one passage of that Holy Word, and warned against such excuses as we have heard in defense of "family planning":

a. "You have to use your common sense." No, we must use sanctified judgment.

b. "I don't want to bring children into the world that will be ruled by Antichrist." God promises to be with us unto the end of the world.

c. "I can be a better parent to one or two children, than if I have many." How do you know?

d. "I may only bring as many children into the world as I can afford, and that includes tuition payments." Here the issue is money! And God knows we need money. Therefore He will provide for us one way or another, by way of our daily labors or by way of the love gifts of His people.

5. We are not trying to steer anyone away from responsible decision making, because we do not believe that anyone has the right to be making decisions in the area under question: number of children and when to have these children. We are trying to warn God's people away from presumptuous decision making, that is, of presuming the right to make decisions which belong only to God! My

conviction that this is solely God's prerogative is based on the following:

a. To God belongs the issues of life and death (I Sam. 2:6). Notice, this is taken from Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving just after she had received Samuel from God.

b. God gives conception to whom, when, and as often as, He pleases (Ruth 4:13).

c. God alone knows the future, and He knows us better than we know ourselves.

d. God has promised never to burden us above what we are able to bear (I Cor. 10:13).

e. God alone knows His elect children, especially the church yet to be born. He will bring that (latent) church forth from believing parents for the most part. We stand in His service in this regard. We hope you, and others, find this helpful.

—Rev. Dale H. Kuiper ■

■ The SB Appreciated by the Dutch Speaking

U wordt van hart bedankt voor de 4 "editorials" aan "common grace" (see the May 15, August, September 1, September 15, and October 1, 1998 issues of the *Standard Bearer*).

Na 50 jaren vragend om Abraham Kuyper eindelijk een open begrijpelijk antwoord.

Mijn hartelijke dank.

[A heartfelt thanks to you for the four editorials on common grace.

After 50 years of wondering about Abraham Kuyper, finally a clearly understandable answer.

My heartfelt thanks.]

(Mrs.) Minnie V. Bleeker
Schnecksville, PA □

Confessing Our Lord (1)

We have seen and believe that the only begotten Son of God is very God. And because Jesus Christ is *God*, He is the unique Son. He alone is the eternal and natural Son of God. He alone is Savior. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

But this same Christ is also our *Lord*.

He who has redeemed us from all our sins has also claimed us as His own property.

We make this confession in full realization that this truth is widely rejected by Christians in our day. That there are multitudes of Christians who deny Jesus' lordship over them is astounding to us. It isn't astounding in the sense that we do not understand *why* people would take such a position. After all, to confess Jesus Christ as Lord is to acknowledge that we are small. To confess Jesus Christ as Lord is necessarily to deny oneself and to acknowledge another more important than self. We were those who had to be saved. Christ is the One who alone could save us. Doesn't it stand to reason, then, that He has a right and a power that we do not have? Doesn't it stand to reason that He has something more than we?

To confess Jesus Christ as my

Lord is to place a limitation around myself, and to walk according to the dictates and will of Him who is higher than I. It is to acknowledge that I am but a servant, a slave. And how we hate servitude — by nature. From that point of view we can certainly understand the desire to shake off the perceived bonds of Jesus' lordship.

But that so many would deny Jesus' lordship is astounding simply because the Bible itself so clearly sets forth this very truth!

Jesus pointed to Himself as the fulfillment of Psalm 110, when, in a conversation with the Pharisees, He asked them, "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions" (Matt. 22:42-46).

This was one of the first points of emphasis in the apostles' preaching immediately after Pentecost (Acts 2:36): "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

How frequently in the New Testament is the Savior referred to as *Jesus Christ our Lord*!

Yet in recent decades there has been a rising movement in evangelical Christendom which denies

Jesus as Lord. There are many who say that they love Jesus, who call themselves Christian, but who want nothing to do with a Christ who is Lord over them. In this article and the next we must give some consideration to that error.

But we immediately and openly confess that to claim Jesus as *Savior* is to submit to Him as *Lord*. Another gospel there is not!

This is a truth that bears great significance — both with respect to the assurance that is ours as Christians and also with respect to the way we live. You and I are called to stand always before Jesus Christ and to join Thomas in the confession: "My Lord and my God."

His Unique Lordship

When we confess our faith in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, our Lord, we are confessing not only that Jesus is the only eternal and natural Son of God, but also that His lordship is unique.

Christ is Lord *alone*. The One God, Jehovah, is Lord over all, and He now reigns by His exalted Son, Jesus Christ.

It is exactly from this point of view that we reject categorically all religions that do not maintain this confession. True Christianity is not a religion that can be placed in categories with other world religions. We do not put Buddhism or Hinduism or Islam or Judaism as religions on equal footing with Christianity. We refuse to give legitimacy even to those sects that call themselves Christian but deny the unique lordship of Jesus Christ, the only true God.

Christ alone is Lord! And He is Lord indeed.

Christ is Lord exactly as the only begotten Son of God. It is He of whom the apostle writes in Romans 10:12,13: "For the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Deny that Jesus is God, and the confession of His lordship becomes a farce. If He is a mere man, why not cast off His demands and twist His precepts to serve our own purposes? But He is not a mere man. He is *God* in the flesh.

As the divine person of the Son of God, Christ is Lord over all.

He is Lord by virtue of His being Creator. John writes concerning the Son of God in the first chapter of his gospel account, verse 3, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." As the owner of that creation, He rules over all and everything in such a way that together all things serve His sovereign purpose.

But when we confess Jesus as Lord, we are confessing His lordship over *us*. We confess the lordship of the only begotten Son of God who is Jesus Christ our Savior. He not only created. But to fulfill the eternal counsel and will of God, He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell. Unfathomably deep was the suffering of Jesus! He suffered for us, for all His people — because of our sins. He suffered and died, that we might never have to bear the everlasting and infinite wrath of God. But having accomplished the purpose for which He became flesh, this Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, was raised and exalted at God's right hand. He is Lord indeed!

We must maintain that He is the only Lord. For "there is none other name under heaven given

among men, whereby we must be saved." Jehovah is Lord alone. And Jehovah reveals Himself in the face of Jesus Christ. That confession is inseparable from salvation. One who does not confess Christ as Lord is not saved.

Satan, for that very reason, would try to destroy that confession. The saints in the early church were placed before the choice of saying, "Jesus is Lord, but Caesar is also Lord," or being executed. Satan does not want an exclusive Christianity. He strives to bring about a false Christianity, anti-Christ. So the saints were told, "You may confess Jesus is Lord, so long as you confess in the same breath that Caesar is Lord." Their refusal to make that compromise meant for some of them that they were burned at the stake, for others that they were thrown to the lions, for others that they were roasted alive in boiling oil. By faith they walked the way of death, rather than deny the unique and only lordship which belongs to Christ Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. By faith they confessed the name of Jesus, that He is Lord alone, and that there is no Lord next to Him or instead of Him.

When we call Jesus Christ our Lord, we do not place Him in a class of lords, but we acknowledge Him as the sole Lord over us and over all.

Obviously, that bears great significance to our own lives. He is not a lord, alongside many other lords in our life. He is not a lord for one day of the week, or part of one day. When we confess Him as our Lord, our Lord by virtue of His death for us and exaltation at God's right hand, we are confessing that His is an unlimited lordship. We confess that which is recorded in Romans 14:8: "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."

And we must recognize that Christ is *not* Lord because *we* made

Him Lord. His lordship is not contingent or dependent upon anything we may do. He is not and does not become our Lord because we acknowledge Him as such and are willing to serve Him. We all are called to serve Him. But His lordship is not dependent on whether or not we obey that calling. He is Lord, Lord over every aspect of our life, at all times and everywhere. Do you confess Him as such — exclusive Lord over you?

This is one area where those who deny the lordship of Christ err grievously. Some certainly misunderstand, while others twist the Scriptures to their own damnation. The following are a few quotations from some who deny the truth that we confess:

— "Lordship salvation contradicts Scripture."

— "This message is accursed of God."

— "The person who preaches such a message is also accursed of God."

— "It hinders the growth of the body of Christ — this will stop the growth of the local churches."

These quotations are from a book entitled *Handbook of Personal Evangelism*, authored by Stanford, Seymore, and Streib, and referred to and criticized by Ernest C. Reisinger in his book, *Lord & Christ: The Implications of Lordship for Faith and Life*.

Those who deny the lordship of Christ are frequently dispensationalists. They are those who tear the very fabric of the Bible, making separation between Old and New Testaments and denying the unity of the church and the one gospel of grace. Dispensationalists generally have a Jewish and therefore earthly concept of the kingdom. Consequently, they deny the kingship of Christ over His church, and teach rather that He is King only over the nation of Israel, that earthly kingdom which is still precious in His sight. They err greatly.

They teach that the gospel of

grace brings complete freedom from any demands. In 1922, Lewis Chafer, a prominent dispensationalist theologian, wrote in his book *Grace: The Glorious Theme*, "The Christian's liberty to do precisely as he chooses is as limitless and perfect as any other aspect of grace."

We insist, however, that the lordship of Christ *does* press upon every aspect of our lives, bringing us into *willing* subjection. And we charge those who deny the lordship of Christ with attempting to

separate fundamental biblical truths that are meant to exist in perfect harmony with each other — truths such as law and gospel, law and grace, saving faith and good works as the fruits of that faith.

Reisinger points out — correctly, in many cases, we judge — that the father of this denial of Christ's lordship is Arminianism, the mother is dispensationalism, with the mother's sister being antinomianism, and all bringing their evil influence upon their daughter and niece. We make bold to say that those who deny the

lordship of Christ have another gospel, which therefore *is no gospel!*

Saving faith, union with Christ, brings the whole man into subjection to Him. That which we think, that which we will, how we make our decisions, and the actions that we take, all are now subject to our Lord Christ. That is true because Christ Himself brings us into willing subjection to Him. That is why I Corinthians 12:3 tells us, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." □

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Arie denHartog

Further Investigation of the Philippines as a Possible Mission Field

It was my privilege and joy, along with Pastor Richard Smit from our church in Doon, Iowa, to make another visit to the Philippines. We made this visit as representatives from the Foreign Mission Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches and in harmony with the decisions of the 1998 synod. It was another exciting and eventful visit, about which we can write only a very little in a short *Standard Bearer* article.

The FMC planned that our delegation should spend most of the time in two places: the first, a city called Cagayan De Oro, which is on the Island of Mindanao; the sec-

ond, a city called Bacolod, which is on the island of Negros. The two places are very different the one from the other.

In Cagayan De Oro we visited with a Bible Study group called "The Independent Bible Study Fellowship." This is the same group we visited with last year. The word "independent" in this name was chosen to emphasize the desire of this group to have a self-supporting work, one that is not financially dependent on a Western church, as are so many Protestant churches in the Philippines. This we considered to be commendable. Though with much struggle, with meager resources, and a very humble meeting place, this group is self-supporting in the work it is doing.

Originally we had planned to give a series of messages to this group. For various reasons which we will not go into, our plans were changed after we arrived in

Cagayan. Looking back we can see the leading of the Lord in this. Instead of the planned series of formal messages we visited in various homes of the members of this Bible Study group. We had a good opportunity to meet with and get to know the members of the group in the settings of their own homes and families. Especially in the provinces of the Philippines, one sees immediately that the standard of living is much lower there than in America. Cagayan De Oro is a city of some 600,000 inhabitants, most of whom live in what by American standards are most humble dwellings. Some of these homes do not even have running water. Water has to be laboriously hand carried every day from quite a distance away. We got firsthand experience of the great difficulties of day-to-day living in a country such as the Philippines. We were again deeply moved by the real-

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Members of the Bible Study Fellowship in Cagayan De Oro

ization of how much we in America have in comparison to other peoples of the world.

At each home that we visited we read a passage of Scripture and spoke with those in the home about spiritual things, somewhat as we do when we make family visitation calls in our home congregations in the US. We talked about the involvement of the family members in the life of the Bible Study and the various problems which they face as Christians in a culture as difficult and economically depressed as the Philippines. We observed family life and learned something about the spiritual character of the homes. We were very well received. Those we had met on our first visit last year became more dear to us as we got to know them better. The people we visited appreciated very much our readiness to come into their homes, and they spoke of the encouragement of our visits. Each visit was ended with a time of prayer.

Though it is not a formally organized church, the Bible Study Fellowship regularly holds worship services on the Lord's Day. On Sunday morning I was given the opportunity to preach in one such service. The audience was made up of about 50 people, pretty much of all ages, including families and a goodly number of young people. Pastor Smit was asked to speak at the evening meeting, which had fewer people in attendance. This

evening meeting was really more of a Bible Study than a worship service. We were not in Cagayan for the Wednesday evening Bible Study, though we had attended this meeting on our visit last year.

During the course of our six-day stay in Cagayan we had three somewhat more formal visits with the three leaders of the Bible Study Fellowship. In these visits we talked with the men about various aspects of what it would mean if the PRC would send a missionary to the Philippines to work among them. We asked them to consider whether they would be interested in such a prospect. We had three very good discussions and were left with some good impressions of the three leaders of the Bible Study Fellowship. We concluded that if the Lord should open the door for our churches to begin a mission work in the Philippines, Cagayan might be a good place for us to start, especially if the Bible Study Fellowship would desire us to come and help her to establish a Reformed church among them.

The six days spent in Cagayan enabled us also to see some of the city and experience the culture. We had opportunity to consider a little what it would be like for a family from the USA to live there, the particular hardships they would face, and the sacrifices they

would have to be prepared to make. We met with two missionaries who had been living there for some time already, and we learned some things from them that we believe will help us to guide future decisions regarding possible mission labors in the Philippines. I could easily write a lengthy article detailing all the interesting experiences we had. We hope to be able to relate some of these later in slide programs.

Our second stop was in Bacolod City. The men with whom we met in Bacolod have united in a small society which they call "Conveners of Historic Christianity." Some of the members of this group attended the conference last year in Daet. Some are pastors in various churches in Negros and surrounding islands. The Conveners are reading books and literature published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association and in our churches. These men have varying degrees of knowledge and understanding of Reformed truth. Some of them in fact can discuss Reformed doctrine on a very high plane. Our fellowship with these men in the truth of the Word of God was very encouraging and blessed. On the Lord's Day that we were on the island of Negros, both Rev. Smit and I preached in small churches some distance away from Bacolod. We had a wild taxi ride for more than an hour through the countryside and saw many interesting things along the way. The churches to which we were brought



Church in which the PR emissaries preached



Rev. denHartog and Pastor Lapiz

are led by men involved with the Conveners.

Besides the more formal meetings with the brethren in the Conveners group, we had several extended times of fellowship with them while seeing sites in the city of Bacolod. We also had fellowship times in our room at the hotel. The city of Bacolod has a population of about 400,000. As far as we could tell, this city is more prosperous, though only relatively speaking, than Cagayan. This is due in part to the sugar cane plantations in this area. From our five-day visit we gained a deeper knowledge of, and developed Christian friendship with, the brethren of the Conveners. They have a love for the truth of the gospel we call the Reformed faith, and therefore it is easy to establish a bond with them that even after a short time is hard to break when one must leave again.

We spent our last couple of days in Manila. There we visited with two men who came in contact with our churches through electronic mail and correspondence with one of our ministers. And we also met with the same young Christian man who visited with us last year. He longs for the opportunity to grow in the knowledge of the Reformed faith which he has learned in large measure through reading the *Standard Bearer* and books from the Reformed Free Publishing

Association. He is earnestly looking for a place in which he can worship in a manner consistent with his new found faith and which is not charismatic. We could only wish that already now we could do more for this young Christian and those like him.

While we were in Manila we had the pleasure of an unexpected visit of one of the pastors from Daet whom we had met last year. He traveled for ten hours on the bus just to meet us. Daet was devastated by the two typhoons that struck the Philippines during the very weeks we were visiting. Many of the members of the churches in Daet suffered great losses, though none were injured or lost their lives. The pastor from Daet again expressed his great interest in growing and developing in the knowledge of the Reformed faith. He continues to be very interested in exploring the possibilities of our churches helping him in his own personal development, and helping those also whom the Lord has brought under his instruction and care.

We had time in Manila to visit the Immigration Office to get some preliminary information regarding the possibility of obtaining the right for a missionary family from the PRC to enter the Philippines should one be sent to work there.



Rev. denHartog visiting with members of the BSF



Rice drying on the road

The two and a half weeks of our visit left us again overwhelmed with the many experiences we had. We realize that our visits were short and very limited in scope. It would not be wise to draw too many conclusions from these visits. One cannot learn a situation in a significant way in such a short time. We therefore cannot at this point lay out the way we should proceed. We also wait to hear about the lasting effects of our visits on the people with whom we met. Our prayer is that the Lord will give us direction on how to move ahead toward the possible goal of a mission field. Perhaps this will come in the form of a specific request from one of the groups with whom we met—a kind of "Macedonian call."

Without making premature judgments we can make at least a few observations. The Lord has His saints in the Philippines who have the beginnings of love for the Reformed gospel, and some more than the beginnings. The Philippines is not a heathen country. It is in fact devoutly Roman Catholic. The work of missions in the Philippines therefore involves largely the calling of God's people out of the darkness of Roman Catholicism. In modern day Protestantism such work would be viewed as unnecessary and even wrong. It is being said that Protestants ought not proselyte Roman Catholics, but

recognize them rather as brothers in Christ who are not in need of any conversion to the Protestant faith. We believe that mission work among Roman Catholics even today is true mission work and work that carries on the purpose of the Reformation.

The church situation among the Protestants in the Philippines is much like it is in so many other countries. There are major ecumenical efforts to bring all Protestants together in a liberal and apostate denomination. The charismatic movement has had a broad influence in the Philippines. There is a very great need for a Reformed work and a Reformed church founded on the glorious doctrine which the Lord in His mercy has preserved in our churches here in America. There are groups of Christians in the Philippines who desire such a work. It is our prayer that the Lord in His providence might use us for this work.

The work, we believe, should involve establishing churches that are truly Reformed in doctrine, worship, and Christian living. Such a work will involve tremendous challenges. There will be opposition to it from various sources even from other Protestants. There will be difficulties. We heard comments from some connected with Reformed churches in the Philippines that it is impossible to have worship services in the Philippines that are not charismatic in character. Only this type of worship service appeals to the emotional character of the people of the Philippines. Others told us that Reformed doctrine does not fit in the Philippines. We believe that the Reformed faith, which is the gospel, is culturally transcending and applicable to people of all nations.

Should the Lord use us to establish a Reformed church in the Philippines, our desire and objec-

tive would of course ultimately be to witness more broadly in the community in which we labor, in order to help a newly established Reformed church to gather others whom the Lord might by His grace and Holy Spirit bring to the knowledge and love of the truth of His Word. If we could begin a work by establishing a Reformed congregation in one area by the grace of God, we could also better help the other groups with whom in the Lord's providence we have come in contact and whom we have known for a number of years. These various groups are actually quite far distant from each other. And distance is complicated by the fact that the groups are on different islands of the Philippines.

Let us pray to the Lord earnestly for His guidance. May He use us to strengthen those who already love His Word, and to gather those whom He has ordained to eternal salvation. □

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ Preservation of Saints—and Sin

Was Clinton's *religion* at fault for his sexual escapades?

One is constantly amazed at the attempts of many to place the blame of Clinton's problems on someone or something else. Now an article, appearing in *Newsweek*, November 2, 1998, seems to place the blame for his sins on his Baptist views—especially on what we call the "preservation of saints" or "eternal security." The article states, among other things, this:

But Clinton's troubled personal life—and his repeated verbal evasions—also bears a distinctive Baptist stamp. Like most Baptists, Clinton was taught that because

he had been born again, his salvation is ensured. Sinning—even repeatedly—would not bar his soul from heaven. "There's no way you can get right with God by doing good," explains the Rev. James Dunn, an FOB and head of the liberal Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. "We do good, not in order to be saved, but because we have been saved."

Clinton was "born again," according to the article, when he was seven. It would appear that the doctrine of "preservation of saints" was at fault for his behavior since it makes Clinton convinced that whatever he may do, his salvation is now guaranteed. It is similar to the old error condemned in Romans 6: "Let us sin that grace may abound." But let none mistake the truth of the matter. Sin is not the result of the truth of preservation of the saints. Rather this truth leads to this: "We do good ... be-

cause we have been saved." It is never: "We have been saved and therefore we do as we please." But, as usual, it is the church and its doctrines of grace which receive the blame for the "evil which we would not."

■ Is Marriage Optional?

The same issue of *Newsweek* presents a rather troubling portrayal of marriage in the 21st century. The estimate of the writer is that 10% of the population will never marry. The writer states:

Getting married used to be a prerequisite for the most important decisions of life.... Today it's common for unmarried couples to move in together, pick out china, buy a dog—even conceive a child—without bothering with the legalities. The rules of courtship and mating are changing steadily as the century nears its close, and by 2025, when the children of the

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millennium begin to settle down, the venerable institution of marriage may be more flexible and less mandatory than ever. Although Americans still overwhelmingly prefer marriage to being single, cohabitation is on the rise: more than 4 million heterosexual couples now live together, up from about 2 million in 1978. Divorce, of course, is still very easy to obtain despite a growing movement to make it tougher. As a result, sociologists now estimate that the percentage of Americans who never marry will grow, from 5 percent to about 10 percent of the population, in years ahead.

The social forces behind these shifts run deep and will last well beyond 2000. The most obvious is the advent of broader career opportunities for women. In the 1950s, says Andrew Cherlin of Johns Hopkins University, "every breadwinner needed a homemaker—they had a need for each other, and that kept most marriages together. Today it's easier for either spouse to walk away if they're unhappy. It isn't that marriage isn't taken seriously today, but it's less necessary." Cohabitation is on the increase because the social taboos against it have weakened....

It is a sad commentary on our society. It is a sad commentary also on churches which now accept divorce and remarriage—and even condone this co-habitation. Few care anymore that all of this is violation of the seventh commandment—the ten commands have long ago been removed from most walls of buildings and from the hearts of mankind. Morality is regulated only by "social taboos."

The article even recognizes part of the problem: "broader career opportunities for the women." The family disintegrates. Children grow up without supervision of parents. That basic institution of society, marriage, is rapidly crumbling. The consequences are already seen on every hand. It is truly one of the obvious signs of the times. How much has all of

this also affected the churches—and our churches?

■ More Signs of the Times

A careful observer is struck by the number of things occurring in the realm of God's creation. The scientists seem to have an explanation for it all—and even warn of increasingly devastating disasters which will surely fall upon this earth. Reading just one issue of the *Denver Post* recently (Nov. 10, 1998), one notes the report of at least two terrible disasters affecting large populations. The first was in Bangladesh, a country often affected by cyclones. This low-lying country is quickly flooded by the heavy rainfalls. And now another awful event is reported:

Bangladesh is in the midst of what some experts say could be the biggest mass poisoning in history. Dangerous levels of arsenic have been found in the groundwater, entering millions of people sip by sip as they drink from a vast system of tube wells. Most of these hand-operated pumps are 10 to 20 years old, which is about how long it takes the arsenic to do its lethal work, killing with one of several cancers.

The unfolding crisis is the unintended consequence of a colossal successful safe-water program. For 25 years, the government along with UNICEF and other aid groups has weaned villagers from disease-carrying pond water and helped them to sink pipes into underground aquifers. The naturally occurring arsenic that tainted these subterranean sources was overlooked.

The same paper reported on some of the misery in Honduras and neighboring countries. Honduras had about 10,000 to 20,000 people killed (no one will ever know for sure how many there were), and the country was virtually destroyed when Hurricane Mitch hit.

Overwhelmed by disaster, grim-

aced Central American leaders gathered Monday to appeal for more aid in recovering from Hurricane Mitch even as a growing army of rescue workers struggled to help hundreds of thousands of victims.

Honduran President Carlos Flores Facusse called his country's \$4.2 billion debt "unpayable" after one of the worst natural disasters of this century in the Americas.

"In 72 hours, we lost what we had built, little by little, in 50 years," he told a news conference following the summit....

One reads with increasing frequency of "natural disasters" which are the "worst of the century" or the "worst in recorded history." Our own country has been hit very hard over the past 10 to 20 years with disasters of major proportions. One wonders what lies still ahead? Surely the book of Revelation speaks to these disasters. Are not all of these things evidence of the fulfillment of the running of the last three of the four horses? And the increase reminds that the trumpets of Revelation are now sounding—for there is the prophesied increase of these troubles which fall upon the earth. Millions are being killed in warfare. Millions are killed by diseases. And, so we are told, more than a million people have died in this century through "natural" disasters. Surely our Lord's return must be near at hand!

■ Quest for Faith

Again, from the *Denver Post*, November 7, 1998, is an article which briefly treats of religious trends for the 21st century. The article reviews a book, "Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium," co-authored by Don Lattin and Richard Cimino. The article stated:

But they try to identify trends. Lattin has been religion editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle* for 15

years, and Cimino is editor of *Religion Watch*, a New York City organization that monitors religion trends.

Lattin said they didn't poll current religious feelings, but summarized polls done recently. Some of those polls show: Seven of 10 Americans believe one can be religious without going to church; 40 percent said a person doesn't have to believe in God to experience the sacred and 99 percent of family physicians think faith helps patients respond to treatment.

Other polls show that 56 percent of Americans pray, chant or play meditation tapes on the job to relieve stress. Thirty years ago, one of 25 Americans left their denominational heritage. Now the number is one of every two or three Americans.

"Americans have a practical faith," Lattin said. "They want a payback. Religion becomes stress reduction, rather than salvation. People want to know how to 'do' religion."

Experiential, rather than cere-

bral, belief is growing, he said. For example, many can find a religious experience in channeling or Pentecostal worship....

One is reminded of Christ's warning, "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not" (Matt. 24:23-26).

Some strange things go on today. One can experience the "sacred" without believing in God?? And 70% of Americans can be religious without going to church?? The earthly manifestation of the body of Christ is considered immaterial and unnecessary?? The dif-

ficulty is that many today place themselves above the body of Christ manifest on this earth. These separate themselves from the communion of saints (for it seems they are the only "saints" remaining on the earth). They separate themselves from the preaching of the Word and the sacraments (for no church can possibly do it the way these insist it must be done). These sin grievously against Scripture which is addressed to the church, and which speaks of that church as the very "body of Christ."

And how true it is that today "religion becomes stress reduction, rather than salvation." Religion is no more a worship of God, but "people want to know how to 'do' religion." Religion has become a "touchy-feely" activity, and God and His Son Jesus Christ have no part in it. One senses the rise of the antichristian spirit and the imminent appearance of the Antichrist. □

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Doug Kuiper

The Relationship of the Diaconate to the Other Special Offices

Of the three special offices in the church of Jesus Christ (those of pastor, elder, and deacon), that of deacon seems to receive the least attention. One man, writing on the subject of the diaconate, says that throughout the history of the church this office "has not found the recognition and

appreciation to which it is entitled. It has been either totally discarded or else corrupted, because its true character was lost sight of."¹ In some denominations the office does not exist. In others, although the office exists, its character and the work assigned to it are not in accord with Scripture's requirements for the office. Even in Reformed churches, in which the office exists and in which sincere effort is made to see that the deacons carry out their work in accordance with Scripture, the very real danger is

that the office is denigrated either in practice or in thinking. In practice, perhaps the council of the church denigrates the office by expecting the deacons to focus more on the general finances of the church than on the work of distributing alms and caring for those in need. Also in practice, perhaps the people of the church denigrate the office by being reluctant to avail themselves of the mercies of Christ which the deacons administer. In thinking, perhaps the people of the church denigrate the office by

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viewing the diaconate as inferior to the eldership, and by thinking that a good deacon "graduates" to become an elder as he grows older.

We ought not — we *must* not — denigrate the office in such a way. The office of deacon is an important office in the church of Jesus Christ. It must be held in high esteem, and must be regulated according to the Word of God. The deacons must be faithful in doing the work which pertains particularly to their office. The people must be faithful in supporting the deacons with their alms, and in calling upon the deacons when legitimate needs require it. The office must not be viewed as being subordinate to, but on a par with, that of elder and pastor.

With this article we begin an examination of the office of deacon, with the goal that we as Reformed believers give the office the high place which God's Word gives it.

As an introduction to this study, this article will compare and contrast the office of deacon to the offices of elder and pastor.



In the first place we must stress that both Scripture and the Reformed churches officially teach the parity, or equality, of the office of deacon with that of pastor and elder.

It is a fact that Scripture neither refers to the office of deacon nor uses the word "deacon" as often as it refers to the other special offices or uses the word "pastor" or "elder" (or "bishop"). In fact, the word "deacon" occurs only five times in our King James Version. Four of these five instances are in I Timothy 3:8-13, which lists the qualifications which God requires of a deacon. The other instance is in Philippians 1:1, in which Paul addresses the saints at Philippi "with the bishops and deacons." Scripture explicitly refers to the office one other time, although the

word "deacon" is not used. Acts 6:1-6 records the institution of the office in the New Testament church. Other passages of Scripture imply the office of deacon by referring to the saints' duty to give for the relief of the poor, but nowhere else is explicit reference made to the office of deacon.

Nevertheless, the Word of God does set the office of deacon on a par with that of elder. In both I Timothy 3:8-13 and Philippians 1:1 the office of deacon is mentioned in connection with that of elder (bishop). Many of the qualifications for the offices of deacon and elder are the same (I Tim. 3). That Paul's letter to the Philippians is addressed to the saints with the bishops *and deacons* indicates the equality of these two offices, and implies that both offices are essential for the organized congregation of saints in the new dispensation.

That the Reformed churches officially teach the parity of this office and the other offices is evident from several documents. First, one of our major creeds, the Belgic Confession, makes this clear. In Article 30 the diaconate is specifically mentioned in connection with the other two offices as being necessary for the proper government of the church. We read that, in addition to the elders and pastors, also the deacons "form the council of the church." Article 31 explains that deacons, as well as ministers and elders, must be put into office only after an election by the church, no man may take the office of deacon to himself.

Second, although the Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons does not explicitly state the fact of the equality of the offices of elder and deacon, it assumes this equality, inasmuch as the same form is used for both offices.

Third, the church order of the Reformed churches makes this parity of office clear. Article 2 teaches that the diaconate is, in fact, one of the special offices in the Reformed churches. Articles 16, 17,

and 27 mention "elders and deacons" in one breath, showing the equality of the two offices.

This being the official teaching of Reformed churches and the teaching of Scripture, we are obliged to view and treat the diaconate as being equal to the other special offices.



This parity is due to two basic similarities between the office of deacon and the offices of pastor and elder.

The first similarity is that all offices are fundamentally positions of service to God in the church. Herman Hoeksema defined an office as "the position in which man is authorized and qualified to function in the name of God and in behalf of God's covenant and kingdom, to serve Him and to rule under Him."² This is true fundamentally of the office of Mediator which Jesus Christ holds. Secondly it is true of the offices of elder, deacon, and pastor in the church to which Jesus Christ calls men.

That the office of deacon is a position of service is clear from the word "deacon" itself, which in the Greek means "servant." Though the word "deacon" is found only five times in the KJV, the Greek noun *diakonos*, from which the word "deacon" comes, is translated "minister" twenty times in the KJV, and "servant" seven times.

Not only the diaconate, however, but also the other offices are positions of service. That the apostles viewed their office as such is clear from the record of the institution of the diaconate in the New Testament church. We read that the apostles resolved to give

¹ William Heyns, *Handbook for Elders and Deacons*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1928), page 285).

² Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), page 363.

themselves "continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). In this verse the word "ministry" is the translation of a Greek noun with the same root as *diakonos*, that is, service. This basic similarity among the offices requires of us that we consider the offices to be equal.

The second similarity is that in every special office, that of deacon included, the exalted Jesus Christ continues to function as Mediator of His church. Therefore each officebearer, whether minister, elder, or deacon, is the personal representative of Jesus Christ to the people.

The one Mediatorial office of Jesus Christ is threefold: He is Prophet, Priest, and King. He has exercised these three aspects of His one office throughout history, from the beginning of the church's existence in the Garden of Eden until now. In the Old Testament He did so through the prophets, priests, and kings in Israel whom God raised up to their respective duties. While on earth He did so by His teachings, miracles, and death on the cross. During the New Testament He continues to do so through His Spirit working in the hearts of all believers, and especially through the work of His Spirit in the hearts of men whom He calls to the special offices.

Because Jesus Christ continues to work in His church through each of the offices, those offices are equal. The saints of the church must remember that the deacons are as much representatives of Christ to them, for their salvation, as are elders and pastors.



There are, however, important distinctions between the office of deacon and that of elder and pastor.

In the first place, through the office of deacon Christ carries out especially the *priestly* aspect of His Mediatorial office, while through the offices of elder and pastor

Christ carries out the kingly and prophetic aspects of His office, respectively.

As our only High Priest, Christ did or does especially three things: first, He offered Himself as the only and complete sacrifice for the sins of God's people; second, He intercedes for God's people; and third, He blesses God's people. By each of these three tasks God, in Christ, shows Himself merciful to His people. He sees the depth of our misery and our inability to escape that misery of ourselves, and, moved with compassion, lifts us up from the depths of our misery to the heights of joy and blessedness. Because sin is the source and cause of our misery, Christ's one sacrifice on the cross took away in principle the guilt and corruption of our sin, and His blessing which He continually bestows on us through His Spirit consists of the progressive realization in us of the forgiveness of our sins and the new life of Christ.

The deacon carries out the priestly work of Christ in the church. He does so not in the way of adding to Christ's atoning work. We know that Christ's self-sacrifice for our sins was performed once and completely. To attempt to add to this work of Christ is to deny the sufficiency of His death on the cross, and to deny that He is the only Mediator. In no sense, therefore, does Christ continue to carry out His atoning work through the office of deacon. Nor, of course, is the deacon able to intercede for us at God's right hand, or efficaciously to bestow upon us the spiritual blessings of salvation which Christ gives through His Spirit.

However, there remains a correlation between Christ's atoning work and the work of the deacons: the deacons, on behalf of the church, must show mercy to those in need. To this correlation Paul refers in II Corinthians 8:1ff. In verse 8 we are told that Jesus Christ, who was rich, became poor through His incarnation and death

on the cross, that we might be rich through His poverty. This doctrine serves as the basis for the commands of verses 7, 10, and 11 to the Corinthian saints to give of their goods for the relief of the poor. Although Paul does not explicitly mention the involvement of the deacons in this collection of alms, their work is implied. They must gather the alms, and distribute them or see that they are distributed. By doing this work, the deacons manifest the mercy of Christ to His people. As Christ took pity on us who are spiritually poor by nature, so the deacons must take pity on those who have needs of the body, and perhaps of the spirit. And as Christ gave of Himself for the salvation of those who are poor by nature, so the deacons must work for the good of those who are needy.

Having understood this, we can see the second distinction between the office of deacon and the other offices: the work of the deacons, specifically, is that of serving tables, that is, being sure that the poor of the church are cared for. It is that work which the apostles realized they were doing, at the expense of the ministry of the Word of God and prayer (Acts 6:4). To this work the first deacons were appointed. The deacons must care for the physical needs of the members of the congregation, and for their corresponding and related spiritual needs. This makes them distinct from the other offices. Pastors must busy themselves with teaching, and elders with ruling. Both pastor and elders *serve* in this regard — they serve God who appointed them to their office, and they serve the people. But this service is related more to the people's souls than to their bodies. The deacons, on the other hand, care for the physical needs, not to the exclusion of any spiritual needs of the people, but rather with those spiritual needs which arise directly from their physical needs.



We see, then, that the office of deacon is a necessary office in the church, in its own right. The church always has her poor, and thus always has the duty of caring for her poor. This she does through the office of deacon. And in doing

so, Christ exercises His priestly office in her midst, blessing her poor and needy, and blessing the whole congregation in their giving for the needs of the poor.

The necessity of having this office in the church demands that we honor it. Its distinction from the

other offices demands that we ascribe to deacons the work which God gives them, and encourage them in this work. Its parity with the other offices demands that we not denigrate it in our midst.

Let us seek to do these things! □

That They May Teach Them to Their Children

Prof. Russell Dykstra

The Great Value of Reformed, Christian Education (1)*

The great value of Reformed, Christian education is a topic that deserves attention.

There is little appreciation in the society at large for Reformed, Christian education. There may be, here and there, a desire to have something generally Christian—a school that opens with prayer, teaches morals, has somewhat biblically based discipline. But *Reformed*, Christian education is not desired.

Secondly, there is little knowledge of what Reformed, Christian education *is*! What makes Christian education to be *Reformed*? Even less understanding exists of the *basis* of this education and the *motives* for providing it.

Thirdly, the large and growing home-schooling movement poses a threat to the Christian school in locations where the school, due to its small size, struggles to maintain itself.

Finally, there is always the nagging voice of the flesh whispering, “This is not worth it.” The pressure of finances may give it voice. As tuition costs rise or income dips, the flesh wonders, “Is it worth all this money?” When hours upon hours are poured into the Christian education: the arduous labor of establishing and maintaining the schools and the work of teaching day after day, long hours; when troubles brew and long meetings become the rule; when tension arises among very friends—the flesh cries out, “This is not worth the grief!”

In the face of all this, it is good for us to be reminded of the great value of Reformed, Christian education.

What is Reformed, Christian education? Please note that the terms Reformed education and Christian education will be used interchangeably.

The term *Reformed*, historically, takes us into the camp of Luther and the great sixteenth century Reformation when God reformed His church by calling a remnant out of the apostate Roman Catholic Church and reestablishing His church on the basis of the Bible. *Reformed* brings to mind Geneva

and John Calvin, the man used by God to complete the Reformation. It takes us into the Netherlands where Calvinism flourished and developed in a unique way with a particular emphasis on the covenant.

Reformed *doctrine* is set forth in the three creeds: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordrecht.

Reformed is always *biblical* because to be Reformed is to be always reforming, that is, always going back to God’s Word in confession and walk. Since it is inherently biblical, Reformed education is also Christian education.

The term *Christian* has to do with Christ. Christian education has Christ at its center. Christ is the core of its instruction. He is the focal point of all Christian instruction. All Christian instruction somehow points to Him who is the Word, the revelation of God.

Christian *education* is, first of all, the work of teaching, of giving knowledge about God and His creation. Proper Christian education is more than that. It is *rearing* the covenant child. It is the work of molding character, developing attitudes, establishing biblical thinking patterns, right goals, and godly

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living in the hearts, minds, and lives of covenant children. And one thing more education is, namely, the passing down of knowledge from believing parents to their children.

By definition, then, Reformed, Christian education is *covenantal*. To understand this we need to distinguish it from other forms of education. First, we distinguish it from home schooling, where a mother or father or both seek to teach their children. It is not my intent to set up the Christian school *against* home schooling. Nor am I suggesting that home schooling cannot be Reformed. In a covenant home, such instruction obviously has a covenantal aspect to it. Still, a Christian school is something different because it involves many children from many covenant homes. Reformed, Christian education has historically been concerned, not merely with the children of one covenant home, but with the children of all the covenant homes in a given locale.

We must differentiate between Reformed, Christian education and state or public education. The government establishes schools to serve the state. These schools are agents for accomplishing the state's goals, to inculcate the state's thinking and morals and to give the prescribed knowledge approved by the state. This in spite of the fact that the Bible demands that parents, not the government, train their children.

There was a day when parents to a large degree ran the public schools. Teachers were accountable to parents and local school boards who represented the parents. But this is emphatically no longer the case. *In loco parentis*, the teacher standing in the place of the parents, is dead in the public school system. Christian schools are not state schools, and state schools are not Christian.

We must distinguish Reformed, Christian education from parochial schools. Parochial schools are

church-run. Such schools are established and governed by a church and funded by the church budget (not free-will offerings). Their purpose is to indoctrinate the children with the particular doctrines of the church. The Roman Catholic schools are the most notable example of parochial schools.

Christian schools are not parochial. In fact, Christian education is not the calling of the church as church. Christ commanded His church to be occupied with three things in particular: preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, and exercising Christian discipline. Christian schools must be parental, not parochial.

Finally, we distinguish Christian schools from private schools. Christian schools are not private academies established for one or another reason—perhaps to avoid the vices found in the public schools, or to get a “better” education. Christian schools are parental, not private.

A Christian school is a covenantal school, a parental school. It is set up by believing parents to fulfill the demands of the covenant, vows made at baptism. Its purpose is broader and deeper than merely imparting knowledge. It is the rearing of the child that concerns Christian education. Christian education is rearing the covenant child in the fear of the Lord, in order to bring him to maturity and equip him to serve God, and enable him to live as a friend-servant of God in the midst of the earth.

Thus: Reformed, Christian education must consciously be *based on the covenant*.

The covenant is the relationship of friendship that God sovereignly establishes with His people in Christ. God establishes this covenant with believers and their seed in the line of continued generations (Gen. 17:7). Within the sphere of the covenant, God ordinarily regenerates His elect as children. Thus parents are able to give instruction to their children, and that instruc-

tion does not fall on dead, stony hearts, but on regenerated hearts changed by the Spirit.

How do believing parents deal with their children? Because of the promise of God to establish His covenant with believers and their seed, believing parents deal with their children as covenant children. Though the parents know and believe that the lines of election and reprobation cut through families of believers, they view their children organically. In the same way, Paul addressed the church of Philippi: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi.” Again, as he wrote to the church in Ephesus: “To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1). Paul knew that not everyone in the churches of Ephesus and Philippi were believers. Why then address them thus? He did so because he viewed the group organically, as one, as the church of Jesus Christ.

In the same way parents view their children as covenant children, even though it may well be that God has not established His covenant with every child.

Parents have an obligation to raise their children as covenant children. They must teach their children about God and His works. Parents are to teach their children to love God, to fear and obey Him. Children must learn to live as covenant friends of the living God in the world.

Scripture is plain in this regard. The believing parent is commanded, Teach the words of God “diligently unto thy children, and...talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut. 6:7). Fathers are admonished to bring their children “up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Children are exhorted, “Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding” (Prov. 4:1).

Most parents find themselves unable adequately to carry out their calling. There are several reasons for this. First, father is gone, not home with the children on the farm as in days gone by. That means the whole burden of instructing the children falls on the mother. If she is to be faithful to her calling, she cannot do all her labors *and* give all the instruction to the children. Perhaps she can "make do" just as a mother who works outside the home can "make do" taking care of the material needs of the family. However, the great danger is that spiritual nurturing will suffer because the mother does not have the time to do the work of a wife, mother, and teacher *and* prepare herself spiritually for this high and arduous calling. Thus the father must share in this work if children are home schooled, and that not merely after he returns from his work.

Secondly, the technical nature of the knowledge has advanced to

the point that most parents find themselves unequal to the task. Children must be able to use the knowledge gained by man and the technology developed. They must both be taught the facts *and* have all the knowledge put into a biblical perspective. This kind of teaching takes training and study, hours upon hours of preparation. Few parents have this opportunity.

These factors have led Christian parents to establish Christian schools to fulfill their covenantal obligations.

The Christian school is, therefore, an extension of the Christian home. It is not the arm of the church. The church uses catechism and preaching to teach the lambs of the flock. By these means the children are taught the doctrines of the Reformed faith.

Nor may the school be merely an arm of the state, to make them literate, able to function as citizens or merely productive members of society.

The Christian school is an extension of the home because parents band together to form school societies. Societies elect boards. School boards set the policies of the school and hire teachers. Teachers then stand in the place of the parent (*in loco parentis*). They are to teach the children as the parents would if they could.

What a beautiful gift the Christian school is to covenant parents! It is a means given to parents to help them fulfill their covenant obligations to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord. The school is not an adversary to the home, nor the home to the school. Rather, the school helps the parents.

What is the nature of the instruction in the Christian school that properly rears covenant children? To this we turn our attention next time by examining the distinctive characteristics of the instruction in the Reformed, Christian school. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

The Secret of the Lord's Prayer

(John 17)

Many secrets! Jesus has been whispering these to His disciples on this night before His death—secrets recorded in John 14-16. Secrets, these are, of God to men, of Grace to graced, of Love to lovers, of Friend to friends. These are secrets of the covenant, of that blessed relationship "God with us."

What secrets? Secret of God with us in Jesus. Secret of heaven. Secret of the Savior's love. Secret Spirit. Secret of the fruit of the Vine. Secret of tribulation. Secret of the peace Jesus leaves.

Secrets which the covenant God will have *with* and *in* those that fear Him (Ps. 25:14). Secrets which the Mediator of the covenant will, therefore, speak *into* the heart of his confidants. Secrets which will be for secret knowledge which is *eternal* life (John 17:3), and for *living*.

Secrets! Jesus' fare-you-well! Secrets for the life of full joy (15:11), the life of faith (16:1), the life of peace in Him (16:33)....

Did you hear them—those secrets? Have they across the ages and from heaven to earth now by Christ's Spirit been whispered...to you? Sweet *everything*s, these whispers! Sweet salvation. You just *must* hear them! They are your life! How do you fare? Well?

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Now another secret. The John 17 secret. A secret, a communion shared not first of all between Jesus and the disciples, but between Son and Father divine. For, His last discourse to His disciples now ended, Jesus turns to His heavenly Father in prayer.

The Lord's Prayer! Look! Listen! Jesus is praying: "*My Father which art in heaven...*" Here a secret revealed to us, to be sure. But certainly also a sanctuary into which we cannot go. For in this Lord's high priestly prayer are these secrets:

Secret of our Lord's humiliation: the sovereign Lord of glory—what need has He? How possible that He bow, that He ask, that He be *outside* the eternal glory praying that once again that glory be restored?

Secret of our Lord's exaltation: the future glory He shall once again have, what will it be like for Him? Does Jesus taste this exaltation, even now (as He prays: "*and now, O Father, glorify thou me...*" 17:5; cf. 16:33b)?

Secret of predestination and *particularity*: why is the Christ Mediator and pray-er only of some, and not of the world (17:9)? Why is He priest of *us*—whose natural sanctuary is the world, who so easily and readily make abundant offerings to self?

Secret of church: she is preserved! How, in *this present evil age*? She is one! How, as the Father and Son are one (17:21)?

Secret of Christ's work, Christ's praying in the sanctuary of heaven: for will He not pray similarly, until the kingdom come, also in the glory and in the bosom of the Father?

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Searcher of the Scriptures! How do we dare *look* into this sanctuary of Jesus? Let us follow the lead of one Marcus Rainsford who wrote his thoughts on John 17:

"The Lord Jesus Christ in

prayer! What a wonderful theme for study and contemplation! Prayer was the messenger He was wont to send on all His errands, and in this He is an example to us. By prayer He held His constant intercourse with heaven; and we have no better way of doing so. Prayer was the arrow of Christ's deliverance, and the shield of His help...."

To the disciples Jesus "had opened His whole heart to them. He now opens it for them to Him before whom 'all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom

no secrets are hid'; and having poured out His soul into the ear, and into the bosom of God, He went forth into Gethsemane. May God the Spirit be with us and give unction and understanding to our hearts, while we meditate on His most precious prayer."

Let us follow the lead of the Spirit who wrote John 17 itself. Into the secrets of the Lord's Prayer. That there may be disciples oft earnestly praying...in the secret love communion of the covenant of grace. You?

For Study, Mediation, & Discussion

1. Jesus' prayer for His glorification (vv. 1-5).

For what is the Son asking when He prays that the Father may glorify Him? Is this too much for Him to ask? Is it a glory equal to the Father's? Search these verses and others for proof. What do the creeds say about this (cf. the Athanasian Creed and the Creed of Chalcedon)?

The Son is glorified, and so is the Father, in the glorification of the church. What, according to John 17:3, is the glory of the church? What does this teach is the relation between eternal life and knowledge? How can we grow in this knowledge, and, therefore, in this eternal life?

2. Jesus' prayer for His eleven disciples (vv. 6-19).

What, according to verses 6-8 (cf. also vv. 25, 26), has Jesus manifested to the disciples? What is the fruit of this revelation?

Some like to say that Jesus is the Savior of all men, or that He at least wants to be. How does v.9 refute such notions?

Jesus describes the disciples as those who are "given" to Him of the Father (cf. vv. 2, 6, 9, 24). When were the disciples given to Jesus?

How were they given to the Son?

How is Jesus glorified in the disciples (v. 10)? How is He glorified in us today?

Jesus kept eleven of the disciples. But one who was with the eleven was lost, even Judas. What does Jesus mean by calling Judas the "son of perdition" (v. 12)? Does Judas' falling away mean that there is a possibility of any of God's people falling away? Explain this in light of Scripture's teaching of the nature of the work of God, and the preservation of the saints. Explain this in light of Jesus' *prayer* to the Holy Father to keep all those given Him (v. 11).

Jesus utters "these things" of His prayer, and of His last discourse to the disciples, that the joy of Jesus might be fulfilled in the disciples (v. 13). How will this joy so occur through the things Jesus says? Are Jesus' words *your* joy? Are they more significant in your life than the things which make for sorrow and which would work despair?

The Savior will go to the Father. The disciples will be left in the world. They are not left in a monastery, or on a desert island, or in a cave on the side of a mountain. They are truly *in* the world,

and *supposed to be* in the world, rubbing shoulders with it. Yet they are not of the world, and *are not to be* of the world. What does this mean—in the world, yet not of the world? How can we err on either end—world flight or worldliness? What is the world's reaction to the disciples in the world? Why does Jesus keep the disciples in the world (vv. 14-16)?

The eleven disciples are *sent* into the world, even as the Son was sent into the world (v. 18). The word "sent" implies "commission" and "calling." The eleven disciples (apostles or "officially sent ones") were officially charged with a great God to represent and great work to do! Just what was their charge and work? What is ours?

What, according to verse 19, is the relationship between Jesus' own sanctification and His people's sanctification?

What, according to verses 17, 19 is the relationship between sanctification and truth? What are some practical implications of this relationship?

3. Jesus prays for the disciples who will in the future believe (vv. 20-26).

Jesus prays that the church may be one. A glorious one, to be sure! A oneness like unto the unity of Father and Son! A oneness of glory! Reflect on these things of the unity of the church revealed in verses 21-24.

Not long ago in Lacombe, Alberta where I was minister, there was an ecumenical service held at the local CRC. An Anglican minister preached on John 17:21a: "That they all may be one." Other local ministers were involved in the service. And I believe a Roman Catholic priest presided. Is this the kind of oneness of which the Bible

speaks, and for which Jesus prays? How do we promote true unity: at home, in our local church, in the denomination, and inter-denominationally? Is there any way we can join with the world—say, to promote the right to life of the unborn?

4. Perspective: John 20:31.

This Lord's Prayer!

These things written, this prayer recorded, that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God...and have life through His name!

What of the Christ-Priest, Prophet, King do we learn in this prayer of our Lord?

What do we learn there is more to learn of?

Holy ground.

Believe!

Live!

Let us pray.

Amen. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

Two members of the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL are currently working on a recording of the entire Psalter. The tunes will be played in order, with up to four stanzas repeated and with an introduction and short ending (piano or organ only). This large project was undertaken for the assistance of one of our missionaries. The recording would consist of approximately 15 CDs and would be available on CD only. The purpose of the recording is for accompaniment with singing as it is done in the worship service. With CD it is possible to go directly to the song desired without fast forward or reverse.

For planning purposes, those two members of Bethel would like to know if others, besides the mis-

sionary for whom it is being prepared, are interested in such a set of CDs. Anyone interested (families, teachers, schools, shut-ins, missionaries, etc.) are asked to contact Deborah A. Benson, Box 5173, Elgin, IL 60123 or 847-464-5012 or dbenson@dis.net. It is not expected that this project will be completed until mid 1999.

From Bethel we also learn that their deacons recently sent a gift from their Benevolent Fund to help a group of Reformed believers in Souenyfalva, Romania, where some 60 families experienced devastating floods this past summer. The money will be used to repair their homes and to buy food through the winter, as many of their gardens and fields were destroyed.

In church building news from Bethel, we learn from their most recent bulletin that their heating system is being installed, their parking lot has been paved, and the siding for the building was about ready to go on.

Progress also continues on the new church home of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. All the cement floors have now been poured, and the bricklayers continue to make good progress. Trusses for the fellowship hall and south wing have been delivered. They did, however, experience a setback on November 10, when very high winds collapsed a large wall behind the platform area. It is being replaced and should be completed long before you read this.

The council of the South Holland, IL PRC recently approved sending letters to all the members of their congregation to determine whether there is sufficient interest to start another congregation in the northwest Indiana area.

Young People's Activities

From information I was able to obtain, approximately 70 young adults met for a Post High Retreat on November 13 and 14 in Benton

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

Harbor, MI. Benton Harbor is located about halfway between Chicago, IL and Grand Rapids, MI, so young adults from many west Michigan churches, as well as our three churches in the Chicago area and even Randolph, WI, were able to attend. Bible discussion centered on the Christian's Attitude Toward Environmentalism.

Not to be outdone, the young people from First PRC in Holland, MI, Grace PRC in Standale, MI, and Kalamazoo, MI PRC planned a retreat at Pine Trail Camp in Saugatuck, MI for the same weekend. Discussion was on "Stewardship of Money."

The Young People's Society of the First PRC in Holland, MI hosted a Y.P. Mass Meeting on Sunday, November 15. Rev. C. Terpstra, First's pastor, spoke on "A Holy Thanksgiving."

The Young People's Society of the First PRC in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada recently sponsored a supper for their congregation on October 31. This was followed by a time of singing songs of the Reformation and good fellowship together.

School Activities

In late September, the bulletin of the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL encouraged those who were interested in the subject of Christian education and would like to work toward the goal of a Christian school in their area to meet and discuss Chapter 1 of Prof. D. Engelsma's book, "Reformed Education." Mr. Lamm Lubbers, principal of South Holland Protestant Reformed Christian School, led the discussion.

The PTA of the Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN met in

early October to hear Rev. D. Kleyn, pastor at Edgerton, speak. Also of interest to many that night was the auctioning off of an antique piano stool that was in the school, as well as some old style desks which were taken out of storage for the occasion.

Rev. M. Dick was the featured speaker at the annual P.R. Teachers' Institute Convention, hosted this year by the staff of Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI. This very worthwhile speech, entitled "Giving Attention to Read-

ing," was given at Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, with an invitation for all interested to come and take advantage of the opportunity to hear about a timely subject.

Food For Thought

"Let us act with humility, cast ourselves at one another's feet, join hands with each other and help one another. For we battle not pope or emperor, but against the devil, and do you imagine that he is asleep?"

—Martin Luther □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express Christian sympathy to Mrs. Peter Faber and her husband in the passing away of Nell's sister,

MRS. MARIE WESTVEER.

"Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (I Corinthians 15:51, 52).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, Pres.
Tim Pipe, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express Christian sympathy to Vivian Guadalupe and her family in the passing away of her brother,

HECTOR GUADALUPE.

"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, Pres.
Tim Pipe, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On December 26, 1998, our parents,
MR. and MRS. PAUL HARBACH,
will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary.

With gratitude to God, we recognize the Christian guidance, instruction, love, and care He has shown to us through our parents. We pray that God will continue to use them to guide us for years to come. "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:7).

- * Carol Harbach
- * Paul and Barbara Harbach
grandchildren Drew and Jennifer
- * Rick and Lil Harbach
grandchildren Melissa Meacham
and Jeannie Richter
great grandchildren Luke, Jacob,
and Benjamin
- * David Harbach

Hudsonville, Michigan

Tape Available

The Men's and Ladies' Society at Southwest PRC wishes to thank Rev. Cornelius Hanks for giving a most inspiring talk on "The Spiritual Life of the Family after the Children Are Grown." Those who were unable to attend this event, which was the featured program at the fall meeting of the Eastern Men's and Ladies' League on September 22, 1998, may order a cassette tape of the talk. Please send your request and a check or money order for \$3.00 made out to "Southwest Evangelism Committee" to:

Southwest Evangelism Committee
Southwest PRC
4875 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418