



The Standard Bearer

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

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**Vol. 75, No. 7
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The Prince of Peace

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulders: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6.

Unto us a child is born. Amazing wonder! The prophet Isaiah sees, as it were, the virgin Mary, who in utter amazement asks the visiting angel, "How shall these things be?" The angel answers her with the simple and deeply profound words, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." How clear, yet how profound!

He is the Son of God, yet He is also Son of Man, completely divine, yet also completely human. Of

Him it was said, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." The Prince of Peace. My Jesus, my Lord!



Unto us a Son is given.

We can trace His genealogy all the way back to the dawn of history. God has eternally prepared our Mediator, our Savior and Lord. He is Adam's son, out of the loins of Abraham, from the tribe of Judah, of the seed of David, Mary's child.

The moment we fell, through the transgression of our first parents, God came to us. No, we did not come to Him. He came to us. Though we had willfully rebelled against our Maker, transgressed His covenant, and broke the bond of fellowship, so that we became

enemies of God and died under His curse, God came to reconcile us unto Himself and to bring us into a most intimate covenant fellowship with Him. He is the God of the impossible. He brought salvation.

God said, I will put enmity between thee, Satan-Deceiver, and the woman, between thy seed and her seed. Her Seed will bruise thy head, even as thou wilt bruise His heel. He is God's gift, not to humanity, but to God's people, His elect of all the ages.

He is the Christ, prepared from all eternity, promised throughout the entire dispensation of shadows, hoped for by all the early saints. He appeared many times during the old dispensation as the *Angel of Jehovah* representing God's cause among His people. He entered into this world of enmity and warfare, of sin and death, to fight the battle of the Lord and to overcome all the

Rev. Hanks is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

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

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

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

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

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

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE
c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland

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powers of darkness as the mighty Conqueror.



Mighty Prince. The government shall be upon His shoulders.

He wears no distinguishing uniform, has no epaulets on His shoulders or stars and bars on His sleeves. He does not ride a mighty steed with dangling sword or saber. Nor does He gather about Himself a large, well-trained army.

Even as He entered this world in all the weakness of sinful flesh, He was always the lowly, obedient Servant, authorized from all eternity to carry out the counsel and will of our Almighty God. He came in all the weakness of sinful flesh, like unto the brethren, to do the Father's will. He is the Seed of the Woman, appointed to crush the head of Satan, to destroy all the powers of darkness, and to bring His people to eternal glory with the Father in heaven.



He is well qualified for the task entrusted to Him. He is completely fitted as no other to assault all the powers of darkness, to conquer and destroy them, to deliver us from the bondage of sin and death and bring us into the glorious liberty of the sons of God in Father's house with its many mansions.

His exalted names designate His qualifications. Who was ever given more majestic names than He? His name is above all other names, for He is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Everlasting Father. Each of these names evinces the truth that He is the very Son of God, the revelation of the Father, born of the virgin, Immanuel, God with us!

He is Wonderful Counselor. In times past, as the Angel of Jehovah, He had said: "Why askest thou after my name, seeing it is secret (Wonderful)?" (Jud. 13:14). Even though He has given us many

names whereby we may know Him and speak to Him and of Him, there is no name that can possibly express all the fullness of the infinite God. This Prince of God is none other than the Most High God Himself, who dwells in the unsearchable light of His own glory, far beyond all that is creature.

That fully qualifies Him to be Wonderful Counselor. He is Wisdom, possessing a wisdom far beyond all that sages know. He can say: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary" (Is. 50:4). He says: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28, 29). Or again, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (Rev. 3:18).

He is also Mighty God. He could say: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. ...When he prepared the heavens I was there; when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: ... when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him" (Prov. 8:22-30).

When this mighty God tabernacled among us He healed the sick; He caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk; lepers were cleansed and dead were raised. Even the winds and the waves obeyed Him, causing Peter to cry out: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:4).

He spoke with divine authority as He daily taught the people. He brought separation among them. Many listened to Him, heard His teachings, and turned their backs to Him, preferring the bread that perishes to the Bread of eternal life. He raised the ire of scribes and Pharisees, chief priests and rulers, for they feared losing their power and were determined to kill Him. But, on the other hand, He drew to Himself sinners who washed His feet with their tears and humbly confessed: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." For all whom the Father gives to Him do come to Him, and He in no wise casts them out.

He surrendered Himself into the hands of sinful men to be judged by the highest authorities of the church and of the world. They all brought condemnation upon themselves, for they all admitted that He was innocent of any crime, a Lamb without spot of blemish, yet condemned Him for insisting that He was the Christ sent of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Even in that, they served a divine purpose, for He gave Himself to be crucified and thus to bring the sacrifice for sin for all those given Him of the Father. The good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep, arose from the dead as the mighty Conqueror over sin and death and is exalted as Lord of glory in the highest heavens.

The Lord unto His Christ hath said,

Sit Thou at My right hand
Until I make Thy enemies
Submit to Thy command.
A scepter prospered by the
Lord
Thy mighty hand shall wield;
From Zion Thou shalt rule the
world,
And all Thy foes shall yield.



He is also Everlasting Father. Literally we read: Father of eter-

nity. He is indeed the eternal God. We may wonder for a moment that the Son of God, who rests in the bosom of the Father, the First Person, should also be called Father. Is there not a contradiction here? Yet, upon second thought, we realize that the triune God is one God. When we pray, we pray to all three persons and address them all three as "Our Father who art in heaven." May we never forget, Christ is fully, completely, eternally God.

He is Head of His church. All things were made by Him and for Him. He is our Advocate before the Father, who through Him bestows on us every spiritual blessing for time and eternity. In Him we are rightful heirs of salvation, renewed by His Spirit in His likeness, and changed from children of darkness into sons and daughters of the living God, to dwell in His presence, to reflect His glory, and to tell His praises.

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He is the Prince of Peace.

As very God and very man He is fully qualified to accomplish the work entrusted to Him from eternity. No one but God could perform that task. The very God against whom we so grievously sinned, whom we have offended, denied, and cast out of our thoughts and life, is the very God who loves us with an eternal love so great that the Father was willing to sacrifice His Son, and the Son was willing to give His life, in order to deliver us from the bondage of sin and bring us into His life and fellowship.

He is the mighty Conqueror. The Christ of God took on all the weakness of sinful flesh, placed Himself under the burden of God's wrath against our sins, fought against Satan even unto the depths of hell, crushed his head under His mighty heel, overcame hell and sin, death and the grave, and triumphantly entered into glory to receive a name above all names. All power was entrusted to Him in heaven and on earth.

He is Shiloh. He breaks into our sin-hardened hearts by His Spirit, powerfully renews us with His glorified life, banishes sin, takes dominion, and creates in our hearts the peace that passes all understanding, the beginning of heavenly joy and blessedness.

He reigns forever over His people as Shepherd-King. I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Now the King in Thy strength
shall be joyful, O Lord,
Thy salvation shall make
Him rejoice;
For the wish of His heart thou
didst freely accord,
The request of His suppliant
voice. □

Editorial

The Coming of Christ and Y2K

The new year dawns bright with promise.

The promise is the coming of Jesus Christ in the body. He will deliver His beleaguered saints from their enemies. He will raise from the dead into immortal life all who fell asleep in Him. He will publicly vindicate in the final judgment those who confessed His name in this Christ-denying world. He will take His bride, the elect church, to

Himself in the bliss of the marriage of the perfected covenant of grace. He will liberate the groaning creation from the bondage of corruption.

The hope of the church is this coming of her Savior and Lord. Titus 2:13 calls it "that blessed hope." The church's prayer on the first day of the new year is the fervent petition, "Come, Lord Jesus." When the Protestant Reformed Churches, following the wise direction of Dordt, gather for worship

on New Year's Day, they strengthen and express this hope. The sermon arouses, deepens, and focuses this hope. The prayers and the singing of the Psalms voice it, so that it wings its way to God in heaven. The fellowship of the congregation in "one hope" (Eph. 4:4) binds the members ever more closely together.

Two Signs That Christ's Coming Is Near

That the new year dawns

bright with the promise of Jesus' coming is not to be understood as though Jesus might return in 1999. His coming is near, but it is not imminent. In the language of II Thessalonians 2:2, the day of Christ is not "at hand." Christ cannot come at any time. He must come in God's appointed time. What the day, hour, month, or year may be, no man knows, can know, or may know. But there are two great events that precede the coming according to II Thessalonians 2:3. They are objective, clear, certain signs to the believer of the nearness of the coming of Christ. One takes place in the realm of the churches and the other, in the sphere of the nations. These events are the apostasy of the churches and the revelation of the Antichrist.

Already the falling away of the churches from the truth of Holy Scripture is advanced. Rome is hardened in her doctrine of salvation by man. Modernistic Protestantism doubts the whole of divine revelation in Holy Scripture. Many churches that call themselves "evangelical" are avowedly committed to a gospel that the apostle condemns as the false gospel of salvation by man's will in Romans 9:16: "It is not of him that willeth" Many Reformed and Presbyterian churches are fatally compromised by the same lie in the popular teaching that the gospel expresses a love of God in Jesus Christ for every human, a sincere desire (will) of God to save every human, and a gracious attempt to realize this desire. Still other churches are swept away from sound doctrine and Christ onto the wild seas of mysticism by the gale-force winds of the charismatic movement.

We will see still more and greater departure in 1999.

Already the mystery of iniquity that will bring to power "that Wicked (One)" (II Thess. 2:8) is working with great and obvious effect. The nations oppose the sovereignty of God and exalt them-

selves as divinely sovereign in fulfillment of Psalm 2, Daniel 7, II Thessalonians 2:4, and the book of Revelation. They deify themselves on behalf of Man. They deny God's authority over life and death, reject His will for the ordering of the family, and even disannul that most basic of all laws in creation: the difference between male and female. The state approves the murder of the unborn and aged (soon the handicapped, and then the Christians), promotes feminism, and legalizes homosexuality. Thus the state lays claim to deity.

This will intensify in 1999.

To be sure, we will see these heart-shrinking developments as serving the coming of Jesus Christ. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the book of the counsel of the Almighty God, and to loose its seals (Rev. 5:5). These developments too are the carrying out by our Lord Christ of the all-comprehensive plan of God that has one, urgent goal: the coming of Jesus Christ. By means of apostasy and the Antichrist, Jesus Christ comes quickly. For this reason the church is not afraid. We look through the apostasy and the man of sin to the coming of Jesus Christ.

But we will see these events in such a way that we must contend with them in fierce, painful struggle and in such a way that we suffer because of them. The way for the church, as for every member, is amidst the faithlessness and through the tribulation. There will be no "rapture" out. Preparation is called for, therefore, and watchfulness ... and courage.

A Computer "Bug"

It is a shame that Christians largely ignore these important signs of the end, but become alarmed about "Y2K."

Y2K is jargon for the "year 2000." It refers specifically to a problem, or "bug," in many computers. Computers were programmed to recognize the year by

means only of the last two digits, e.g., 99. On January 1, 2000 these computers, unable to determine the new century, will fail to perform the functions for which they were designed. Because so much depends on computers, there is the possibility, we are told, of serious disruption of society. There may be a shutdown of electricity and the cutting off of the supply of water; a halt to transportation, including the moving of food; the closing of the banks; and an interruption of basic services of government. Some shrilly predict the collapse of the economy, the breakdown of all order, and the disintegration of civilization worldwide.

Certain bread-eating prophets of disaster reproach the church for not preaching this impending calamity and for not admonishing her members to take drastic action. There are also those who are quick to relate the predicted evils of Y2K to the year 2000 as though this year of the new millennium has some special significance for the end of the world.

Postmillennial "World-flight"!

It is intriguing that a leading postmillennial Christian Reconstructionist is beside himself regarding Y2K. Gary North forecasts the direst calamity: the collapse of civilization worldwide. He calls for the most bizarre behavior: all Christians should give up their jobs, sell their homes, and move to some remote and desolate spot in the South. At once! There they are to dig a well, store up huge quantities of food, and wait out the upheaval. He himself has done so.

Amazing!

The very thing for which he has so sorely taxed Reformed amillennialism for, lo, these many years!

The evil for which he berated the Protestant Reformed Churches in his newsletter hardly a year ago!

The foolishness of the Protestant Reformed Churches that he ridiculed as only he can in his latest book (for some 16 pages; see

Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, ICE, 1997!

World-flight!

But now, *postmillennial Christian Reconstruction world-flight!*

This madness is not a personal quirk of this bright and learned man. It is the natural outworking of his postmillennial eschatology, the natural fruit of his doctrine of the last things. North sees the supposed (and in his case hoped for) catastrophe of Y2K as the fulfillment finally (in the year 2000!) of the ardent dream of postmillennial Christian Reconstruction. Ungodly civilization will be destroyed by God, so that from their hideaways in Georgia and Arkansas North and the other Christian Reconstructionists who survive can rebuild civilization according to the biblical, and especially Old Testament, blueprint.

Despite their doctrinal differences, both of the main millennial fantasies—pre and post—tend to the same foolish behavior: abandonment of one's everyday, earthly calling in order to wait for the "end," often in some isolated refuge. The cure is conversion to solid, sober, Reformed, biblical amillennial eschatology.

Distraction

Whether Y2K will cause hardships, who can say?

Fixing the problem with the computers is costing business and

government billions of dollars. This alone is a hardship for the consumer and citizen, who pays the bill. One who remembers that people were ready to kill each other at the gas pumps when gas was scarce a few years ago has no difficulty believing that even temporary interruption of goods and services might trigger social disorder.

A Christian should take whatever precaution he judges to be wise. He should listen, however, to the civil authorities, not to individuals who have neither competence nor authority in the matter. If the civil authorities recommend storing up water for several days' use, I suppose that the sensible Christian, like the sensible unbeliever, would store up some water.

Fleeing to the hinterlands is not an option for us. Apart from the fact that the Reformed believer may not abandon his God-given station and duties (least of all merely because someone with an utterly mistaken eschatology begins to cry that the sky is falling), there is no Protestant Reformed Church or good Christian school in those hinterlands.

The church has nothing to say about it. It is not part of the gospel of Scripture. Y2K is an earthly matter, like the forecast of a hurricane, the prediction of an epidemic of flu, or speculation about the falling of the stock market.

Y2K is of no special significance for the coming of Christ and

the end of the world. The year 2000 means nothing for the end—no more than 1999 or 2001.

If Y2K should, in fact, result in severe social distress in North America, it will be another well-deserved judgment on these godless nations, like the present judgments of wicked rulers, the violence of young people raised without the Word of God and often in broken homes, and AIDS. God's people suffer these judgments along with the ungodly. But for us the judgments are chastisements that discipline and that quicken our hope in the coming of Christ. They are not punishment, as they are for the world. Therefore, we can bear them patiently.

Whatever the effect of Y2K may be, it will not be the overthrow of the gathering kingdom of the beast and the opportunity for postmillennial Christian Reconstructionists to erect a carnal kingdom of Christ.

We have the apostle's clear, sure word for it: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day (of Christ) shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (II Thess. 2:3).

The attention of the church must be directed to the great apostasy and the appearance of the Antichrist and, thus, to the coming of Christ.

Y2K is a distraction. □

— DJE

Seek Ye First

Our Father tells us: Seek ye first
The kingdom of our God.
The deeds that bear eternal fruit,
Those righteous and unflawed,
Are those proceeding from true faith —
God's glory is their aim.
His children who seek first His will
Shall not be put to shame.

But love of money, love of fun,
Of fame, of lust, of pride,
Will taint the works our own hands do
Unless in Christ we hide.
So let us pray for needed grace
To flee desires of earth;
Wholeheartedly to seek His face
And show His glory forth.

Thelma Westra

■ Surprise at the Kuyper Issue

Having subscribed to the *Standard Bearer* since 1972, I thought myself to be somewhat familiar with your line of thought. Therefore, to find Dr. Abraham Kuyper as the focal point of the special, Reformation issue was a surprise. It seems to me that Kuyper's contribution to the cause of the Reformation was more negative than positive, at least in the Netherlands.

Besides his doctrinal errors, particularly common grace and presupposed regeneration (the first error being worse), he was quoted as saying, "They and we have the same root of faith," in order to justify his partnership with the papal forces.

The outcome of this was that many sincere Reformed Christians quit the Anti-Revolutionary Party and joined the newly formed Political Reformed Party (*de Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij*), whose leader was Rev. G.H. Kersten. This party subscribed to Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, unaltered. Later on, two other parties appeared: the G.V.P. of Dr. K. Schilder's church and the evangelistic R.P.F. As a result, the K.V.P. (the Catholic People's Party) became the biggest one and dominated. Eventually, the K.V.P. dropped the Anti-Revolutionary Party in favor of the Socialists.

To understand the sad influence of the coalition government of Kuyper, one must realize that Holland proper, the area of the Netherlands north of the great rivers Rhine and Maas, has historically been Protestant, while those living south of the rivers in the provinces of Brabant and Limburg have been Roman Catholic. Evidences of the

latter are the many statues of saints and Mary along highways and in public places. As a 14-year old boy on a bicycle trip from our village near Rotterdam to Maastricht in Limburg with two friends, I was surprised to see all the statues in what was considered a Protestant country. Somehow one Mary and one saint became dislodged and went to the bottom of a drainage ditch.

As a direct result of Kuyper's alliance with the Roman Catholics, Holland above the Rhine became a Roman mission field. Roman Catholic churches, monasteries, abbeys, schools, etc. were built or bought with the help of the government. Also, the appointment of Roman Catholic government officials, especially mayors of cities and towns in predominately Protestant areas, was a grief. (The appointment of mayors is done in Holland by the Crown in consultation with and by recommendation of the government.) The opposite was not done in Roman provinces.

C. VanOosterom
Chilliwack, BC, Canada

■ Budgeting for Church Buildings

You solicited comments on the article in the November 1, 1998 *Standard Bearer* by Mr. Pete Miedema on "The High Cost of Building Churches." I would like to express my thoughts.

First, I do not want to tell any individual church how much money to spend, but I do feel that the high cost often results from the type of building chosen. It is a matter of choice by the congregation.

Second, the way things were

done in the past certainly has worked, and we have more than adequate church buildings in the denomination.

Finally, and most important, I believe that putting items such as that suggested by Mr. Miedema on the budget is not wise. The budget should include only those items that are immediately related to the operation of the congregation. Members are asked to pay their budget first and then to live off what remains. Churches that include items such as church picnics, choirs, or even support for young people's conventions, place an unnecessary burden on those families that are struggling to meet the budget. These other worthy causes should be part of free-will giving as the Lord has blessed us. The only alternative is that members use the budget as a free-will offering.

Besides, it can be questioned whether fancy, million-dollar churches are really necessary. This is the reason many churches separate the building fund from the budget. It's not wrong to build fancy churches, but we should not overburden already struggling families who have high tuition and cost of living. We should put buildings in the "free-will giving as the Lord blesses us" category.

John VanBaren,
Grandville, MI



Visiting the Sick

It needs to be acknowledged at the outset that it is impossible to anticipate the many and various questions, circumstances, and problems an elder will be involved with in his ministry to the sick. There is no way an article or two such as this one can prepare an elder for all of these. All that one can hope to accomplish is to set down certain basic biblical principles, trusting that the Lord will give His servants grace to put these principles into practice when the time is there and as the circumstances present themselves. After all, our heavenly Father must work by His Word and Holy Spirit through the elders to supply the need of the sick among His saints or that need will not be met.

It is not the elder's calling to give medical advice. It can rather easily happen that an elder will do this, or at least be tempted to do this. The elder (especially the minister) in the course of his work meets all kinds of diseases. Soon he learns to recognize symptoms. He becomes familiar with the "treatments and medications of choice" for various conditions and diseases. But he must leave the medical aspects to the person's doctors. This does not mean the elder may give no advice whatsoever. He may, e.g., advise a person to get a second opinion. He may advise a person with life threatening heart disease to seek

treatment at the Cleveland Clinic. But beyond this sort of advice the elder must not go. The elder must not get involved in the diagnosis and treatment of the illnesses of God's people.

The elder is always the servant of Christ. He is called by the Chief Shepherd, Christ, to shepherd the flock of God. This means, among other things, that the elder ministers to the sick in their spiritual need.

Because the elder is the servant of the Chief Shepherd, he must not assume the role of a psychological counselor with the sick. The elder's calling as Christ's servant is not to provide psycho-therapy for the anxious and/or depressed among the congregation. There is, obviously, a close connection between the physical, the psychological, and the spiritual dimensions of a person. Clinical depression can be an effect of some illnesses. Post-operative depression occurs rather commonly, especially following major surgery. Some women suffer rather severe depression following the births of their children. This is called post-partum depression. There are medications available today which can in most of these cases alleviate the symptoms and help the child of God get through these depressions. The point we are trying to make is that the elder must recognize the fact that a person's condition may not in every instance be rooted in a specific sin. Anxiety/depression, e.g., may not be due to a lack of faith, but due to a physical condition.

But, in any case, the elder must remember that the real, root need

in sickness is spiritual. The spiritual need transcends both the physical and the psychological and is, for this reason, far more important than either.

Positively, let the elder remember, and those whom he shepherds too for that matter, that he is a servant and, therefore, a representative of Jesus Christ, the Great, the Good, the Chief Shepherd of the sheep. Christ calls the elder to the office and Christ qualifies him with the necessary gifts of grace to do the work of shepherding the sheep. To Christ the elder will give an account of the care he bestowed on Christ's sheep (Heb. 13:17). This means that the elder must always bring the Word of God to the sick and "pray over" them (James 5:14). More than anything else, more than physical healing and restoration, this is what the sick need. In one word, they need to be saved from sin and death through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. It is the Word of God and the "prayer of faith" which alone can save the sick (James 5:14-15).

The need of the sick is not first of all physical, nor is it psychological. The need of the sick is always fundamentally spiritual. This is the point of the oft-disputed and misinterpreted passage to which we just referred, James 5:13-15.* The passage reads, "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed

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

sins, they shall be forgiven him." Scripture, in this passage, teaches that one must pray when he is afflicted and sing psalms when he is merry. When one is sick he is to call the elders of the church and let them pray over him. The point is that sometimes a child of God is unable to pray on account of his sickness. When this happens he must call for the elders of the church so that they may pray over him. "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick." This does not mean that the prayer of faith will heal the sick of his illness. It means that through the means of the prayer of faith the Lord will save the sick from his sin and death. That this is true is evident from the rest of the passage, which speaks of the Lord's raising him up and forgiving his sins.

That the need of the sick is fundamentally spiritual is also evident from the fact that Scripture connects sickness with sin, the fall, and the curse of God. When the Lord God told Adam that he might not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He said, "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Adam and Eve disobeyed the Lord's command and ate of that tree, and they died (Gen. 3:16-19). Sickness belongs to the dying! Death is the punishment of God on account of man's sin (Rom. 6:23). Sickness is the fruit of sin.

It is true that the Christian has the victory over sin and its fruits, also sickness and death, on account of the cross and resurrection of Christ. But as long as he is still on this earth the Christian's victory is in principle. He still has to battle what Scripture calls "the flesh" or "the old man of sin" (Rom. 7:5, Eph. 4:22). Inasmuch as he still needs to put off the old man, the Christian is also subject to sickness and death. The child of God still shares in "the sufferings of this present time" (Rom. 8:18).

The elder must visit the sick in the awareness of all this. He must,

by means of Holy Scripture, point the sick to Jesus, who "heals our diseases" because He "forgives our iniquities" (Ps. 103, Is. 53).

That sickness is the fruit of sin is true not only in some general sense, but also in specific instances. Suffering, sickness is connected with particular sins. This is obvious in several instances. Sexual promiscuity, adultery, fornication often result in venereal and other sexually transmitted diseases. Homosexual and lesbian behavior very often results in AIDS. Habitual drunkenness results in brain damage or cirrhosis of the liver. These illnesses are not merely the natural results of the sins, God sends them upon the sinner in His righteous judgment.

What is true of these sicknesses is true of all the sickness a child of God experiences. Always the illnesses of God's children are directly connected not only with sin in general, but with one's own sins. God's chastisement always fits the sin. This is precisely why there is suffering and sickness in the lives of the children of God. God sends these chastisements in His love in order to sanctify his children (Heb. 12:5-11). Were God's children already perfectly free from sin in this life, there would be no need for their suffering. Part of the glory God's children shall experience in the new heaven and earth is that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4). When the child of God finally puts off the old man in death, all the effects of sin are also put off.

This leaves us with the question, ought the elder try to determine the sin or sins and point them out to the sick parishioner? In general terms the answer must be affirmative. It is perfectly proper to lay down the connection between our sins and sicknesses from the point of view of the sicknesses be-

ing the "chastening of the Lord" (Heb. 12). This has a good effect on the Christian. He learns to ponder his own sins and sinful nature and to confess with the psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn thy statutes" (Ps. 119:71). This causes the Christian to appreciate the goodness and faithfulness of God. The awareness of the relation between his sickness and his sins leads him to confess, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Ps. 119:75). This awareness also causes the Christian to trust the more in God and to ask the Lord, "Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant" (Ps. 119:76).

In specific instances the answer to the question, ought the elder try to determine the sin and point it out to the sick, is sometimes affirmative. There are instances where the connection between the sickness and the sin must be pointed out. The habitual drunkard who is suffering from cirrhosis of the liver needs not only medical attention, he needs to repent of his sin or he will perish!

Beyond these instances, however, the elder ought not go. He ought not attempt to tell a parishioner that he is sick because he has committed a certain sin or because he has a certain sinful weakness of character. This is a matter best left between the sick person and the Lord. God by means of His Word and Holy Spirit must do the judging. If the sick person asks whether his sickness is on account of a specific sin, give the question back to him. If he confesses to a specific sin, the elder can then deal pastorally with him. □

* There is a detailed, excellent exegetical study of this passage, by Prof. Herman Hanko, in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, volumes VIII and IX.

The Prediluvian Period From the Protevangel to the Flood

The Conflict of Cain and Abel (2)

The Offerings

As to these offerings, we notice, in the first place, that this is the first time that the offering is mentioned in Scripture. But in this connection we remark:

1. The mere fact that this is the first mention does not mean that this was the very first occasion at which offerings were brought to the Lord. In fact, this is most unlikely and inconceivable.

2. Undoubtedly the Lord Himself taught His people to bring offerings, both by the example which He gave in shedding the blood of an animal in order to provide coverings for the nakedness of Adam and Eve at the time of the fall and by direct instruction. Adam and Eve must have been the first to bring such offerings, and their sons must have learned from them.

3. The fact that here the bringing of offerings is first mentioned is only because of the "selective" character of sacred history and because of the fact that in connection with the conflict of Cain and Abel it was necessary to relate this.

The idea of the offering is that of a gift to the Lord. This is according to the original word used. Hence, the offering represents the

idea of *consecration*. Man cannot give anything to the Lord in the sense of offering Him something which He does not possess. God is the Lord, the sovereign proprietor of heaven and earth and all that they contain, including man himself. The cattle on a thousand hills are God's. How then can man give anything to the Lord? But the offering is symbolic of the consecration of one's self in love to God. Any other offerings are an abomination to Him. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight" (Prov. 15:8).

In the sacrifice, therefore, we must see the beginning and the principle of what later constituted the sanctuary. The altar was always an indispensable item in that sanctuary and its service. It was the only way by which communion and fellowship with God were possible. In and through the sacrifice the offerer approached God, consecrating himself in love to God and seeking to enter into and to taste His covenant fellowship. It is only in this light, too, that we must consider the element of atonement and blood in the sacrifice. Consecration to God in love and the fellowship of God are impossible for the sinner, except by way of atonement, the blotting out of the guilt of sin, and reconciliation.

Now Scripture records the following data concerning the offerings of Cain and Abel.

1. They both brought offerings to Jehovah.

2. Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground; Abel brought an offering of the firstlings of the flock.

3. Abel offered by faith (Heb. 11:4), and Cain, in unbelief.

4. Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than did Cain, which can, in the light of Scripture, only refer to an absolute, not a relative, difference.

5. The Lord had respect unto Abel *and his offering*, not to Cain and his offering.

It is obvious that there was a fundamental difference between the two offerings. That difference, moreover, was not only a subjective difference, that is, a difference in the offerers and in the attitude in which they brought their offerings. It was also an objective difference, that is, a difference in the offerings themselves.

According to some, the difference between these offerings lay only in the inward attitude of heart in which Cain and Abel sacrificed. Abel's offering had its spiritual root in the love of God and was brought in faith. Cain's offering was not rooted in the love of God and was brought in unbelief. While this is true in itself, and is also of fundamental importance, it is not the whole truth. On this basis, it is only incidental that Abel brought of the firstlings of the flock and Cain of the fruit of the ground,

The late Homer Hoeksema was professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

the nature of their offerings being only a natural consequence of the nature of their respective occupations. But this cannot stand the test of the Scriptures, which certainly point to a difference, an objective difference, in the sacrifices themselves. Besides, this objective difference in the nature of the sacrifices stands in close connection with the faith or unbelief in which those sacrifices were brought.

The "more excellent" sacrifice of Abel arose from the spiritual principle of faith and of the love of God in Abel's heart. For this love would lead him to a consciousness of sin, and it would produce in him confession of sin and arouse in him the desire for reconciliation. His sacrifice was a confession before the Lord, "If I am to enter into Thy communion, I must first die!" Such was Abel's sacrifice in distinction from Cain's. It was a bloody sacrifice. It was a confession on his part that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, and without the remission of sins it is impossible to enter into the covenant fellowship of the righteous and holy God.

This is not to say that there was value in the blood of an animal as such. This is not true, and it could not have been true before Abel's consciousness. But by faith he in and through his offering clung to the promise of the seed that would overcome the serpent and crush his head in final victory. Thus, in obedience of faith he followed that form of offering clearly taught by God Himself when He made Adam and Eve coats of skins, covering their nakedness through blood.

Cain, as well as Abel, brought an offering to Jehovah. Bear in mind that Cain is not to be compared to the heathen of a later date, who bowed before man and beast and creeping things. No, but he surely is the man who knew God and refused to glorify Him as God. Certainly, Cain did not fear the Lord. He had no faith. He was filled with enmity against God. In

that enmity and unbelief he brought his offering to Jehovah. "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

But this unbelief also became manifest in the nature of his offering. Cain acted as if, on the basis of his own works and gifts, he could be pleasing to God. He knew neither God spiritually nor his own sin. Hence, in unbelief, he offered of the fruit of the ground, claiming for it, as a work on his part, meritorious value and a self-righteousness on the basis of which God the Lord would be obliged to accept him. Cain's offering is that of the self-righteous man of the world, who imagines that God ought to be pleased when he offers unto Him some of his possessions. It was a denial of the need for the remission of sins through shed blood.

There was, therefore, a radical spiritual difference between Cain and Abel, a difference which is to be traced to and which is a manifestation of that which the Lord announced in the protevangel. It is the difference between sin and grace, between light and darkness, between faith and unbelief, between reprobate and elect. This radical spiritual difference comes to its full manifestation in the sequel to these offerings and its climax in Cain's murder of Abel.

The Testimony Which They Received

The narrative of Genesis 4 continues by informing us, in verses 4, 5: "And the Lord had respect unto (literally: looked to, viewed) Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." The words of Hebrews 11:4, that Abel "obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying with respect to his gifts," form an inspired commentary on the words of Genesis 4.

The Lord was well-pleased with Abel and his offering. We must notice that the text mentions both the offerer and the offering in

this connection, with emphasis upon the former: the Lord had respect unto Abel only because of and through his offering.

To Cain and his offering, on the contrary, the Lord did not have respect. The Lord was displeased — and again, not only with the offering but also with the offerer. The offering of Cain was an abomination to the Lord. Thus, the Lord did not receive, but rejected, Cain through his offering.

Not only did the Lord assume a certain attitude toward Abel and Cain respectively, but this was also revealed. Abel received testimony that he was righteous. He was justified. He had the forgiveness of sins. He had the testimony of that eternal righteousness which implies that the sinner, wholly guilty in himself, worthy of condemnation, daily sinning and daily increasing his debt of guilt before God, is declared perfectly innocent, declared worthy of the favor of God, worthy to be received of God, the heir of everlasting life.

The Lord maintained and fulfilled His promise! For we must remember that this was not a righteousness because of or on the ground of Abel's faith. Nor was it a righteousness on the ground of his offering as such. That offering of Abel typified the blood of Christ, the only ground of genuine righteousness before God. The faith of Abel was a faith which was the means, the God-given means, whereby he clung to that unseen and hoped for blood of Christ as the realization of God's promise. Abel, therefore, was righteous by the power of the promise.

Moreover, he received *testimony* of this fact, testimony that the Lord had respect unto him and to his offering, testimony that he was righteous, God testifying with respect to his gifts. Not only was Abel objectively righteous, but he also had the assurance of this righteousness. He received that assurance from God Himself.

This also implies that Cain had

the very opposite testimony. He had the testimony that the Lord did not have respect unto him and his offering, that his own works were wicked, and that in his wickedness he could not be the object of God's favor, but only the proper object of His wrath.

There have been various conjectures as to how this testimony was conveyed. The text tells us of the *fact*, but it does not go into detail as to the manner. We do, however, have the statement of Hebrews 11 that God testified of Abel's gifts. Some have suggested that this became manifest in the smoke of Abel's offering ascending and the smoke of Cain's offering descending. Others have suggested that the offering of Abel was consumed, while the offering of Cain was not consumed.

It is much better to understand, however, that this testimony came from God very objectively and clearly and directly. God spoke. He did so not by some vague sign or symbol, but He actually spoke His Word, testifying to the righteousness of Abel and his acceptance with God and to the unrighteousness of Cain and his rejection by God. This is the regular way of God's dealings: the objective testimony of His Word. Only at that time that Word of God came by direct speech. This is clearly suggested by Hebrews 11, and it is in full harmony with the context in Genesis 4. For immediately following the statement that God had respect unto Abel and his offering, but not to Cain and his offering, there is the statement that the Lord did indeed speak directly to Cain concerning the latter's anger. Why, then, should it be considered unlikely that this testimony concerning their offerings came by the same direct speech of God? On the contrary, this was the most likely manner, especially in that age when there were no Scriptures and when God frequently spoke in this direct fashion.

Moreover, it was such a direct

testimony of God which would also leave absolutely no doubt either with Abel or with Cain as to the status of each before God. Besides, in Cain's case there was added the plain testimony of Abel's believing and godly conversation. For do not forget that there was such a testimony of Abel: he stood for the cause of God and over against the wicked Cain, and he condemned the works of the latter. It was this testimony, in fact, which kindled Cain's murderous anger against his brother. For do not we read in I John 3 that Cain slew his brother because his own works were evil and his brother's were righteous? And does this not clearly imply that Cain apprehended the testimony of Abel and his works?

Thus, in both cases — that of Abel and that of Cain — there was the divine testimony: in Cain's case convicting him of sin, and in Abel's case assuring him of righteousness.

Cain's Murderous Anger

The reaction of Cain was that of anger, in verses 5, 6. He was morose. He was filled with bitterness, as is manifest from his fallen countenance. His anger, however, was wicked: it was not anger with himself, as it should have been. No, instead of being angry because of the wickedness of his own heart, he is filled with bitterness about the Lord's righteous dealings. His heart was hardened. He was angry at the Lord! This was the deepest nature of Cain's anger. It was not first of all anger against his brother Abel, but it was enmity against God.

Over against that anger of Cain the Lord maintains Himself and His justice, and He rebukes Cain. He does so not in His love, but in His wrath, for Cain must be left without excuse. "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."

The thrust of these words is plain. Sin crouches like a wild beast at the door, in order to make thee its prey, Cain. To thee is sin's desire. If thou doest well, thou shalt rule over him and be righteous; but if not, he shall surely swallow thee up. Thus the purpose of this Word of God to Cain is certainly very clear. The Lord says in effect: "Why art thou angry, Cain? Certainly, thou canst not be angry because I, the Lord, am unjust. For he that doeth well is accepted with Me. This is an eternal principle of My justice. Thou oughtest not to be angry with Me, but with thyself. The guilt in this matter is thine, and thine anger is foolishly wicked."

Or, as the Rev. G.M. Ophoff comments in this connection: "Thy wrath, Cain, is unreasonable, groundless, and uncalled for. For thou art angry with me, but thou shouldest be angry with thyself and praise my wrath. For thou doest not well. Thou tramplest the blood of my sacrifice and despisest the riches of my goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, and thou hatest thy righteous brother. Turn from thy evil way. Repent, and thou shalt be accepted of me. If thou repentest not, thou shalt come to grief, and the responsibility of the doom that awaits thee will be wholly thine. Be admonished. If thou restrain not thy wicked impulses, they will become mighty in thee, and in thy unbridled wrath thou wilt go from bad to worse and be driven by my curse into everlasting desolation. But the responsibility for thy doom shall be wholly thine. For thou shalt remain the subject, the ruler and director of thy vile impulses."

But Cain gave no heed. He went on in his ungodly anger. He was hardened. The same anger with which he was filled toward God also filled him toward his brother Abel, the seed of the woman, whose works in contrast with those of Cain were righteous.

The narrative does not indicate

how much later it was when the events of verse 8 took place. It could not have been long: for Cain's anger burned within him. We read that "Cain talked with Abel his brother." It may be assumed that in this conversation Abel revealed himself as a righteous child of God, and Cain's ungodliness came to expression. When Cain's darkness is reproved and made manifest by the light, bitter resentment and thoughts of revenge begin to arise in his soul. God, however, Cain cannot reach, but Abel represents the cause of God. Upon Abel the wicked Cain wreaks his vengeance. He is stronger than Abel as far as brute strength is concerned. Besides, brute strength could be no proper weapon for the righteous Abel

against his brother. Thus Cain kills his brother, causing the earth to drink Abel's blood as the first martyr in the cause of God in the midst of the world.

Thus the conflict of the two seeds comes to early and sharp manifestation. For we must remember that the murder of Abel was not mere murder or fratricide. The message of the Word of God does not deal with *mere* murders.

The Scriptures reveal to us the history of God's kingdom and covenant in the midst of the world. It tells us of the battle of the ages, the battle between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, the battle of the righteous and of the wicked. In Cain and Abel and their history we have the first battle in that warfare of the centuries.

Outwardly, Cain has the victory in that battle, and Abel goes down to defeat. But by faith Abel is nevertheless the victor. He is the victor because God takes the part of His people. He is their covenant Friend, His blessing is upon His people, the seed of the woman, and His face is against the enemies of His people. Abel is the victor, too, because, though he was slain, he was slain into glory. Here, by the way, begins the history of heaven as far as saved humanity is concerned! Victorious is Abel, in the third place, because his blood cries to God from the ground. That cry is a cry for divine vengeance and justice. It is a cry that is surely heard — heard throughout the ages, and heard finally in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. □

Marking Zion's Bulwarks

Prof. Herman Hanko

Apollinaris and the Doctrine of Christ (1)

Introduction

After a long and bitter struggle in the early Christian church over the heresy of Arianism, the truth of the absolute divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ had been established. This truth had been established and incorporated into a creed of the church by the Council of Nicea which met, under the auspices of the emperor Constantine the Great, in the year 325. The doctrine had been reaffirmed by the Council of

Constantinople in the year 381. From that time it has been confessed by the church of Christ in every age, even though, throughout the centuries, others have risen who have denied it.

But these decisions did not mean that the controversies over the truth of Christ were at an end. It is true the church had declared that it was the teaching of Scripture that our Lord Jesus Christ was divine, very God of very God. But nothing had been said about the fact that He was also like us in all things, except for our sin.

There were specific questions which the church was forced to face. How was our Lord like us? It could hardly be denied that the Scriptures describe the life of

Christ as One who was born just as we are; who ate, drank, grew, walked the roads of Palestine, talked with many; who did the same things we do. How could that be, when He was very really God?

Further, the church also emphatically agreed that the divine nature could not suffer. And yet our Lord, who was God, suffered. How was that possible?

But the questions did not end here. Perhaps more importantly, all knew that only God can save us from our sins, and salvation by the power of the One who was truly God was obviously sound doctrine. But the church had also a clear understanding of what our Heidelberg Catechism later set down as

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

truth: He who saves us from our sins must be truly man, for "God will not punish any other creature for the sin which man has committed" (Lord's Day 5).

It was, of course, easy to answer these questions by simply saying that our Lord Jesus Christ was both God and man, which, in itself, is true. But the fact remains that such a statement could not be satisfactory, for one must still find some answers to the burning question: How could one be both God and man at the same time? And, in what way was Christ God and in what way was He a man?

The questions were many and difficult, and the church did not immediately see how they could be answered.

Other questions arose as well, questions which had to do chiefly with the worship of the church. We can mention a few of them here. One such question was: How was Christ present in the Lord's Supper? Was He present as divine or was He present as a human? When the saints partook of the Lord's Supper, did they partake of Christ's divinity, and/or of His humanity?

Another question involved the worship of Christ. If Christ is divine, and He is, surely we must worship Him. But if He is human, may we nevertheless worship Him, for it is wrong to worship a man.

By this time in history, many monks were present in the church. They had a special knack for complicating things. Especially the monks in Egypt, where the whole idea of asceticism arose in the first place, developed a rather elaborate doctrine of Mary. Perhaps because they themselves had taken vows of celibacy, much attention was given to Mary, the mother of the Lord, and many great and wonderful things were said of her. In fact, the whole Romish doctrine of Mariology really arose among the monks in Egypt.

In their veneration of Mary, they exalted her as "the mother of

God," and applied a term to her which gave her that honor. The term was a Greek term, *theotokos*, which literally means, "mother of God." While it is not now the time to go into the term and its proper or improper use, the fact is that that term was to cause almost constant grief in the church for over 100 years. Monks had a way of doing that.

But the term *theotokos* added confusion to an already confusing situation. If Mary was the "mother of God," was she also the "mother of a man," the man Jesus? If so, how could she be the mother of both at the same time?

All these questions came down to one great question: How could our Lord Jesus Christ be at the same time both God and man?

These were the questions that triggered the great Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries, and were finally settled by the creed of Chalcedon.

This article on Apollinaris is only one chapter in the long and involved story. Nor does this chapter bring us to the final answer of the church. It is the story of one man's solution to the problem, and the story of the church's rejection of that solution as an answer insufficient and inadequate to do justice to all that Scripture says concerning our Savior.

God's Greater Wisdom

I must mention one other aspect of the controversy which I want to talk about in this article. It is really an aspect, not just of this controversy, but of all the controversies which followed. It has to do with what strikes me as an amazing display of God's wisdom.

In an earlier article, written quite long ago, I mentioned the fact that while heresy in the church was certainly to be explained as Satan's way of destroying the truth and the church which needed the truth to survive, God used heresy to goad the church to develop the truth. A striking demonstration of this is to

be found in these controversies over the doctrine of Christ.

Let me state that truth now. The truth which the church confessed concerning the Lord Jesus Christ since the time of Chalcedon is this: Our Lord Jesus Christ united in His one person, the person of the Son of God, both the divine nature and the human nature. He was, therefore, personally, the eternal Son of God, the second person of the holy Trinity. He united in His one person the whole of the divine nature, so that he was indeed, as Nicea confessed, very God of very God, and a complete human nature, so that He was like us in all respects, except for our sin.

Now, before that truth was confessed and set down in creedal form by the Council of Chalcedon in 451, this solution was preceded by every possible heresy which one could imagine. One taught that the humanity of Christ was not real, but had only ghost-like characteristics (some Gnostics, whom we discussed earlier). Another said that Christ had one person, a divine person, and had only one nature, a kind of mixture of divine and human. He was a sort of God-man. Another said that Christ possessed two natures, a divine nature and a human nature, but that this was possible only because Christ also was two persons, a divine person and a human person.

Interestingly, it was not all that long ago that I heard a radio minister teach this latter error. He was trying to explain how Christ could be tempted. He solemnly assured his listeners that the temptations of Christ were real only because Christ could have fallen into sin. But then he rightly considered the question how it was possible for God to sin. His answer was that, while it was not possible for God to sin, Christ was also a man, and therefore, as a man, could sin.

But more of this later. I do not want to run ahead of my story. Now I am interested only in showing that every possible denial of the

truth was considered by the church before the truth itself was finally discovered and set down in a confession.

When I was still teaching Catechism classes in "The Essentials of Reformed Doctrine" and came to that lesson in the "Essentials" book which deals with the person and natures of Christ, I would first lead the young people through a brief history of these controversies before teaching them the biblical doctrine concerning Christ. It helped them to understand something of the great mystery of God become flesh.

What I am saying is this. God led the church to consider every possible mistaken idea concerning the relation between the two natures of Christ before guiding the church by His Spirit into the truth. Only by considering what is wrong could the church finally see what is right.

This is a wisdom of God to help us poor mortals who are so hard of hearing and dull of understanding that we find it almost impossible to know the great mysteries of the works of almighty God.

The Life of Apollinaris

It is almost embarrassing to write about the lives of these early men. If one is expecting an interesting and exciting biography one is bound to be disappointed, because so little is known that one has difficulty filling one page with the actual facts of their life.

But history has provided us with a few interesting details of the life of Apollinaris, the man of whom we write.

He was born somewhere around 310. He was 15 years old when the great Council of Nicea was held. His father must have named him after himself, because the father is known as Apollinaris the Elder, and the one in whom we are interested was called Apollinaris the Younger.

They were apparently very close and in fact collaborated for

many years in various writing projects of one sort or another. They were both Christians, and Apollinaris the Elder served as presbyter (elder) in the church for many years.

Apollinaris the Younger received a classical education and went on to teach rhetoric in the city of Laodicea. In that city was a church, the bishop (minister) of which was Theodotus.

Now that in itself was interesting. You will recall that around the end of the first century, when the apostle John was banished to the island of Patmos, a church already existed in that city. Laodicea was one of the seven churches of Asia Minor to which our Lord wrote letters, which letters are recorded in Revelation 2 and 3. These seven churches were all in the western part of Asia Minor, in the province called Asia. It is quite probable that they were all organized while Paul was working in Ephesus, when laborers in the gospel went out into all the area to bring the gospel. Laodicea was most likely one of those churches.

Over the space of less than 50 years that church had become all but apostate and, in His letter to them, the Lord threatened to spew them out of His mouth. But here, 300 years later, a church was in that city. It may have been that the church of Laodicea repented of its sin in obedience to the command of the Lord and thus continued to exist as a church; or it may be, and this is more likely, that the faithful in this apostate church heard and obeyed the call of Christ, who was standing at the door of the church knocking and calling His faithful out. After leaving a church which had become the false church, the faithful reorganized the church; and that was the one which is mentioned here in our story of Apollinaris.

Apollinaris the Younger also became a presbyter (elder) in the church of Laodicea, which would seem to indicate that both father

and son were men of exceptional ability.

But both had one flaw: they were deeply involved in the reading and study of pagan philosophy; they both loved pagan learning; and they both gave themselves too much to it. About this time, both were very closely associated with and became friends of some pagan philosophers in the city who were Sophists. As a result they were excommunicated by their church; but they repented of their sin and, after confession, were received back into the fellowship of the church.

They never, however, shook free from their love of pagan culture, and in the course of the years, they collaborated in the writing of a great deal of secular prose and poetry. Their gifts of writing were so great that they gained something of an international reputation among scholars and authors.

Eventually Apollinaris the Elder died and Apollinaris the Younger became bishop (minister) of the church in Laodicea. It was about 346 that Apollinaris the Younger met and became a lifelong friend of the great Athanasius, the powerful defender of Nicean orthodoxy who suffered so much because of the truth. From that time on, Apollinaris joined forces with Athanasius and was himself an influential defender of the truth of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But he was by no means one who stood in the shadow of the great Athanasius; he acquired a superb reputation by his own accomplishments. We can mention only a few here.

He was a gifted Hebrew scholar, mastered that language, and became a skilled exegete who put the books from Genesis to I Samuel into poetry and drama. His exegetical abilities shone brightly in the firmament of the church, for he was known everywhere as a sober and sensible expounder of the Word of God who avoided that dreadful allegorizing which was so

characteristic of so many preachers in his day. He was famous as a theologian, and some claimed that his theological abilities were greater than those of Athanasius himself. He was a prolific writer and penned some thirty books which defended the Christian faith against various heresies. He was one of the great theological writers

of all time—although, sad to say, almost none of his works have survived the destructive forces of time. He was a wise and respected minister in the church where God had placed him.

For all these accomplishments and more, he was held in high esteem by friend and foe alike. And, in fact, when he began to teach

various erroneous views of Christ's person and natures, those who attacked his views, and synods which condemned his views, rarely, if ever, mentioned him personally and by name.

But he became a heretic in spite of all these accomplishments. And that is sad.

... to be continued. □

Guest Article

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

Judging: The Christian's Duty (1) The Prevailing View of Tolerance

Tolerance is the buzzword of the day. We are told that we must tolerate the ideas, words, and actions of each and every segment of society. We may not pass judgment on the character of other people, but must accept them the way they are. What our elected officials do in their private lives must not influence our view of their qualifications for public office. We must accept the lifestyle of homosexuals as (viable!) alternatives to ours. We must cater to the whims and wishes of the feminists. We must not speak of God, lest we anger the atheists.

This attitude of tolerance is found even in the church world today. Many people, claiming to be Christian, will be quick to remind us of Jesus' words that we must not judge (Matt. 7:1) and that we may not cast a stone because we are no better than the other person (John. 8:7). This attitude has wreaked havoc in the Christian church, including churches which

are Reformed in their heritage. Heresy is no longer denounced, and heretics are no longer disciplined. The foundational teaching of Christianity — that Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came in the flesh, is our only and complete Savior — is denied. We are told to tolerate the religious thinking of non-Christians, because every religion has an element of truth to it, and because salvation is not exclusively for Christians. We must also tolerate in our churches the sinful actions of others. It is not our business if an unmarried couple lives together! It is none of our business if a member of our congregation practices homosexuality! We must not judge them.

Considering this sad state of affairs in the church world today, it is not surprising to learn that the most frequently quoted text of Scripture is no longer John 3:16, but Matthew 7:1, as I recently heard from a radio speaker. In the past we were reminded: "For God so loved the world...." This verse, wrongly interpreted as teaching the lie of Arminianism that God loves every person, was meant to comfort every person who believed it. "God loves me! All is well with me." Today we are told: "Judge

not!" This shift seems logical. If God loves me and every other person, then He finds no fault with us, our actions, or our ideas. And if He finds no fault with us, we should find no fault with each other. However, the logic fails. It proceeds from a wrong premise, that God loves every man, and from a wrong assumption, that a God who loves a person ignores or tolerates that person's sins. Thus the conclusion is also wrong. In actuality, the shift of most-quoted Bible text indicates the increasing godlessness of our society. In the past, God received the emphasis, even though God was wrongly understood. Now the emphasis falls on man, to the point that in certain situations we must be careful not to mention God's name! Man is god, free to construct his own ideas of morality. And man's basic foundation for morality is his thinking: "I am good. You are good. Let us agree not to find any bad in anyone."

There is one group of people, however, on whom society permits us to pass judgment, and toward whom we may be intolerant: those who judge this modern morality as wrong, and do not tolerate it! In this latter group true Christians

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan.

must find themselves, and the true church of Jesus Christ must find herself. We must judge the prevailing view of tolerance as wrong, for it is not scriptural. Scripture is the only basis for our morality.

In these articles we will examine in more detail the prevailing view of tolerance in the light of Scripture. Our conclusion will be that this view is dangerous, godless, and unscriptural. We will then examine in some detail the Scripture passages which are most pertinent to the issue. From these passages, we will see that to judge is the Christian's calling from God. Although God places some restrictions on how we judge and show intolerance, He does not forbid intolerance.

This view which prevails today can be further explained both from a negative and a positive viewpoint.

Negatively, the view is that our attitude toward the ideas or actions of others must never be one of intolerance. An attitude of intolerance is wrong for several reasons, we are told. First, it manifests hatred; thus it is morally wrong. God Himself condemns intolerance by forbidding us to judge (Matt. 7:1) and by commanding us to love one another. Tolerance is one expression of love. Second, this attitude reveals arrogance on our part for thinking that we are better than the other person, that our view is the only right view, and that our way of doing things is the only right way. This arrogant thinking denies the inherent goodness of every person, each of whom is created in God's image (according to the proponents of tolerance). An attitude of intolerance is wrong, thirdly, because by it we judge a person without trying to understand him or what causes him to act or to think the way he does.

Because this attitude of intolerance is wrong, we must not demonstrate such by speaking against the ideas or practices of others. We

must not condemn those who favor and practice abortion, for we do not understand the hardships which the pregnant woman endures and will endure if she has her baby. We must not condemn homosexuality, for God created homosexuals in His image, and their sexual orientation is a part of that creation. Besides, homosexuals are as capable as heterosexuals of keeping God's law of love by being faithful to their partners. We must not condemn those whose theological, social, or political views differ from ours, for God gives to each of us a mind, and each of us individually is free to use that mind as he wishes. Besides, the fact that the Bible has been interpreted many different ways by many different people, churches, and denominations indicates that there is no one correct view of the Bible and its teachings.

Stated positively, this prevailing view is that we must tolerate those who differ from us in thinking and practice. Such tolerance would indicate love, compassion, and understanding for others. In addition to tolerating these people, we ought to *approve* their views and practices as legitimate. Perhaps our views and practices will still differ from the next person's, but not because ours are inherently right and the next person's are inherently wrong, for all people, regardless of their views and practices, are good people.

This view of tolerance has specific implications for the church of Christ. First, we must not preach an exclusive gospel of salvation through Christ alone. We must not view the teachings of other religions — Judaism, Mormonism, Buddhism, and all others — as inherently wrong. We may not tell the Jew, the Mormon, or the Buddhist that he must repent of his sins against the first four commandments of God's law, and come to the knowledge of the true God who has revealed Himself in Christ.

Rather, we ought to approve the teachings of Judaism, Mormonism, Buddhism, and other religions; present them as viable alternatives to the Christian faith; and encourage members of our churches to incorporate into their lives whatever good is found in these teachings.

Second, this affects our mission work. Our mission work should consist not of calling others to faith and repentance, but of helping the poor, the sick, and others who need physical and economic help. We should also be more ambitious in developing contacts with other religions, finding the good aspects of their teachings and practices, and incorporating them into our own teachings and practices.

Third, we must not discipline those whom we believe to be living in sin or teaching that which is contrary to our understanding of the fundamental truths of Scripture. Rather, remembering that we all sin, we must allow church members who are living in sin to remain members in good standing, partaking freely of the Lord's table. We ought even to find some good in their actions, and recommend that other members follow the good example which this member has set in some way. A person who emulates Jesus most closely will view the other person as a brother, remind him that he is a good person, encourage that person in his sin, and remind him that God is pleased.

What accounts for this view?

Certainly the natural depravity of man is one explanation. Man by nature is able to do and think only that which is evil. This view is another instance of man's disregard for the Word of God, and for God Himself. God's Word tells man that he is a slave to sin by nature. Man, however, claims to be free, and insists on manifesting that freedom by doing what he wants to do. The pregnant woman insists on her freedom to choose to live her own life, by aborting her

child. The man insists on his freedom by choosing to love other men.

However, this explanation does not sufficiently explain why the church world at large has adopted this view. Explaining this is the fact that the church has, as a general rule, conformed herself to the world in every area of life, failing to live antithetically.¹ Underlying this failure is the fact that the church has lost her consciousness of God's holiness. Her great message has been the love of God, but she has divorced His love from His holiness. If the church can once more understand what it means that God is holy, she will understand the need to separate herself from the world's ideas and practices, to denounce sin as sin, and to preach that the loving God, Jehovah, hates sin and punishes sinners on account of their sin.

Christians must evaluate this view as being dangerous, godless, and unscriptural.

The view is dangerous because it leads to further accommodation of the church with the world, in violation of her calling. God calls the church to live antithetically, that is, to live in opposition to sin and the world and in devotion to Jehovah. The church lives antithetically, not by pretending that sin is good, but by declaring sin to be sin, and by disciplining those who impenitently continue to live a sinful life. She lives antithetically also by preaching the truth of God, pointing out the lie of Satan which opposes the truth, and disciplining those in her midst who knowingly and impenitently promote the lie.

Failing to live antithetically, the church is in danger of becoming the world, and of no longer being the church of God. By living and thinking like the world, she shows that she is not fundamentally different from the world, as God calls her to be. Thus her attribute of holiness is lost. By teaching that which is contrary to Scripture, she shows that she is not grounded

firmly on the doctrine of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, as God calls her to be. Thus another attribute, that of apostolicity, is lost. Failing to be holy and apostolic, she has no right to call herself church, for she is no different from the world.

The danger of this view, then, is the same as the danger of poison. Poison may look harmless, and even palatable, but it is eaten to one's own destruction. The world's ideas and practices are a poison which might appear attractive to some, but when the church tolerates and approves them, she does so to her own destruction. This destruction is not simply a matter of the church failing to be distinct from the world in this life, but is also an everlasting destruction. The God who judges righteously will judge those who impenitently teach false doctrine and who live in immorality without repenting. Taking warning from this, the church must not conform herself to the world, but be transformed (Rom. 12:2)!

Our second evaluation of this view of tolerance is that, for all its apparent godliness, it is in fact godless. The various appeals to Scripture and to the attribute of God's love in defense of this view might make it appear to be godly. There is mention of a god — one who approves of tolerance and who cares for those who are the victims of intolerance, hatred, bigotry, and mean spiritedness.² There is also mention of a heaven — the place where victims of such intolerance are brought when their "persecution" has ended in death.

Despite this apparent godliness, the view is godless in that it rejects Jehovah as the God whose Word is the standard for doctrine and life. That we must tolerate, approve, and embrace the ideas and practices of others is not God's Word, but man's! Man has set himself up as the judge of right and wrong. And man says: "Tolerance

is right! Intolerance is wrong!"

That this is really what man has done is evident when one considers that society itself, not the Word of God, decides in what situations tolerance is right, and in what situations some intolerance is permissible. The Word of God clearly forbids murder, in the sixth commandment: "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13). But society, while condemning the murder of a two-year-old child or forty-year-old adult, will tolerate the killing of unborn babies and, in many instances, the killing of the terminally ill who desire a dignified death. The Word of God clearly forbids adultery and all sexual perversions, declaring that sex is permissible only between a husband and a wife. This it does in the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14), as well as in other passages (cf. I Cor. 5:1-5 and Heb. 13:4). But society, while intolerant of child pornography and molestation, nevertheless permits adultery and fornication of all sorts, and cries out for tolerance on the issue of homosexuality. When it comes to the question "What is truth?" society attempts

¹Francis A. Schaeffer's book *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1984) develops the thesis that the church in the twentieth century has conformed herself to the world. This thesis is stated on page 37: "Here is the great evangelical disaster — the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this — namely *accommodation*: the evangelical church has accommodated to the world spirit of the age."

²This was also the theme of a number of letters in the "Public Pulse" section of the *Grand Rapids Press*. God loved the homosexual teacher, and by death (the teacher died in December of '96 or January of '97) brought him to a better place where he was free from persecution, one writer said. Another writer applied Romans 8:18 to the teacher, and prayed that he might rest in peace.

to give its own definition, ignoring Jesus Christ and the Scriptures as the Truth.

These inconsistencies reveal that man has dismissed Jehovah God and His Word as the standard of right and wrong. Men do not want God telling them what to do! Man will be the judge of right and wrong. Any appeal to Scripture to support the prevailing view of tolerance does not proceed from a view of Scripture as God's Word, but from a view of Scripture being

the record of the thinking of society in the past. In the Bible, a text can be found here and there to show that society in the past has also apparently condemned intolerance.

This leads us to our third and fundamental evaluation of this view: it is unscriptural. Perhaps you can hear some asking: "What do you mean, unscriptural? Haven't you looked at Matthew 7:1, John 8:11, and John 13:34?"

The fact is, however, that many people interpret these passages wrongly. The passages do not teach what those who use them to promote this view of tolerance say they teach!

We must examine these and other pertinent passages of Scripture to show that, rather than commanding tolerance of the ideas and practices of all others, Scripture forbids such and requires us to judge. This we will do in our next article. □

Contribution

Martin Swart

The Relation of the Deacons to the Consistory (1)

The question concerning the relation of the deacons to the consistory is one of the most debated questions in connection with the office of deacon. Various answers have been given to that question. According to some, the deacons belong to the consistory, and the consistory, therefore, is composed of the ministers, the elders, and the deacons. Others would exclude the deacons from the consistory and make of them a separate body, though standing under the supervision of the consistory. Finally, there is the tendency to separate the deacons from the consistory completely, so that they become independent of any consistorial control.

To this it must be added that

there is an apparent conflict between the Netherland Confession and the Church Order. Article 30 of the Confession definitely includes the deacons in the consistory, while the Church Order seems to exclude them. Besides, there is the seemingly conflicting position of the Church Order itself. The Church Order, on the one hand, seems to exclude the deacons from the consistory, while, on the other hand, it permits that the deacons be added to the consistory when the number of elders is small, and even demands this when the number of elders is less than three. Even more confusing, the Church Order really includes the deacons in the consistory again when it requires that much of the affairs of the congregation shall be discharged at combined meetings, or what is usually called, the general consistory.

The question arises, how must all the confusion and difference of opinion be explained? Then we must bear in mind, first of all, that the New Testament does not give

us a detailed pattern for church organization. Hence, it has little to say, directly, about the office of deacon, and, especially, about the relation of the deacons to the other officebearers. According to the oldest and most generally accepted view, we have the origin of the office of deacon recorded in the sixth chapter of the book of Acts. Although this is most likely correct, the fact remains that this opinion is a conclusion that is based largely upon what we read elsewhere in Scripture. Because Scripture elsewhere speaks of deacons in distinction from bishops, it is concluded that the origin of this office is to be found in Acts 6. It is for that reason that by no means all share this opinion. According to some, Acts 6 speaks of no ecclesiastical office at all. The appointment of these seven men was simply a temporary measure, due to the peculiar circumstances at the time. Others are of the opinion that because of the complaints that certain widows were being neglected these men were merely appointed to look

Martin Swart was an elder for many years in the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI.

This article was originally an essay that Mr. Swart presented to the Men's Society of First Church.

after the widows and no more. Still others hold that the appointment included both the office of elder and that of deacon, seeing that at least two of the men appointed also labored in the Word.

Several other things must be taken into consideration. In the first place, we must not overlook the fact that the appointment of these men concerned only the congregation at Jerusalem. In how far all three offices were immediately instituted in all the congregations is an open question. But in the light of what we read in Titus 1:5, it is safe to conclude that the offices were only gradually instituted in all the churches. Calvin is of the opinion that they were instituted only as the need arose. In the second place, as already mentioned, at least two of the men appointed for the office of deacon also labored in the Word. They, therefore, functioned in both offices. In the third place, it is evident from Acts 11:30 that some time after the appointment of the deacons the gifts for the poor were still sent to elders. Calvin explains this by saying that these deacons were appointed in such a way that they nevertheless stood under the elders, in order that they should do nothing without their consent.

Finally, it is also evident that, with the appointment of deacons, the apostles did not mean to cast the care of the poor entirely off their own shoulders. At least the apostle Paul continued to take an active part in this work. He not only ordered collections to be taken, but he also instructed the churches as to how and when they should be taken, and how they should be sent. He even takes an active part in the distribution of the same (cf. I Cor. 16:1-4; II Cor. 9:3-5; Acts 24:17; Rom. 15:25-28). From all this it is evident that the fact that Scripture speaks of the office of deacon as a distinct office does not yet mean that this office has nothing in common with the other offices. After all, Scripture also dis-

tinguishes between ruling elders and teaching elders without separating them.

Turning now to the history of the offices, we find that there has always been, and still is, much confusion with respect to the question concerning the relation of the deacons to the other officebearers. There are many different, and even conflicting, opinions with respect to this question. Lightfoot, in his study on "The Early Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries," sums up the situation by saying that in the last decades of the first century each congregation had for its officebearers a body of elders and a body of deacons, but whether they were separated into two colleges, or formed one, must remain unknown. But however this may be, that there was some relation between the two offices would almost seem certain. Otherwise you cannot explain the history through which the office of deacon passed.

How else, for example, is it to be explained that already in the post-apostolic age, although the office was recognized as a distinct office, the deacons, nevertheless, performed their labors under the supervision of the bishops, to whom they had to give account and to whom they were responsible. Already in the second century the deacons were regarded as assistants to the bishops and were assigned to the double task of caring for the poor and of assisting in the public worship. By the third century the care of the poor was entirely under the control of the bishops, and the office of deacon disappeared as a distinct office and remained dead until the Reformation. Now it is rather difficult to explain this history unless we may assume that there was a relationship between the offices which was gradually corrupted.

Calvin restored the office of deacon to its rightful place as a distinct office. But the degree in which it was restored was by no

means the same in all Reformed churches. Calvin himself, on the basis of Romans 12:8, made distinction between two kinds of deacons, the one for the ingathering and distribution of the gifts for the poor, the other to render aid to the sick and the infirm.

In the Church of Hesse (1526), and also in the Church of Basil (1529), it was established that each pastor should have at least three deacons to assist him in the care of the poor. In these churches, therefore, the deacons were merely assigned to the task of assisting the pastors in the care of the poor.

The French Reformed churches followed the pattern of Calvin, except that they recognized only one class of deacons. These deacons administered the gifts for the relief of the poor, but under the supervision of the consistories. So strong were the French churches for cooperation between the offices, that, whenever possible, the pastor was to meet with the deacons, especially at the time when financial reports are given. The deacons also belonged to the consistories and, as deacons, were delegated to the synod of Clairac (1560). To remove all possibility of suspicion, the elders were charged with the distribution of the gifts for the poor, but the deacons visited these homes weekly, not only to inquire if there was need, but also to make sure that the poor received the gifts. The Walloon congregations, organized in the southern Netherlands, followed the pattern established by the French Reformed churches.

In the Dutch Reformed refugee church in London, under the leadership of John á Lasco, the deacons were restricted to caring for the poor and were not part of the consistory. Yet even here an exception was made, and in unusual circumstances they were added to the consistory. Besides, once in six weeks the deacons met with the elders and the ministers, to render an exhaustive report of their activi-

ties. They also helped the elders collect funds for the support of the ministers.

The first regular synod of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands, Emden 1571, considered the deacons as belonging to the consistory. But there seems to have been some difference of opinion regarding this decision. The question seemingly arose whether the synod had meant that all three offices must meet in one gathering, or whether the deacons might, or perhaps should, constitute a separate gathering. In most of the churches the elders and the deacons met separately. In some churches the deacons definitely

were not admitted to the consistory. In still others the deacons refused to meet with the consistory. Three years later, therefore, the synod of Dordt (1574), being questioned in regard to this matter, declared: that the meaning was that the ministers and the elders shall meet by themselves and the deacons by themselves. But in places where there are only a few elders, the deacons shall be permitted to be part of the consistory and, having been called into the consistory, they shall be obliged to come. The churches in the Netherlands (1905) decided that they must be reckoned with the consistory, if the number of el-

ders is three or less.

This same synod of Dordt (1574) decided that the alms were to be collected and distributed by the deacons personally. But it decided at the same time that the deacons were to render periodic reports to the consistory, whose advice they must seek in all weighty matters. The above-mentioned synod even declared it to be proper for the ministers to ask the deacons as well as the elders to visit the sick and comfort them with the Word, since this was in harmony with their office. A similar definition of the task of the deacons was given by the synod of Dordt (1578).

...to be continued □

Come, Lord Jesus

Rev. Cornelius Hanko

Signs of the Times (1) When Shall These Things Be?

Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

Matthew 24:1-3

It was Tuesday evening of the passion week when Jesus was leaving Jerusalem with His twelve disciples, who were filled with anxiety and perplexity. Jesus had spoken to chief priests, rulers, and others who were gathered in the temple. His message had been powerful and bore a note of absolute finality. The Lord had pronounced His woes upon the scribes and Pharisees, exposing their hy-

pocrisy. He had charged them, saying: "Ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" His concluding indictment still rang in the ears of His disciples: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37).

Even as a hen gathers her own chicks to herself, Jesus had gathered those given unto Him of the

Father, yet the wicked rulers had done their utmost to prevent Him. Therefore, shaking, as it were, their dust from His feet, He declared: "Behold, your house shall be left to you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matt. 23:38, 39).

While leaving the holy city the disciples looked back upon the city, and more particularly upon the beautiful temple with all its buildings which Herod had built and which now stood out boldly in the

Rev. Hanko is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

light of the setting sun. If Jerusalem would be destroyed and its inhabitants killed, would God no longer dwell among His people? Would this be the end of the ages? But how about Christ's kingdom?

Without further explanation Jesus assures them that not one stone would be left upon another, but all would be destroyed. God's judgment rested upon its wicked inhabitants. Israel as a chosen nation would cease to exist.

When the entire party had arrived at the Mount of Olives, where they likely intended to spend the night, four of the disciples, Andrew, Peter, James, and John, approached Jesus privately to ask Him in deep concern: "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

These were pertinent questions that burned in the souls of these men. In their minds they associated the destruction of the temple with the end of the world, for God certainly would not forsake His chosen people, His heritage and portion forever. But that only raises other questions: How about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem just two days earlier? The disciples were still expecting an earthly kingdom, deliverance from the power of Rome, and the glorious restoration of the throne of David. Even after the Lord's resurrection they asked Jesus: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

Now they must know, when will Jerusalem be destroyed? What signs will point them to the glorious appearance of the Son of Man when He comes into His kingdom? And when will all things be accomplished, when will be the culmination of the ages or the end of the world? Important questions indeed!

It is very obvious that the disciples were troubled, even perplexed. They realized that Jesus would soon be leaving them. Tremendous changes would take

place. Their first question was: When shall these things be?

These were crucial times. Old things would soon pass away. In a sense, all would become new. The dispensation of types and shadows was drawing to an end. All the prophecies and signs that spoke in the old dispensation of the coming of the Son of Man were being realized. Israel as a nation would no longer hold any typical significance. In fact, the nation itself would perish under the righteous judgment of God after they had openly and deliberately rejected Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. The presence of God would no longer be symbolized by the Most Holy Place in the temple, for the temple would be destroyed.

The new dispensation was about to dawn. Christ's death and resurrection would introduce a new era. The church would no longer be bound within the narrow confines of Israel as a nation but would become universal. God would gather His church from all nations, tribes, and tongues, even unto the ends of the earth and the islands of the sea. God would no longer dwell in a temple made by man, but would come to dwell in the hearts of His people by the Spirit of the exalted Christ. All God's promises spoken by the prophets of old would be realized. God's counsel would be accomplished at the consummation of the ages, the end of the world, "For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts" (Hag. 2:6, 7).

In a sense, this was fulfilled when Christ died, arose, ascended, and poured forth His Spirit in the church. Yet Hebrews 12:26, 27 informs us: "Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he has prom-

ised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven."

We should bear in mind that as the prophets of old stood on the mountaintops of revelation and beheld the future that was revealed to them, they saw the entire panorama of the new dispensation as one great future event. We can best understand this by picturing before our minds a large mountain range looming into view in the distance before us. Our first impression is that the distant peaks are all close together, almost in one line. Only when we arrive at the mountains and begin to travel through them do we realize that those various peaks are separated by large distances. Only by traveling many miles do we pass through the entire mountain range.

We now stand between the first and second coming of the Lord. For us He came once burdened with our guilt and sin, in order to bear it away. He is coming again in all His glory to make all things new. Thus we can even distinguish between various comings of the Son of Man throughout this dispensation. There was, first of all, His coming on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was sent into the church (John 14:28). There is also a coming for each of His saints. The Lord Himself tells us that He is now preparing a place for us and that when that place is ready, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). Moreover there is a continuous coming of Christ throughout this present dispensation, since our Lord is carrying out the counsel of God unto the culmination of the ages (Rev. 22:12). And there is His final arrival at the end of the ages (Matt. 24:30).

The disciples were still struggling with the problem. "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Literally we read: What shall be the sign of Thy coming, or Thy presence, and

of the culmination of the ages?

The question comes down to this: How will we know when Christ will establish His kingdom? And how is that related to the end of time when God's eternal counsel is realized and His plan for the salvation of His people is accomplished?

Actually, the rest of this chapter and also the next chapter serve as answer to those questions. Jesus gives the disciples and us various signs of His coming and of the end of the ages.

The question is just as pertinent today as it was when it was first asked: When shall these things be? The disciples certainly did not expect that two thousand years

would elapse before the end of the ages. In fact, Paul writes to the church at Thessalonica: "Now we beseech you ... that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand." And then he goes on to warn them that there must first be a falling away and the man of sin must be revealed, that is, the Antichrist must come (II Thess. 2:1-12). Peter also assures the churches in his second epistle that "the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). Only when all the elect are pre-

pared for glory will Christ return.

No man knows the day or the hour. Attempts have been made to determine it, dates have even been set, but all speculation is a bold defiance of the holy Scriptures. The end is determined by God and will come in His own time. Scripture reminds us: "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (II Pet. 3:8).

But there are definite signs that point us to the culmination of the ages and the return of Christ. These we hope to discuss, the Lord willing, as the account is given to us in the 24th chapter of Matthew's account of the gospel. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Mission Activities

The Foreign Mission Committee of our churches met in late November at the Hull, Iowa PRC. Most of the business that morning centered in the report of the recently completed trip of Pastors A. den Hartog and R. Smit to the Philippines. However, the committee also reported that they had just recently heard from the Secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana, that they will consider our churches' inquiries and requests with respect to sponsorship by the end of November. We should hear from them soon. In anticipation of this, our FMC planned to spend some time on the subject of Ghana at a special meeting after receiving that material.

Rev. B. Gritters, pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, reported to his congregation, by way of their monthly newsletter, "A Closer Look," about his and Rev. K. Koole's recently completed trip to

the Emerald Isle. They visited our churches' missionary there, Rev. R. Hanko, and his family, and the Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland. Since Pastor Gritters can say it so much better than I, I include a few of those highlights here for you as well.

The congregation had arranged that we stay in the homes of four different families of the congregation (the Hankos, Clarkes, Reids, and McAuleys). In addition, many members of the church wanted to have us over for a meal during our stay. The result was not only that I gained a good part of a stone in weight (no word on Rev. Koole), but also had interesting and profitable fellowship with the saints there.

Our consistory (Hudsonville) and the Domestic Mission Committee had given us a specific, written mandate with regard to the oversight of our missionary, his family, and work. Part of it was to conduct "church visitation" with the consistory there. But the most important part of our work was to discuss with the consistory the possibility of "sister-church relations" with them. Rev. Koole's place in our delegation was to rep-

resent our Committee of Contact with other Churches. The uniqueness of this proposed relation is that Covenant PRC is not a denomination but a single congregation. They have no classis or synod. Without them there is no possibility of protest or appeal from them so they seek that right through our churches. Synod will finally decide all these matters, but we made good progress and have a good hope that we will be able to relate in a profitable way to this new and little but quite mature congregation.

The next meeting with the consistory was for church visitation. We are glad to be able to report a rich peace and unity in their congregation in large part due to the diligent and faithful labors of the officebearers. The consistory reports their great love for our missionary among them. Rev. Hanko continues to be greatly appreciated for his faithful labors of love for the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Since I first visited in the early 90's, the group has doubled in size. There were over 60 people at each of the services we attended.

We also conducted family visitation with Pastor Hanko and his family on behalf of Hudsonville's

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

consistory. The Lord gives fruit to their work, which is a good encouragement to them. Their children are well adjusted and happy in their work and studies.

Pastor Gritters goes on to say that "if we learned anything, we learned of Covenant's great love for the truth of the Reformed faith and for its messenger, Pastor Hanko."

Sister Church Activities

In looking over recent bulletins sent from the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, we found a reference to a first in the history of that congregation. On Sunday, August 30, one of their members made confession of faith. Nothing very unusual about that, unless you consider that this was the first time in that church's short history that one who was baptized as an infant in their church made public confession of faith when reaching the "age of discretion." We pause and add our thanks for that evidence of the work of God's grace with their children.

Congregation Activities

In a follow-up to a recent council survey, the council of the South Holland, IL PRC decided that there was enough interest regarding a possible daughter church among their members. South Holland decided to arrange a meeting to which all those interested would be invited. The date and details of that meeting were to be announced later.

Following the evening service on Sunday, November 22, the Choral Society of the South Holland, IL PRC presented a concert for the spiritual enjoyment of their congregation.

Minister Activities

Rev. R. VanOverloop, pastor of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, sustained injuries from a bad fall in mid-November while working at their new church construction site. He fell about 18 feet, breaking ribs, his jaw, and bones in his face near his eye. He submitted to surgery later that week. He continues to recover, but at the time of this writing (early December) he still suffers from double vision and a misaligned jaw, which makes it difficult to

chew. The Lord willing he will begin a gradual resumption of his labors this week, starting with leading Bible studies, adding catechism teaching, and finally preaching, perhaps towards the end of December.

Food For Thought

"If the church maintains her separation from the world, she will always be despised. If she ever becomes popular, it will be sign of compromise."

— Reuel G. Lemmons □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 6, 1999, our parents and grandparents,

JAKE and JEANNE JABAAY,

will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary.

We, their children, would like to thank them for all the years of Christian love and godly instruction they've given us. They have led us by their faithful example. We pray that God will continue to bless them and keep them in His care.

"For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

- * Berend and Janine Meelker
Chad, Brent, Deanna, Andrew
- * Jim and Laurie Jabaay
David, Michael, Matthew, Katie
- * Rick and Jill Elzinga
Megan, Kristen, Kelsey, Jenni
- * Jason Jabaay

Redlands, California

NOTICE!

Remember, the committee needs pictures relating to the the PRC denomination for the 75th year anniversary of the PRC to be celebrated in the year 2000, the Lord willing.

Please send the pictures to:

Mr. Ken Elzinga
4465 100th St.

Byron Center, MI 49315

Remember to include your name and address on the back of each picture so they can be returned to you promptly.

THIRTY YEARS IN MINISTRY REV. RICHARD MOORE

Rev. Richard Moore recently commemorated thirty years in the ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Rev. Moore has served the congregations of Isabel, SD; Doon, IA; Edmonton, AB; and for the last 13th years in Hull, IA. We are thankful to God for his faithful labors in our midst. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:2-4).

Council, Hull PRC

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Society of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, IA express their Christian sympathy to fellow member Mary Ann Aardema in the death of her mother-in-law,

TRACY AARDEMA,

and her brother-in-law,

STANLEY AARDEMA.

May she and her family find comfort in the words of Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose."

Rev. R. Smit, Pres.
Gert VanDenTop, Vice-Sec'y.