



The Standard Bearer

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

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Elijah's Testimony Against Ahab

And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

I Kings 17:1

As we stand in the first month of a new year we tend to look ahead and try to anticipate somewhat what lies in store for us in the future. We know what we have just experienced in the previous year. We saw the world around us become increasingly more wicked, its cup of iniquity filling up ever so quickly. Looking ahead we know that it will not get any better. Man in his sin will only sin more. Ever more quickly all the laws which were based on biblical principles will be replaced by those which will please the heart of man.

Elijah, God's prophet to Israel,

Rev. Miersma is pastor of Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church of Lacombe, Alberta, Canada.

was also faced with much wickedness. On the throne was King Ahab, who along with his wife Jezebel had introduced the worship of Baal. In the darkness of idolatry the true prophets of God were being slain. In this darkness Elijah, like a lightning flash in a storm-darkened sky, appears unto Ahab. He whose name means "My God is Jehovah" was grieved that Israel had turned from Jehovah to Baal.

Even his appearance directed one to the true God. His upper garment was of black camel's hair, and about his loins he wore a leathern girdle. His apparel spoke of poverty, a renunciation of the world, a mourning and almost stern judgment. What a contrast to his surroundings as he came down the streets of Samaria to King Ahab. The terraced streets of the city spoke of luxury. Over against the effeminate, decrepit priests of Baal in their white linen clothes and

pointed hats appeared this no nonsense prophet of the Lord. Indeed, a wild, bold man amongst a cultured people.

It was during the darkest period of Israel's history that Elijah made his appearance. The kingdom of Israel was the kingdom of the ten tribes who had separated from the kingdom of Judah and the house of David. Jeroboam, their leader and first king, had erected golden calves through which the people were to worship Jehovah. From that point on, it was a rapid descent, for all the kings of Israel departed not from "the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin." Of Ahab we read, "And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him," and "Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him" (I Kings 16:30, 33).

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To make matters worse, Ahab had gone to the heathen king of Tyre and Sidon, Ethbaal, to ask for the hand of his wicked daughter Jezebel that she might be his wife. A more wicked wife he could not have found. If there were evil deeds to be done, she would be the one to introduce them. Thus, Baal worship was not only introduced in Israel, but it was enforced as the state religion. In order to root out of Israel the worship of God, she ordered that the prophets of the LORD be killed.

At her table in Samaria she fed four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred more at her summer palace in Jezreel. Baal was supposed to be the cause and sustainer of life, the god of all generative and reproductive powers in nature. A temple and altar had been built for him in the capital city of Samaria. Apostasy was now complete; the powers of darkness were in control of every phase of life. A darker picture one cannot imagine.

Into the midst of this horrible darkness, there appears Elijah with his sharp, short, crisp message. Truly it was a flash of light in the midst of utter darkness.

All of Israel as a nation stood before Baal, but here was a man who by his own confession stood before Jehovah. As we mentioned, even his name was a clear confession and a loud protest. *My God is Jehovah*, over against Baal and all the forces of darkness. The name pictures this prophet of God as standing before God in opposition to the wickedness of his day.

He swears an oath: "As the LORD God of Israel liveth." An oath, of course, is not to be taken lightly. To swear by Jehovah indicates that one stands in His presence and speaks before His face. It further indicates that one calls upon Jehovah as witness to the truth of one's words. That is a serious matter, to call upon the God of heaven and earth, the God of truth, the God that cannot lie, as

your personal witness to the truth of what you are about to say. That is why perjury is such a serious offense, punishable by law. How many people today have the fear of God in their hearts when they swear an oath?

Ahab heard on that day both an emphatic and an antithetical announcement. He heard a sermon that was, in a few short words, a strong confession, a powerful protest and condemnation of the powers of darkness. Elijah's God is Jehovah, the I AM. Baal is not God. Moreover, Jehovah is the God of Israel, a relation which has its source and eternal ground in God's free and sovereign election. Baal can never be Israel's God, despite the efforts of a wicked king and a cruel queen to enthrone him as lord over God's heritage.

This Jehovah, the God of Israel, is the living God. He acts; He sees and hears; He knows and speaks; He is mighty in all His works. On the other hand, Baal is dead — nothing but a dumb idol. Jehovah has life within Himself, and all life has its source in him. Baal, who claimed these powers, is nothing but an impostor and a usurper. Fearlessly Elijah, in a short staccato speech, declared to Ahab that he stood as the servant of this living God, Jehovah.

Elijah's message was short and to the point: "there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." This message, although bold and blunt, was entirely in harmony with the word of God as recorded in Deuteronomy 11:13-17: "And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou

mayest eat and be full. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you." We find this same warning a little later, in Deuteronomy 28:23, 24: "And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed."

This was the law of the Lord for His people Israel. They had sinned; they had turned to another god, Baal. Now this same Jehovah would reveal His power and bring to nought the powers of darkness as represented in Baal. Just as Elijah had said, this would be "according to my word." Ahab and the people had to know that the shut heavens, and the drought and the cracked earth that would soon follow, could not be attributed to any natural phenomenon. They would not be able to say that the drought was due to certain atmospheric conditions, or to the unusual position of the stars, or to an *El Niño*. Nor would they be able to attribute it to the displeasure and wrath of Baal. No, everyone would know that the terrible drought was of the Lord. It was His chastising them for their sin.

Furthermore, the Lord wanted Ahab and the people to know that His judgment upon them was connected with the servant of Jehovah, Elijah, with the word of him that standeth before God. Elijah must bring the announcement of Jehovah's judgment to the king. He shall have the power to shut and to open the heavens. It was exactly for this that Elijah had prayed. Concerning the prayer of the righteous, we read in James

5:17, 18: "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." Indeed, his soul had been sorely grieved at the sight of Israel's apostasy and the reign of the wicked in the land of the covenant. Thus, in harmony with the law of God he prayed earnestly that it might not rain. And his prayer was heard.

The Lord had a definite purpose in mind when He sent His servant with this testimony. There was a question that had to be decided in the minds of Israel. It is a question that is often raised in the minds of those in the power of iniquity: Who is God? Ahab, Jezebel, and apostatizing Israel answered: Baal is God. It is Baal who is the cause of life; it is Baal who gives rain and fertility, crops and prosperity. Therefore, the heavens and the earth must bear witness that Jehovah is God, and that He alone is Lord over all. There will be no rain. That is a terrible judgment. No rain means no crops. No crops means no food. No food means hunger and starvation for both man and beast. Witness Ahab later on as he and his servant Obadiah search the length and the breadth of the land for a little bit of grass so that what animals they had left would not die. Or Elijah when he was sent to the widow at Zarephath. She was gathering two sticks that she might take the little bit of oil and meal that was left and bake a cake for herself and her son. Then there would be no more; they would soon die. This drought from the Lord would be absolute. There would not even be any dew. One would expect that at least a morning dew would give refreshment to some degree, but there would not even be that little bit.

Where do we fit into this picture? What is the significance of this account for the church of to-

day? Elijah, as the servant of God, stood before Him. We must do likewise. The Lord has established His covenant with us, that beautiful relationship of friendship and fellowship. We are servants of the Lord while at the same time His friends, friend-servants. That means that we are to be conscious of standing before His face, conscious of being the objects of His grace. As such we will taste His goodness.

We began by saying that the world is becoming more and more corrupt, that we face a future that will see this only get worse. As God's children we must speak and act, fight and suffer. However, we will receive all the power and authority to do so from Him who is the Almighty. When we act and speak we will do so in His name and in His behalf. That was the secret of Elijah's power. Really, he had assumed a dangerous and apparently impossible stand. On the one hand, there is Baal, who was worshiped as God by thousands in Israel. If these thousands consisted merely of the ordinary people, that would be one thing, but Baal has control of the sword power, the government as it resided in Ahab the king. The mighty and the noble are all in the camp of this idol-god, Baal.

Then on the other hand there

is Elijah, a lonely, solitary figure. Does this make him afraid? Does this stop him from coming to the king with this message of terrible judgment? Would not King Ahab erupt in anger when confronted with his sin, when told that the terrible drought would occur because of his departure from Jehovah? It matters not to Elijah if Ahab is angry. He is afraid neither of the king nor of all his host behind him. Elijah knows that he has the victory because he stands before Jehovah.

We must take that same stand. We are called to be lights in the midst of darkness. This will not be easy. Constantly we will be brought face to face with the question of whom we shall choose? Will it be God or mammon? If we choose for God, will we not incur the wrath of all those who have chosen for darkness? Yes, that will happen. The forces of darkness hated the Lord Jesus and nailed him to the cross. They hated him; they will hate those that belong to him. However, instead of that being a liability, that is our comfort, that we belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He stands before God eternally. He has already won the victory for us. Our strength is in him. Let us go forward in that confidence, walking boldly as children of the light. □

How Long, Lord?

How long, O Lord, before the day
When Thou wilt call me home?
When sadness will be over
And heartaches will be gone?

How long, O Lord, before the day
When trials will be past:
When all our toil is ended
And we are safe at last?

O Lord, I long for that great day
When sin will be no more;
And we will dwell forever
On heaven's golden shore.

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus"
(Rev. 22:20b).

Annetta Jansen

ECT in the Pitiless Light of the 1998 Bull on Indulgences

In the last half-dozen or ten years, leading evangelicals, including J. I. Packer and Charles Colson, have been cooperating with prominent Roman Catholics, including Avery Dulles and Richard John Neuhaus, to unite evangelicals and Roman Catholics. They call the project "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (ECT). The document that announced the movement of union, and described it, was published in March, 1994 as "Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium."

The stated purpose of the union-movement is threefold: "co-belligerency" in a war against the depraving of Western culture; co-operation in evangelism; and the uniting of the church.

To convince evangelicals (Protestants who still profess the gospel) that such union with Roman Catholics is right, the evangelical leaders declare that evangelicals and Roman Catholics are one in the faith. Because justification is fundamental to the faith, the evangelical leaders affirm that evangelicals and Roman Catholics are agreed in the great doctrine of justification by faith.

With the endorsement of many other influential Protestants, including Bill Bright, Os Guinness, Nathan Hatch, Richard Mouw, Mark Noll, and Pat Robertson, and with the enthusiastic support of such powerful evangelical agencies

as *Christianity Today*, the movement threatens to attract and carry away multitudes of evangelicals.

The Pope's Bull on Indulgences

On November 29, 1998, ECT was exposed in the pitiless light of an official document issued by the pope of Rome. On that day the Roman idol published a bull entitled "*Incarnationis Mysteriorum*" ("The Mystery of the Incarnation"). In connection with the year 2000, which Rome with characteristic legalism and arrogance has declared "The Great Jubilee Year," the pope calls for an "abundant use of the gift of indulgence."

The papal bull is a public, full, emphatic, and unembarrassed insistence on the Roman Catholic theology and practice of indulgences.

"The Mystery of the Incarnation" declares that indulgences are "one of the constitutive elements of the Jubilee" of the year 2000. Indulgences are a "precious gift" to the people of God. They are nothing less than "an expression of the 'total gift of the mercy of God.'" An indulgence "frees one from what is called the 'temporal punishment' of sin." Indulgences draw on a vast treasury of meritorious good works performed by certain saints, especially Mary. These are their good works that exceeded God's demand upon them. The bull speaks of "a surfeit of love, of suffering borne well, of purity and truth." Christ has given this treasury of meritorious works to the Roman Catholic Church, that is, the

pope. The Roman Church, therefore, distributes the benefits of these works as and to whom she pleases.

Deliverance from the temporal punishment of sins by means of indulgences applies not only to people on earth but also "after death in the state called Purgatory." As the official attachment to the bull bluntly puts it, "The Jubilee indulgence also can be applied in suffrage to the souls of the deceased."

This official attachment indicates the "Conditions of Gaining the Jubilee Indulgence." These "conditions" are, in fact, the works that the people must do to merit deliverance from the "temporal punishment" of the sins of themselves and of their dead friends and relatives. The bullish appendix calls them "the prescribed works." They include: a pilgrimage to certain Roman Catholic church buildings; a visit to a needy person; abstinence for a day from smoking, alcohol, food, or sex (when Rome is in the mood, salvation comes cheap); giving money to the poor; donating money to worthy religious causes (read: the Roman Catholic Church and her agencies); and volunteering for some service of the community.

All of these works must be accompanied by prayers for the Roman pope ("prayer for the intentions of the Roman Pontiff") and "prayers to the blessed Virgin Mary."

Rome's Official Teaching on Indulgences

To the informed Christian, there is nothing surprising about any of this. It is all official, binding, everlasting Roman Catholic doctrine, laid down by the Council of Trent in the 16th century, maintained by Vatican II in this century, and expounded by the 1994 "Catechism of the Catholic Church."

On Roman teaching, indulgences are the Roman Catholic Church's forgiveness to a sinner of the "temporal punishments" of his sins. Christ has suffered the eternal punishment. The sinner himself must pay God the temporal debt of his sins, usually in purgatory.

An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, par. 1471).

Rome forgives the sinner this "temporal punishment" by drawing on the treasury of merits of the saints, especially Mary, and applying part of the treasury to the sinner's account.

An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins (*Catechism*, par. 1478).

But the sinner must himself earn this forgiveness. He earns it either by doing some good work or by giving money to the Roman Catholic Church.

Since the people in purgatory are presently suffering the "temporal punishments" of their sins in order to pay the temporal debts they owe to God, their suffering can be shortened if the living will only earn or purchase indulgences for them.

There is a Purgatory, and ... the souls there detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful.... Let the bishops take care that the suffrages of the faithful who are living, to wit, the sacrifices of masses, prayers, alms, and other works of piety, which have been wont to be performed by the faithful for the other faithful departed, be piously and devoutly performed, in accordance with the institutes of the Church; and that whatsoever is due on their behalf, from the endowments of testators, or in other way, be discharged.... ("The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent," Twenty-Fifth Session, "Decree Concerning Purgatory").

Through indulgences the faithful can obtain the remission of temporal punishment resulting from sin for themselves and also for the souls in Purgatory (*Catechism*, par. 1498).

Rejection of the Gospel of the Reformation

Proclaiming the Roman Catholic theology and practice of indulgences, the papal bull is a public, full, emphatic, and unembarrassed repudiation of the Reformation's biblical gospel of justification by faith alone.

Luther! Thou should'st be living at this hour: Evangelicalism hath need of thee; it is a fen of stagnant waters.

Indulgences deny that God's forgiveness by the gospel removes all the sinner's guilt and shame and imputes to him a perfect righteousness as his standing before God.

Indulgences deny that deliverance from the punishment of sin is gracious—the free gift of God through Jesus Christ.

Indulgences deny that the for-

giveness of sins is by faith.

Indulgences deny the fundamental gospel-truth of justification.

Denying justification, indulgences deny the cross of Jesus Christ as perfect and complete satisfaction for sin.

Indulgences deny every sinner any comfort: no sinner can be sure of eternal life; every sinner faces the terrifying prospect of purgatory.

Indulgences deny God: that god who is not alone glorious in the forgiveness of sinners out of mere grace by faith alone on the basis solely of the obedience of Jesus Christ is an idol.

A Bewitched Evangelicalism

It is not at all the purpose of this analysis of the recent papal bull on indulgences to convince Rome, even if it should fall into the hands of Roman clergy. Long ago, Calvin prefaced his critique of the decisions of the Council of Trent with the observation that he was not so foolish as to attempt to recall Rome to a sound mind. For, as Cato had said, the belly has no ears. In addition, Rome is hardened with "blind ambition." Rather, Calvin's purpose was to "let the godly see how abominable the impiety of those men is" ("Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote," in *Tracts and Treatises*, vol. 3, Eerdmans, 1958, p. 18).

In light of the pope's bull on indulgences, will the evangelicals now see that Rome's siren-song of the unity of the church has bewitched them?

Rome and, therefore, all Roman Catholics hold the theology of indulgences, repudiating the gospel of justification by faith alone. So much is this the case that the pope is willing to rub the noses of the evangelicals of ECT in Roman Catholic indulgences, even as the evangelicals are defending their carefully crafted agreement on justification.

The very abomination that occasioned the Reformation, as every

Protestant schoolboy knows, the Great Tetzels at Rome promotes publicly, worldwide, by a bull.

The light shed on ECT by the bull is pitiless.

It exposes ECT as those evangelicals' total, inglorious capitulation, whether deliberately or ignorantly, to unchanged, unchanging, and unchangeable Rome.

It exposes the agreement of the evangelicals and Roman Catholics on the faith, particularly justification, as a damnable sellout of the Reformation, that is, of the gospel of grace, whether deliberately or ignorantly.

It exposes ECT as apostasy of evangelical Protestants, whether

deliberately or ignorantly: back to the "Babylonian Captivity," back to the church of the gospel of indulgences, back to the false church.

May the God of all pity use the bull to bring the evangelical participants in ECT to repentance and to warn off all true Protestants who may be tempted by ECT.

— DJE

Rome's Impenitence

One other element of the papal bull, "The Mystery of the Incarnation," referred to above demands comment. This is the suggested repentance on the part of Rome for past sins, particularly her tortures and murders of "heretics" by the Inquisition.

The newspapers have been reporting the possibility that the pope will confess this and others of Rome's past sins. For some reason it is significant that this confession will coincide with the year 2000.

No doubt, when (as will be supposed) the pope does this, the world will be impressed by the humility of the pope and his church. Very likely, many Protestant churches will also be taken in and will immediately fall to confessing the sins of Protestantism, which for some of them will include the Reformation itself.

Rome is not thinking of confessing any sins of the Roman Catholic Church. The pope will not confess past iniquities of the Roman Catholic Church. He has never indicated that confession of the sins of the Roman Catholic Church is possible.

What the pope intends to do is to confess past sins of certain of the *members* of the Roman Catholic

Church, including, perhaps, those whom he will charge with responsibility for the Inquisition.

The Roman Catholic Church herself, as church, has not sinned. She has nothing to confess. But in the person of her head, the pope, she will confess the sins of some of her children, or members.

The pope makes such a confession in his recent bull.

We too, sons and daughters of the Church, have sinned and have hindered the Bride of Christ (that is, the Roman Catholic Church—DJE) from shining forth in all her beauty.

As the Successor of Peter, I ask that in this year of mercy the Church, strong in the holiness which she receives from her Lord, should kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of *her sons and daughters* (emphasis added—DJE).

Rome remains impenitent.

Mother is blameless; some of her children misbehaved.

This confession is deceitful and base. Blame the sons and daughters? When they acted in Rome's name? When they carried out her orders, did her will, and expressed her nature?

But this is crafty Rome to the end of the day.

The world and many of the

Protestant churches will be taken in. Not so the true church. She refuses to accept Rome's confession. It is not genuine. It is not confession of *Rome's* sins.

The true church charges Rome—not her "sons and daughters," but the Roman Catholic Church herself—with gross, public sins in the present time, as in the past:

1. by her theology of salvation by man's own will and works, she is an enemy of the gospel of grace;
2. by her fictitious doctrine of the papacy, she opposes the headship of Jesus Christ;
3. by her innumerable cruelties towards countless men, women, and children for no other reason than their confession of the pure Word of God (the Dutch Reformed and the French Huguenots come immediately to mind), she is guilty of persecuting the church of Christ. Her hands are red with the blood of the martyrs.

For these heinous, mortal sins, Rome must repent. She must repent *as the Roman Catholic Church*. She must repent *on behalf of herself*.

And then, since true repentance involves breaking with the sins, she must cease being Rome.

She does not. She will not. She cannot.

Rome remains impenitent. □

— DJE

■ Birth Control

Allow me some comments on the prohibition of birth control mentioned by Rev. Dale Kuiper in his article on "arrows" in the October 1, 1998 *Standard Bearer* which I believe reflects the teaching of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Of course abortion is sin and murder because God speaks of people in the womb. Of course the issues of life and death ultimately belong to God. But is outlawing birth control not akin to despising modern medicine and every other advancement of human discovery? Parents of children denied medical attention are rightly prosecuted. Muslims in Pakistan where maternal mortality is very high appeal to fate. Surely, medicines, the car, computers, and even weapons are morally neutral and in most cases a boon, though all are open to abuse. "Be fruitful" is the only command the human race has obeyed! But are we not given dominion over the creation? Presently, we can save life by medical means. No one would say that we

were interfering with God's prerogative. So, what about birth control? Onan sinned because he blatantly disobeyed God. Is birth control not one of the "all things" that Paul allows in I Corinthians 6:12? Are we to be like the Roman Catholics, who virtually force women who may neither be fit or financially able to care for a large family, to have one? It reminds me of the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned for lading people with heavy burdens that neither they nor the people could bear.

(Dr.) Julian Kennedy
Bournemouth, England

RESPONSE:

First of all, we refer you to our response to another letter in a previous issue of the *Standard Bearer*, where a defense of our article in the light of the covenant appears. We believe this will answer some of the concerns expressed in your letter dated November 21, 1998.

We remark as follows to your specific concerns:

1. Although the Protestant Reformed Churches do not have an official position on birth control

and family planning, I do believe that what was written reflects the emphasis we have in our churches. I learned these things growing up in our churches, and I certainly was confirmed in this teaching as I worked in the Word of God as a pastor for over thirty years.

2. Members of the Protestant Reformed Churches do not despise the advances of modern medicine. Nor do we blindly use every medication or device that comes along. A distinction should be made between those medicines which prevent disease, relieve pain, and aid healing on the one hand, and those which allow man to manipulate things not in his province, on the other.

3. If people marry for the sake of the covenant, and raise families for the sake of the covenant; if they take upon themselves the yoke of Jesus and learn of Him; then they find that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matt. 11:29-30). I have found that to be true in my life. And I deny the charge or implication of Phariseism. □

—Rev. D.H. Kuiper

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Jason Kortering

Buying Missions

Buying missions is a common practice in the church world today. It is done by local congregations as well as by individuals. One simply shops the smorgasbord of available opportunities, makes a decision, and forks

over the money. In such a process the conscience is soothed and one's holy obligation to do mission work is satisfied. Little attention is paid to the consequences. The mission field suffers desperately, and Christ's name is often blasphemed in the process.

We must be sure we are not guilty of buying missions.

The Temptation to Buy a Mission

The temptation arises in the

western ecclesiastical culture, where it is fashionable to do mission work. It is born in a milieu where doing mission work is looked upon as a fourth mark of the faithful church. Precious little regard may be paid to the three marks given to us in our Belgic Confession. There we have set forth the biblical norm of orthodoxy: biblical preaching, biblical administration of sacraments, and biblical Christian discipline. It is sad

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how little attention is paid to any of these marks. Why then consider adding a fourth? Fact is, if we hold to the first mark correctly, we know that faithful, biblical preaching includes mission work. Such preaching is not to be done only in the established church. Preaching is the mark of the faithful church also when she preaches the gospel to all the world as Christ has instructed her to do.

When we say mission work is "fashionable," we do not deny that it is the duty of the church to do such work. Rather, it is fashionable in the sense that the church does not look upon missions as hard work, requiring sweat and tears, done upon the wings of prayer. Rather, she is only interested in parading before others how much mission work she is doing, she likes to brag about how large a percentage of the annual church budget is spent on missions. Such churches prepare slick portfolios to display the missionaries' work; they detail how they engage the national leaders; and there will be a statistics' report of how successful they are, how many souls are won for Jesus, and how many more locals were added to the church in the foreign land. I say, if this is the emphasis on missions, then there exists a real temptation to buy missions.

Even well-intentioned individuals can fall into this trap. Sometimes they encounter such needs in their personal travel. Other times they may feel frustrated by their own church's lack of mission zeal and take it upon themselves to do mission work alone. Since material needs are evident, the easiest thing is to meet these needs with a monthly check. Such a person is guilty of buying missions.

That may sound judgmental, but the fact remains that mission work done from such a perspective is fraught with danger. And that danger is not just theoretical, else I might just leave it alone. It is practical. The wreckage of mission

work done from such a perspective is strewn all over this part of the world. We encounter it both in South Asia and Southeast Asia. Here is a church group getting their monthly check from an American church. Here is an individual struggling in his mission work, and he is getting his monthly check from an individual or two in America. We ask, who is supervising this work, to whom are you accountable? And the answer is that they write a letter occasionally to the ones who send the money and keep them informed of the progress. Once in awhile the person or church may send a pastor or delegation to have a look, but even this does not help. It makes matters worse. By this time the local people are well aware that the church is receiving money from "overseas" and are more than eager to show an interest in its endeavors. The presence of some "westerner" who will lead a service or conduct a seminar lends tremendous prestige to the local effort and lifts the standing of the pastor. Note with me, the emphasis is on carnal, earthly things, not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. If the church is engaged in buying missions, more than likely she is not really doing mission work.

Repeatedly in our travels this comes home to us when the local church wants us, too, to buy them. How difficult this is for us. We see all their poverty. They usually have great ideas on what they could do to serve our Lord if only they had more money. They can look at us with pleading eyes. How tempting it is just to send them a check each month to meet personal as well as mission needs. But we then would be guilty of buying a mission.

Three Levels of Buying a Mission Field

The first level consists in this, that the local congregation which is entrusted with the care of the mission field does nothing more

than raise funds and pay expenses.

Mission work must be done by the local instituted church. The authority which Christ gives the church to preach the gospel is vested in the local congregation. Our Reformed system of church government recognizes this when all missionaries of the Protestant Reformed Churches are called and sent out by a local church. The local churches designate some of their authority to the broader assembly in order to work together on missions. Out of this mutual concern, a mission committee serves the churches in common. This committee works with the local calling church to govern the work which is to be done. I am thankful to God that as churches we take this responsibility seriously. We are careful how we make decisions regarding any particular mission field. There are careful checks and balances in place to make certain that the work is done according to the Word of God. This may make doing mission work tedious at times, and seemingly slow things down, yet it eliminates the evil of authoritarian dictatorship (which is highly efficient, but woefully subject to abuse) on the one hand, and democratic individualism on the other (equally pragmatic and woefully capricious).

By contrast, a church that simply buys a mission shops around for a mission field. Usually contact is made with a para-church organization which can list many opportunities. All the church has to do is adopt a mission field, which means that it either furnishes the missionary or takes responsibility for one already in the field, prays for him, supports him, takes an oversight over him—but does it in the context of combined mission efforts. Depending on the arrangement and willingness of the local church to be involved, this arrangement does tempt the local church to be satisfied simply to maintain cursory contact with the mission-

ary, pay the expenses, and display his work as their own. How frequently missions become nothing more than paying bills and basking in the public relations advantage of being a "mission-minded church"! Such a church does not actually do missions, it simply buys a mission. In the measure that that church either cannot or refuses to take full responsibility for making the decisions and nurturing the missionary and his work, in that measure it is guilty of buying missions.

The second level of buying missions is that the local church which is responsible for doing mission work does it by paying the monthly expenses of the nationals (local pastor or evangelists in the foreign land).

This appears to be a very plausible and frugal way of doing mission work. We quickly learn that western missionaries have serious handicaps in third-world countries. First, being western they carry cultural baggage which does not help but hinders their being accepted. Second, they carry a tag on them which indicates wealth. Everyone knows they have money, certainly a whole lot more than the locals. My wife and I have discovered, too, that the locals in third-world countries know westerners have a generous spirit as well. There are times when locals will approach my wife and me and bypass everyone else. We are pegged as "softies." Third, it is very difficult if not impossible for a western missionary and family to live anywhere near the level of the locals. If they try, they will encounter diseases, hardships, and psychological difficulties which almost inevitably will drive them from the field. History of missions shows that western missionaries have great difficulty in living like the locals on their level, but almost always *had* to take with them bundles of material goods which they needed to survive. Finally, so much time is spent on survival that pre-

cious little time is even available to do the Lord's work. All of this makes inefficiency and inadequacy inevitable. How much better to train and pay the locals to do the work among their own people and race!

This reasoning, however, quickly leads to a pitfall: just pay the expenses of the national pastors and let them do mission work. How easy! They are far more equipped to do the work. They know the language, can handle the hazards of travel, have bodies which have developed enough antibodies to throw off bacterial and viral infections. They have better rapport with the locals. They can use contextualization in a good sense and relate the gospel of Christ in the context of local false religions. Besides all this, they can live so cheaply. If we pay them only US\$15.00 a month they can do more than survive, they can function very well. What western missionary can do anything like this? So the solution is simple. Train the local pastor and pay his fee and we buy another mission.

The problem lies here, in the payment of a monthly fee. What a headache this produces. Often the consequences are horrendous. We make such a worker dependent on foreign money. Just by virtue of the fact that he receives foreign funds his standing rises and complicates his work among the people. If he is foreign educated (that is, in a country other than his own), the problem is accentuated because his standing has greatly increased, he claims to have more knowledge, and he must have more privileges because of his training. Other factors enter the picture of course, and circumstances may vary from place to place, but the problems are real and have been well documented in missions' articles. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, April 1998, for example, has a case study in an article entitled, "When the Mission Pays the Pastor." More detailed treatment is

given in the book *Missions and Money*, by Jonathan J. Bonk. The point I want to make is this: simply paying money, even to local workers, is not doing mission work. It is buying missions.

The third level of buying missions is by sending money to the local church in the field and permitting them to make use of it as they see fit. Details of this method are developed in the booklet entitled "Funding Third-World Missions, the pursuit of true Christian partnership," by Luis Bush.

Using this method, the church which is responsible for maintaining the mission field includes in its work the financial support of the local churches in the field by sending to their central office a monthly check which they are required to distribute among their own churches as they decide the need. I do not place this method in the same category as the first two. I believe there is a real place and need for doing such things. But what it requires is a mature mission field which can handle money on its own. This approach is being used by the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore in their work in Myanmar. We have discovered that if we take this approach in a field which is *not* well-developed and does *not* have in place the necessary structure for church government, with the checks and balances it provides, this method brings about many of the same problems as the second level.

For a church to do mission work *just* by sending a check to the field and letting them manage it for themselves is also wrong. Thankfully the ERCS is not simply sending money this way, but actually works hard at bringing the gospel and requiring accountability as Christ requires.

Solving Money Problems in Missions

I am hardly so foolish as to imagine that I can propose solu-

tions to such a persistent and pervasive problem in the few lines I have remaining in this article. Yet there are certain things we do well to consider that may help us work toward solutions.

First, the preaching of the gospel must always have the emphasis in missions. Money matters must arise out of this activity. If we lose this priority, mission committee meetings will be nothing more than solving money problems. In initial stages the preaching may involve western missionaries, but the goal must be that the locals are trained to preach the gospel. This work must be done, or missions is not being done. Hence, the training of local pastors and missionaries must be given priority. The chief role of the western church today is in the area of theological training. No one can do that better than mature churches who have the benefit of theological development and mission experience. The locals can bring the Word to their own people in their own land better than anyone else.

Second, we must come to grips with our perception of money and wealth in connection with missions. If western churches are going to continue in mission work, they will have to revamp their entire attitude toward money. All of us are living on too high a financial level. If the church is going to send out missionaries to third-world countries, such missionaries will have to take far more seriously what it means to become poor for the gospel's sake. We must not imagine that Christianity and wealth go together. I had to re-think my concept of gospel and poverty, and I concluded that God does not intend for everyone to become richer or rich through the gospel. We must accept poverty as a way of life which God ordains. Any missionary among the poor will have to be willing to become materially poor for his hearers' sake or he might as well stay home. If not, his life-style will contradict all he

has to say. If the *church* desires to send such a one out of their midst, the congregation will have to abandon their own attitude toward wealth or the church will never produce a missionary who has such a spirit. Furthermore, we must not imagine that it is our duty to elevate the economic level of those who become Christians. The bottom line is we have to come to terms with poverty.

Herein lies the temptation to buy a mission, we think we can stay rich and still help the poor in missions.

Thirdly, it is amazing how much good mission work "poor nationals" can do in the midst of their poverty. Jobs are very scarce, and the few that are available pay only enough to earn food to keep alive. It may be that full-time pastors will be able to bring the Word more effectively with minimal financial support. The biblical principle is that he who brings the Word lives from the Word. Where will they get support if they do not get some foreign money? The key is to help the people of the congregation so that they can support their pastor. This is biblical. When we first discussed this subject in the Joint Mission Committee we focused on helping the pastors so that they could earn a little on the side, following the tent-making idea. Yet, when Brother Armand of the Philippines helped us, he taught us that if we help the people to raise pigs or chickens, or to grow mushrooms, or teach the ladies to do hand-work, they would in turn have money to pay the pastor and the pastor would not be elevated above them financially. This we call a self-help program, which we are now seeking to implement. Our Projects Committee is arranging for more trips to Myanmar, and they are working closely with the deacons and Joint Mission Committee. We have made a decision that on a projected quarterly basis, we will decrease the monthly payments to the churches as we provide them

the means to help themselves.

Finally, there is much need for diaconal work. It is also biblical that the poor must be attended. This is true for the individual Christian as well as for institutions which minister to the orphans and aged. We are just beginning to give training to the local churches in the work of deacons and how they are to function. Already we handle requests for the poor, especially medical, through the deacons in Myanmar and in Singapore. They give us a list of needs which they judge important, and the deacons in Singapore consider this and provide the deacons in Myanmar with the funds. This is in an infant state and being developed through practice, but it too is an important way to meet financial needs in the mission field.

Doing these things, we conclude that we are not simply buying a mission. God has given to us mission work and the potential of many fields, more than we can handle for the present. They all have one thing in common, they suffer lack of basic needs: food, medicine, clothing, medical treatment, and such like. The pastor has to work in order to earn even the little he can, which still is not adequate for his family. He learns to live with poverty. But by the combination of self-help programs and diaconal mercy, we trust that God will use us to enable the saints in Myanmar and elsewhere to do the work Christ has called them to do, to preach the gospel and serve Him. Under His blessing and the presence of the Holy Spirit, they seek to save lost souls in the midst of their poverty.

I trust this article will force every reader to ask, "Am I willing to become poor for the sake of the gospel." If so, there ought to be plenty of missionaries and funds to support them.

Then we will not go out to buy missions. We will, by the grace of God, actually do mission work. May God be praised in this. □

Judging: The Christian's Duty (2)

An Examination of Pertinent Scripture Passages

In the previous article we examined the prevalent view that we are not to pass judgment on the ideas and practices of others but are to tolerate and approve their ideas and practices. That this view is present even in the church is due to the fact that the church has lost her consciousness of God's holiness. We evaluated this view as dangerous, godless, and unscriptural.

In this article we will examine the Scripture passages which are pertinent to the issue, in order to understand that God requires judgment of us, and to see from God's Word *how* we must, and must not, judge.

It will be helpful at the outset to set forth a few principles which must guide us in our interpretation of Scripture. Knowing and applying these principles should prevent us from coming to a wrong understanding of Scripture's teachings on this issue.

That the Bible is the Word of God is the most fundamental principle. All Scripture is the Word of God, according to II Timothy 3:16. This means that we will find in the Bible no contradictions, but only the truth, for Jehovah is the God of

truth, and His Word is truth (John 17:17). Therefore, we may be sure that we will not find in Scripture some texts which, properly understood, condone intolerance and others which condemn intolerance; rather, we will find the one, consistent truth regarding this matter. Furthermore, because God makes His truth *clearly* known, we expect that Scripture will state that truth clearly.

A second fundamental principle is that Scripture interprets Scripture. This means that when we examine Scripture to see what it teaches about an issue, we must examine *all* pertinent passages. If in doing so we find some verses which *appear* to contradict others, we must first come to an understanding of the easier verse, and then we will be able to explain the more difficult verse in its light.

Third, we must remember that, in order to understand a text of Scripture correctly, we must consider it in the light of its context. A part of Scripture—whether a whole verse, several verses, or part of a verse—cannot legitimately be used to support one's ideas or actions if the text is not explained in light of its context. The context will often qualify the teaching of the text, by indicating more specifically *in what situations* a command applies, or *how* a command is to be carried out.

Our examination of the various Scripture passages which relate to the topic of judging and tolerance

will proceed on the basis of these principles. Because the word "judge" and its related noun and verb forms are used many times in Scripture, we will not attempt to examine every text in which they are found. Rather, we will focus on the main passages which are used to support the idea of tolerance, and we will briefly explain a few passages which clearly require that the child of God discern between right and wrong.

Of those passages which are used to support the idea of tolerance, Matthew 7:1 is perhaps the most often quoted. The text reads: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." It is clear that Jesus here forbids judging. The question, however, is whether Jesus forbids *all* judging, or only a *certain kind* of judging. Verse one by itself does not give us an answer to this question. Those who quote only verse one to condemn intolerance ignore the context, verses 2-5, and thus assume that the verse forbids all judging and intolerance. However, one who reads verses 2-5 sees that Jesus does not forbid all judging, but only *hypocritical* judging. The text in its context (Matthew 7:1-5) reads as follows:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest

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not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

Jesus tells the Jews in verse one not to judge. In verse 2 He gives the reason why they must not judge: the standard which they use to judge others will be the very same standard which others use to judge them. They must not ignore their own sins while condemning the same sins in others. To do this is to judge with a double standard, to judge hypocritically. "Is it not hypocritical to condemn the brother for a little fault, or even to try to help him overcome this fault, when you yourself are guilty of a great fault?" This is the question Jesus was putting before the people.

Notice that the sin of the two sinners (the person and his brother) is the same in two respects. First, it is the same in nature: in both instances a piece of wood was in a person's eye. Second, it is the same in that both were currently sinning: the piece of wood was in their eye at the moment. The difference between the two faults is only one of size: one is small, the other great. For one whose sin is great to condemn one whose sin is small, yet being the same sin, is hypocritical (cf. v. 5). In other words, a woman who is aborting an eight-month fetus is in no position to rebuke a man who kills a bank teller, and the homosexual is in no position to criticize unfaithfulness in a heterosexual marriage!

Matthew 7:1, taken in its context, does not forbid all judging and intolerance, but only hypocritical judging and intolerance. In fact, it does require of us that, after repenting of our own sins, we condemn the brother's sin as sin, and help him turn from it. "First cast

out the beam out of thine own eye," Jesus says, "then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (vs. 5). Jesus commands *genuine*, not *hypocritical*, intolerance of sin which the brother commits.

John 8:7 and 11 are also important. The context is the story of the woman who was caught in the very act of adultery and was brought to Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees. In verse 7, Jesus says to the scribes and Pharisees: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." In verse 11 He speaks to the woman: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." The advocates of tolerance use these words to argue that one should not condemn others, because he is no better than they.

Although we will explain what it means to judge in more detail later, understand for now that when one judges, he gives a verdict: guilty or innocent. After one is judged, he is sentenced: the guilty person is condemned (sentenced to punishment) and the innocent is set free. The point is that judging and condemning are two distinct actions, related but not identical.

Bearing this in mind, notice that Jesus did in fact judge this woman, but He did not condemn her. By telling her, "Go, and sin no more," Jesus indicates that she *did* sin. In itself, the Pharisees' accusation was correct, and Jesus judged sin to be sin. This shows *intolerance* of the sinful action! Following Jesus' example, we must tell sinners to show evidence of genuine repentance by no longer committing sin.

While Jesus did judge the woman, He did not condemn her. She could go free; she would not be put to death. The gospel for penitent sinners is: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). This mes-

sage Jesus gives the woman: Jesus would Himself be condemned for her! He would bear her punishment, that she might go free!

Jesus' answer to the Pharisees exposes their hypocritical judgment in the matter. (Their primary purpose, of course, had nothing to do with the woman; it was to trap Jesus in His own words. Yet Jesus knew that the Pharisees prided themselves in their self-righteousness, and responded in light of this fact.) The Pharisees, Jesus reminds them, were also guilty of sin, and specifically of adultery, whether in the act or in the heart. Because they also were not free from sin, they were as worthy of death as she was. So, by wondering what judgment she ought to have received, they revealed their own hypocrisy and wrong motivation.

John 8:7 and 11 teach us how to deal with others who sin. Verse 11 teaches us that we must desire the sinner's repentance; verse 7 teaches us that we must not do so hypocritically, with wrong motives, or in an improper manner. The passage does not mean, however, that we must never hold each other accountable for our sins (that is, judge sin to be sin).

One more passage which is frequently quoted is the one in which we are commanded to love one another. Actually, many passages in Scripture give this command. John 13:34 is one of them. There we read: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."

What is love, and what does love involve? Love is a bond of friendship, which manifests itself in seeking the good of the other person. This might mean seeking the other person's bodily good: if he is hungry, thirsty, cold, or naked, we must take care of that person's physical needs. It could also involve seeking the person's spiritual good. If he or she is walking in a way that is contrary to God's law and thus displeasing to

the Lord, we must seek to turn that person from his or her sinful way, in love for that person.

In John 13:34, Jesus does not command everyone to love. The command comes to His disciples—the twelve men whom Jesus specially chose to follow Him during His earthly ministry. The command did not even come to *all* of the twelve, but only to eleven of them. One of them, Judas Iscariot, who would later betray Jesus in his hatred for Jesus, was not present. That the eleven disciples were the ones to whom Jesus spoke is significant. As Jesus loved these eleven, they must love each other! The command does not mean that all men must love all men; rather, it means that in the church (represented by the eleven disciples), the saints must love each other as Jesus loved the church, giving Himself for it.

Such love does not rule out intolerance of wrong ideas or actions on the part of fellow saints. True love seeks the salvation of the fellow saint. Thus true love seeks to turn the saint from his or her sins (James 5:20).

Another passage which, although apparently not used by advocates of tolerance, might seem to support their position is Romans 2:1-3, which reads:

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

The "man" whom Paul addresses must be understood to be every man and any man. Paul, having explained in the last part of chapter 1 the sins to which the world gives itself over (note the

context!), now says that each and every man who condemns these sins, while doing the same things himself, is inexcusable. We can expect God's judgment upon us, if we live in the same sins which we condemn in others! Paul's point is also to warn against hypocritical judging—a warning which we all need. However, the text does not forbid us to judge *rightly*!

Other passages of Scripture positively command us to judge. One passage which clearly does so is John 7:24. This is set in the context of Jesus' discussion with the Jews who question His doctrine, and have accused Him of having a devil (John 7:20) and of breaking the Sabbath day by healing a man on the Sabbath (John 5:1-16). To them He says: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." By saying "Judge not," Jesus does not mean to forbid judging as such, but to forbid a certain manner of judging, as the positive part of this verse makes clear. We may judge, but when we do so we must judge righteously.

Outward, superficial judgment—that is, judging simply on the basis of what *appears* to be the case, without knowing all the facts—is rash, unfair, undiscerning judgment which is contrary to the ninth commandment of God's law. God hates such judging. Righteous judgment is carried out using the law of God as the standard by which to discern whether what appears to be the case actually is the case.

I Corinthians 5 is an important chapter as regards the positive duty of judging. First, in verse 3, Paul states under the inspiration of the Spirit that he has passed judgment on a member of the church in Corinth who was living in the sin of fornication. His judgment was "to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." This

is a bold judgment on his part. Second, in verses 9-13, Paul reminds the saints of their duty to judge people that are within the church, as to whether or not they are obeying the law of God. Those who claim to be Christians and are members of the church, but who are also judged to be impenitently disobedient to any commandment of God's law (cf. vv. 9-10, which is not an exhaustive list) must be excluded from the church's fellowship. Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, tells the church not to tolerate impenitent sinners.

Other passages also indicate that it is our responsibility to judge. Jesus asks the people in Luke 12:57, "Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" Jesus rebukes the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:23, saying: "ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." It was their duty, according to the law, to judge—but they had failed in this duty. Paul prayed that the love of the Philippians would "abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phil. 1:9). He tells the Corinthians, "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say" (I Cor. 10:15).

Some passages of Scripture seem to forbid judging, while others clearly require it. Studying the contexts of those which seem to forbid judging, we find that judging itself is not actually forbidden, but a wrong kind of judging. God hates hypocritical judging! But God loves righteous judgment on the part of His children. That He loves it is clear from the fact that He commands it, and has given His law as a standard by which to do it.

It is, therefore, the Christian's duty to judge. This duty will be set forth positively in the next article. □

■ The Authorized King James Bible—Introduced by...the devil??

Well, not quite. Obviously, however, Satan himself is behind the deception. In his attempt to remove the Word from the hands of the child of God, he seeks to create doubt and question about that Word. He has done so by the introduction of a multitude of translations and paraphrases of the Bible. Now, he has made an additional attempt to make of the Word a laughing-stock among the people—and hopefully with the Christian.

Business Week, November 23, 1998, reports:

The latest buzz in British book circles is an ancient text with all the trappings of a modern best-seller. Although copies have been in bookstores just one month, the publication has already garnered much press attention and the threat of a blasphemy charge. And it's coming to U.S. bookstores this spring.

The surprise hit? The Authorized King James Version of the Bible. Pocket-size editions of the Bible's individual books, introduced by celebrity writers, to be exact.

...Canongate's (the British publisher—GVB) flash of insight was to take the 400-year-old translation and package it in secular marketing garb—from snazzy promotional displays to arresting cover art and high-profile media events—usually reserved for novels. Canongate broke the Bible into its 66 books and produced 12 of them in slim paperbacks. In Britain, where they were launched on Oct. 1, they cost just one pound

(\$1.70) each—designed to draw impulse buyers. The publisher added striking black-and-white cover art and arranged the text in prose, modernizing the format of the verses. But what really sets the Pocket Canons apart are the prefaces, penned by a wide range of thinkers and celebrities—Australian rock star Nick Cave on *Mark*, feminist writer Doris Lessing on *Ecclesiastes*, and atheist and evolutionist Steven Rose on *Genesis*. *Revelation* is introduced by British bad-boy author Will Self, whose exploits include getting caught snorting heroin on a campaign trip for former Prime Minister John Major last year. Self describes *Revelation* as a "sick text" that appeals to nut cases. It's the best-seller of the series. Even more controversial are novelist Louis de Bernieres' views on *Job*. The author of British best-seller *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, a dark comedy, refers to God as a "sarcastic megalomaniac" and a "frivolous trickster."

The article concludes:

Twelve more books are scheduled for release next year. So far, the biggest name among the preface writers is Bono, lead singer of musical group U2. The Irish rock star, better known for packing stadiums than pondering the nature of God, will give his interpretation of *The Book of Psalms*. Can Oprah on *Lamentations* be far behind?

The article hardly requires additional comment. The combination, as presented in the article, represents an attempt to link the Word of God with the word of man—or worse, the testimony of the devil through men. It is designed not only to gender financial gain, but to create doubt and mockery. Yet one wonders even then, if perhaps God would not use something like this to testify to elect sin-

ners and bring them to the proper preaching of the Word and the cross of Christ. Surely, however, it will be used to testify to the unbeliever of judgment and punishment to come. These will be condemned not only by God's testimony in creation, but now also by the very Word they read—though read in mockery and scorn.

■ Another Reminder of the Times?

An article in the *Denver Post*, November 28, 1998, struck my attention again. It is a reminder that the visions of John in *Revelation* are coming to pass. The seven seals now appear to be superseded by the seven trumpets. The article had this by-line: "A disastrous year. Storms, floods, droughts and fires worldwide caused a record damage in 1998. The total for this year so far exceeds estimates of all damage for the 1980s." The article itself states:

Violent weather has cost the world a record \$89 billion this year, more money than was lost from weather-related disasters in all of the 1980s, and researchers in a study released Friday blame human meddling for much of it.

Preliminary estimates by the Worldwatch Institute and Munich Re, the world's largest reinsurer, put total losses from storms, floods, droughts and fires for the first 11 months of the year 48 percent higher than the previous one-year record of more than \$60 billion in 1996.

This year's damage also was far ahead of the \$55 billion in losses for the entire decade of the 1980s. Even when adjusted for inflation, the 1980s losses, at \$82.7 billion, still fall short of the first 11 months of this year.

In addition to the material losses, the disasters have killed an estimated 32,000 people and displaced 300 million—more than the

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population of the United States – according to the report.

The study is based on estimates from Worldwatch, an environmental research group, and Munich Re, the Frankfurt, Germany-based re-insurer, which writes policies that protect insurance companies from the risk of massive claims that might put them out of business.

The report says a combination of deforestation and climate change has caused this year's most severe disasters, among them Hurricane Mitch, the flooding of China's Yangtze River and Bangladesh's most extensive flood of the century.

"More and more, there's a human fingerprint in natural disasters in that we're making them more frequent and more intense and we're also ... making them more destructive," said Seth Dunn, research associate and climate change expert at the institute.

One wonders: is it the "human fingerprint" or also, and especially, the "fingerprint of God"?

■ The Gospel from Science?

It is remarkable that in these end-times, when atheism and evolutionism appear to be the prevalent views of the age, there come views which point out the impossibility of both. An interesting article by George F. Will in *Newsweek*, November 9, 1998, presents a case for a "First Cause."

Soon the American Civil Liberties Union, or People for the American Way, or some similar faction of litigious secularism will file suit against NASA, charging the Hubble Space Telescope unconstitutionally gives comfort to the religiously inclined. For people so inclined, science, especially cosmology, is augmenting, not subverting, the sense of awe that undergirds religious yearnings. Hubble recently sent back to Earth—to this strangely lush speck in one of perhaps 50 billion galaxies—infrared images of the faintest, most distant galaxies ever

seen. They could be more than 12 billion times 6 trillion miles away....

Sometime—perhaps half a billion years—after that explosion (the "Big Bang"—GVB), the first stars formed and light returned. Abraham Loeb, a theoretical astrophysicist, says, "Suddenly, the universe lit up like a Christmas tree." How? That is an interesting question. Why? That is a *really* interesting question.

One that interests Gregg Easterbrook in his fascinating, elegant new book, "Beside Still Waters: Searching for Meaning in an Age of Doubt"....

In the late 1920s astronomy established that numerous galaxies near ours are racing away from us and each other at millions of miles per hour. This, and the fact that the universe is bathed in radiation, suggested that matter and motion originated rather as Genesis suggests, *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, in a stupendous explosion of light and energy.

For extravagant implausibility, writes Easterbrook, nothing in theology can hold a candle to what science says about the Big Bang. From a pinpoint of compressed potential—"a microscopic, transparent, empty point in primordial space-time"—it sent a cosmos hurtling outward at an unimaginable speed. The forces loosed were—are—remarkably (miraculously?) balanced:

If the Big Bang had been slightly less violent, the expansion of the universe would have been less rapid, and would soon (in a few million years, or a few minutes—in any case, soon) have collapsed back on itself. If the explosion had been slightly more violent, the universe might have dispersed into a soup too thin to aggregate into stars. The odds against us were—this is just the right word—astronomical. The ratio of matter and energy to the volume of space at the Big Bang must have been within about one quadrillionth of 1 percent of ideal.

This good news—that is the meaning of "gospel"—from science suggests, Easterbrook says, "a buoyant view of our being." Life is so improbable it must

somehow be favored by something. By some First Cause, "to which," said Aquinas, "everyone gives the name of God."

...What stance should humanity take toward a poignantly welcoming universe? One of gratitude for life, which begins to look less like a chemical fluke and more like what one Nobel biologist calls "an almost obligatory outcome," given the conditions caused by the First Cause....

...Science increasingly validates a heartfelt—and rational—"Eureka!" in response to the (literally) cosmic surprise of life. As playwright Tom Stoppard puts it, "The idea of God is slightly more plausible than the alternative proposition that, given enough time, some green slime could write Shakespeare's sonnets." To say no more (but this is saying a lot), what *is* is staggeringly implausible, and that is theologically suggestive.

All this again shows the truth of Romans 1:18-25. Yet it is remarkable that, apart from reference to the long age of the universe, etc., there can be a recognition that all things did not simply "evolve" and develop into their present state just by chance—but that there must have been divine direction. True faith, of course, not only recognizes that there must have been a "First Cause" which determined all things, but also that the Bible clearly and inerrantly reveals what God did and both how and why. □

REMINDER

Remember, the committee for the 75th Anniversary booklet needs your pictures by the end of January! See January 1 issue for address.

The Relation of the Deacons to the Consistory (2)

Another consideration in this matter of the proper relation of the deacons to the consistory is the seeming difference between Article 30 of the Netherland Confession and the Church Order. The Confession definitely includes the deacons in the consistory, while the Church Order seems to exclude them. This raises the question: if there really is conflict between the Confession and the Church Order, which of the two should have priority? To this question Dr. K. Dyk answers: the Confession. In like manner does Prof. Martin Monsma. Speaking for the committee for Church Order revision, Prof. Monsma writes: "It is worthy to note that Guido deBrès, the primary author of our Belgic Confession, in many instances modeled our Confession after the French Reformed Confession, which French Reformed Confession was drafted with the help of Calvin himself. He sent three of his colleagues with a draft to the assembly of French Reformed Churches which was to write the French Confession. This French Confession has the following: 'We believe that the true Church of Christ is to be ruled according to the mode of government which our Lord Jesus Christ has instituted, namely that there are pastor, el-

ders, and deacons.'" To substantiate the above, Monsma refers to Dr. K. Dyk (*De Eenheid der Ambten*; English tr.: *The Unity of the Offices*).

With respect to the question concerning the conflict between the Confession and the Church Order, Monsma states that it is the position of the Revision Committee that "our Creeds should have priority over our Church Order. The Creeds state fundamental principles; the Church Order is a body of rules based on the Word of God and the Creeds, but it is in many instances a set of practical provisions according to which the churches have agreed to rule themselves." The Church Order Revision Committee, therefore, followed the Confession in the proposed revision. Article 28 of the Revised Church Order, which is to replace Article 37 of the present Church Order, reads as follows: "In all Churches there shall be a consistory composed of the ministers of the Word, the elders and the deacons.... In the interest of efficiency separate meetings may be held by elders and by the deacons. However, in churches in which the number of officebearers is five or less, no such separate meetings shall be held."

It is also significant to note, in this connection, that although the Confession antedates the Church Order by some 56 years and the fathers of Dordt certainly were acquainted with Article 30 of the Confession, yet no attempt was made then, or since, to alter the article. This certainly would have been done if they considered it contrary to Scripture.

As far as the Church Order is concerned, it seems to take a rather conflicting position with respect to the question concerning the relation of the deacons to the consistory. On the one hand it seems to exclude the deacons from the consistory, but on the other hand it includes them again. By the frequent use of the expression, "the Consistory and the deacons," the Church Order seems to exclude the deacons from the consistory. But on the other hand, by permitting that the deacons be added when the consistory is small, and even demanding this when the number of elders is three or less, the Church Order evidently includes the deacons in the consistory again. What is more, the Church Order nowhere states what constitutes a large consistory. That is simply left to the judgment of each local consistory. If we consider that, in comparison with some of the churches in the Netherlands, we really have no large consistories here, not even in the Christian Reformed Churches, then it is evident that the Church Order leaves it pretty well up to the local consistory whether or not they want to include the deacons in the consistory.

Besides, according to the Rev. P.Y. DeJong (*The Ministry of Mercy*), this provision of adding the deacons to the consistory was universally carried out, since most of the congregations began with a small number of officebearers. It was only as the congregations grew that the need for separate meetings of the deacons was felt. Yet even in those congregations where such

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separate meetings of the deacons were inaugurated, no move was made for separate meetings of the elders, and consistorial work was still done in the presence and with cooperation of the deacons. It is only comparatively recent that several consistories of larger congregations excluded the deacons from the consistory, at least in as far as the Church Order permits this.

It has been argued that when the deacons were added to the consistory, they only served in an advisory capacity. But this is hardly in harmony with the facts. For, in the first place, that certainly would be in conflict with the purpose of the Church Order. The purpose of the Church Order in adding the deacons to the consistory undoubtedly is to avoid putting the power of government in the hands of a few, and so check the tendency toward hierarchy which is always present in the church. But if the deacons are added merely in an advisory capacity, the power remains in the hands of a few, and the purpose of the Church Order is defeated.

But in the second place, even if it were true that the deacons are added only in an advisory capacity, it would make no essential difference. For even though it be in an advisory capacity, they nevertheless are then busy in the work that pertains to the elders. The deacons then express judgment in matters pertaining to government and discipline, and although the final decision may then be left with the elders, the deacons nevertheless cooperate and use their influence in reaching that decision. That certainly does not belong to the office of deacon as such.

In the third place, it often happens in small consistories that a deacon is delegated to classis when the elder is unable to attend. But when a deacon is delegated to classis he certainly does not function in an advisory capacity, but is on a level of absolute equality with the ministers and the elders, and

is so recognized by classis. In other words, when deacons are delegated to classis they serve in the capacity of assistant-elder. Now this would be impossible, unless they serve in the consistory in that same capacity.

In the fourth place, that the deacons, when added to the consistory, merely serve in an advisory capacity is certainly not the opinion of some of the leading authorities on church government. Voetius, one of the foremost authorities, is of the opinion that there is a scriptural basis for placing the deacons in the consistory, in Philippians 1:1. The Rev. Gispen claims that when the deacons are added to the consistory they usually serve in an advisory capacity. Yet the very fact that he states that this is "usually" the case implies that this was by no means always the case. Prof. W. Heyns, proceeding from the fact that the offices are one in Christ, maintained that the deacons should always be included in the consistory and that all the affairs of the congregation should be taken care of in the full consistory. In substantiation of this, he appealed to Article 30 of the Confession and the first Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the Synod of Emden (1571). The Rev. Knap (*De Kerk*) expresses it in a somewhat similar way. According to Knap, from the fact that the offices are one in Christ it follows that, although we acknowledge the distinction between the offices, their deeper oneness must be maintained and brought to manifestation, and it is exactly in the consistory that they unite. According to the Rev. Jansen, when the deacons are placed in the consistory they then serve as assistant elders and decide over matters of government and discipline. The elders, in turn, decide on matters pertaining to the deacons.

VanDellen and Monsma, in their *Church Order Commentary*, express themselves as follows: When

the deacons are part of the consistory they should be considered to be full-fledged consistory members. They have a voice and vote in all matters which pertain to the government of the church, even as the elders under these circumstances have a voice and vote in all matters regarding the church's work of mercy. To deny the deacons a right to vote in cases of discipline, for instance, would be contrary to the Church Order and the duties which have been imposed on them by local arrangement.

Undoubtedly others could be mentioned. So, for example, Dr. K. Dyk (*De Eenheid der Ambten*) absolutely rejects the line of demarcation between the offices and considers it contrary to Scripture. Dr. Dyk even suggests that the fathers differentiated between the consistory and the deacons as often and as readily as they did because of the fact that many diaconates were virtually looked upon as civil agencies for the care of the poor. (Remember the close connection between the civil government and the Reformed "state" church at the time.) But however this may be, that the deacons, when added to the consistory, merely function in an advisory capacity certainly is not the opinion of leading authorities on church government.

To the above we would still add the opinion of Rev. Ophoff. According to Rev. Ophoff, "if the deacons are added to the consistory they thereby are made elders in addition to their being deacons. This is the only possible view. Otherwise the article (Art. 37) involves us in a difficulty, namely, how a deacon can function as an elder." With respect to the notion that in matters of discipline the function of the deacons should be limited to an advisory capacity, the Rev. Ophoff writes that "this view is untenable. For if the deacons are added to the consistory, they have decisive vote in all matters and likewise the elders. It really means

that the elders, in addition to being elders, are also deacons and the deacons, in addition to being deacons, are also elders."

The Rev. G. Vandenberg (*Standard Bearer*, May 15, 1959) would limit the function of the deacons in the consistory, in those matters that belong strictly to the office of the elders, to an advisory capacity. But, as already stated above, essentially that would make no difference. For even though they function only in an advisory capacity, they are, nevertheless, busy in the work that pertains to the office of the elders and not to the office of the deacons, even though it be in a limited sense. If it is proper for the deacons to function in the work that pertains to the elders, in a limited capacity, what possible objection can there be to their functioning in a full capacity?

However, it is evidently not the intention of the Church Order that the deacons, when added to the consistory, should only function in an advisory capacity. For, in the first place, if that were the intention, the Church Order undoubtedly would have stated as much. Yet it does not even suggest such a limitation. Without any qualification whatsoever, the Church Order speaks of adding the deacons to the consistory. But this is also evident from the distinction which the Church Order makes between large

and small consistories. With respect to large consistories the Church Order required that separate meetings shall be held of the elders and of the deacons, but with respect to small consistories no such separate meetings need, or may, be held. Of course, where no separate meetings are held, there all the affairs of the congregation are discharged at the one meeting of elders and deacons, and the deacons function as assistant-elders, and the elders as assistant-deacons.

But there is more. Although the Church Order provides for separate meetings of the elders and of the deacons, it at the same time restricts the holding of such separate meetings, and requires that much of the labor in the midst of the congregation shall be conducted in the combined meetings of all the offices, even in the largest churches. The Church Order requires that in matters of appointment to office, the release of ministers when they desire to accept a call, the exercise of supervision over each other as officebearers, and church visitation, the three offices must cooperate and work as one body even in the largest churches. Beside the above-mentioned matters, Jansen mentions several other matters as properly the business of the combined meetings. Bouwman, although not nearly as elaborate, is in substan-

tial agreement with Jansen in this. Now all these matters belong to the government of the church, yet in all these things the deacons are fully on a par with the ministers and the elders.

Briefly, therefore, the position of the Church Order is as follows. On the one hand, by using the word "consistory" exclusively for the meeting of the ministers and the elders, the Church Order seems to exclude the deacons from the consistory. But on the other hand by the provision it makes concerning small consistories and by its demand that whenever important matters regarding the offices and the like are to be acted upon the three offices must cooperate and work as one body, the Church Order evidently includes the deacons in the consistory. If, therefore, we do not want to place the Church Order in hopeless conflict with itself, we will have to assume that it does not mean to exclude the deacons from the consistory and, with the Confessions, recognizes the one consistory, composed of ministers, elders, and deacons, but simply provides for a limited measure of division of labor in keeping with the peculiar duties of the offices. The introduction of this division-of-labor-plan is a matter which is left for each church to decide entirely for itself. □

...to be continued.

That They May Teach Them to Their Children

Prof. Russell Dykstra

The Great Value of Reformed, Christian Education (2)

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

What makes Christian education to be what it is and to have the great value that it does? The great strength of Reformed, Christian

education lies in its distinctive character. In addition to what has already been pointed out in the first segment, we note five main characteristics of Christian education.

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Scripture and the confessions

First of all, Christian education is based on Scripture and the Reformed confessions. There is a movement among Christian schools away from this. It is the movement known as the AACCS, the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship. This movement, born in the 1950s, was first known as the Association for Reformed Scientific Scholarship. Its headquarters is the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto. Adherents are found on the faculty of virtually every Christian college in North America, and Christian schools are widely affected.

The AACCS/ICS people are disciples of the Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd and his sphere sovereignty. They sharply delineate between home, school, and church, insisting that parents run the sphere of the home, but the teachers must control the sphere of the school. This is destructive of parental education.

In turn, they assert that the church is the sphere of faith, and the confessions are appropriate for that sphere but not for the school. Schools must have their own educational creeds. The result is that in many school constitutions, Reformed creeds were removed as the basis for the instruction.

Even worse, the proponents of this movement effectively take the Bible out the school by redefining the term "Word." They play games with terms. There are, say they, many different *Words of God*. There is the Incarnate Word, that is, the Word become flesh. There is the spoken word of God (preaching). There is the Inscripturated (written) Word, by which they mean the Bible. And finally, there is the Word of God in the creation.

These different *Words* may be used only in their proper spheres, it is claimed. For instance, the Inscripturated Word is important for matters of faith. However, the Word in the creation is the proper study of the school. The calling of

the school is to discover the Word of God in the different spheres. There is a word of God in math, in history, in art, in law, in business, etc., waiting to be discovered and applied.

According to this view, the school's search for the Word of God (or Law) in each sphere does not mean that the instructors will find principles about science, art, business, etc., in the Bible and apply the same to the study of the various subjects. Rather the goal is to *discover* the Word of God in the subject area (sphere) by a study of the subject itself. In this way, the Bible is effectively removed as the basis of the instruction.

This is exactly what has happened in many Christian schools across Canada and the United States. And what if the particular *Word* of God that the class discovered happened to conflict with the teaching of the Bible? Objections were met with quick dismissal – *That Word of God (the Bible) is for matters of faith, not for the sphere of science*. Only when people woke up and realized what was happening did some societies change the school constitution to read that "the basis for instruction is the Bible, that is, the Word of God contained in the Old and New Testaments."

Why is it so important to have the Bible and the confessions as the foundation of the school? First, the Bible and the confessions are the standard of truth. *Thy word is truth*, Jesus said (John 17:17). It is the only unchanging standard of truth. Secondly, all the creation can be understood only in the light of the Word. The Belgic Confession in Article 2 teaches that the Bible is the revelation of God that is clearer and fuller than God's revelation in the creation. The confessions set forth the same truth in a systematic way by summarizing the whole of the Bible's teaching in particular areas.

Remove the Bible and the confessions, and the school has no

standard for rejecting the lie. The devil does not operate only in the church. He works mightily to corrupt the home and the school. Without the Bible and the confessions, who can say what is right? The history teacher avers, "I have studied this. This is God's word which I have drawn out of history, namely, that the kingdom of Christ is of the earth."

The science teacher maintains, "I have studied the material carefully and have learned that the world evolved out of a mass of material over billions of years. This is God's word in the sphere of science."

Who can contradict that? Take the stance that the Bible and the confessions are only for the sphere of the church, and there is no standard of truth in the classroom. In addition, the "clearer and fuller" revelation of the Bible is thrown out.

No, the Bible and the confessions are the essential basis of the Christian school's instruction. All instruction must be built on this foundation. All instruction must be evaluated and judged by the same.

Christ-Centered

A second significant characteristic of the Christian school is that all its instruction is Christ-centered. Since Christ is the center of the council of God and the Mediator of the covenant, the instruction must bear that out. Christ is the Creator of the universe. All things were made by Him. All things were made for Him. He is the Lord of history. He is controlling all things for His triumphant return.

Christ is the wisdom that children are exhorted to "get" (Proverbs 4:7).

He is the Word. This has obvious implications for teaching English and literature. Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and thus is the reason why $2+3=5$ every day of the year.

He is Life. He not only gives spiritual life to His own, He gives

also natural life, and controls both the beating of the heart and the movement of the individual blood cells to every part of the body.

Christ, the Son of God, sees all our actions. He condemns the evil word and the cruel mocking on the playground. He demands love and obedience from covenant children. He is also righteousness, sanctification, and redemption for them.

Is there any area of the school curriculum or the school life where Christ can or may be excluded? There is none. This is what makes Christian education to be Christian. It is not merely prayer at the appropriate times in the school day. It is not merely having a Bible class in the curriculum. Nor is it the fact that teachers require students to memorize Bible verses or emphasize good morals. What makes the school to be Christian is that every aspect of the school's instruction and life is truly Christ-centered.

Covenantal Instruction

A third characteristic of Christian education is that it is covenantal in its instruction, that is, covenantal both in content and with respect to the manner of instructing and dealing with students.

That the content of the instruction be covenantal is possible and necessary because the whole purpose of Christian education is to equip the child to live in covenant fellowship with God. All the instruction in the Christian school will be affected because the covenant is all encompassing. It defines the child's relation to God, to the world, and even to the creation. The covenant child is a friend of the living God, even an adopted child of God. Consequently, he is the enemy of the wicked world.

We should add that the covenant of God includes the whole creation. This is plain from Genesis 9, which records the fact that God established His covenant with Noah and the creation. Romans 8 speaks of the creation groaning unto the day when it will be deliv-

ered from the curse. Thus the study of the creation involves the covenant. God created all things with an eye to His covenant. The creation is designed to be the place where the covenant would be realized in and through the fall of man, the salvation of the elect in the cross, and the gathering of the covenant people out of the fallen race. In the end, God will save the creation through fire and recreation (II Peter 3).

The Christian schoolteacher must begin his task with a clear understanding of how each subject fits into the whole body of the truth of God, the covenant God. When the Christian schoolteacher makes lesson plans, he should face the question, "How does this knowledge equip the students to serve God as members of His covenant?"

Secondly, the instruction is covenantal in the manner in which teachers deal with students. That is to say, the students are viewed as covenant children. They are not treated as unbelievers, those who need to be regenerated. Rather, the students are considered to be what the Bible calls them, namely, Jehovah's heritage (Psalm 127:3) and God's children (Ezekiel 16:20-21).

Christian schoolteachers thus deal with their students as regenerated, believing children. They know assuredly that these children still have their evil natures. They are sinners. Christian schoolteachers know that their students will sin. They will need the rod and reproof.

At the same time, these children have been redeemed from sin. They are sanctified by the blood and Spirit of Christ. They have within them the principle of a new and holy life. They can and must be called to a life of thankful obedience.

Antithetical

A fourth characteristic of Reformed education in the Christian school is that it is antithetical. An-

tithetical instruction sets forth the truth over against what is false (the lie). The term antithesis is a Reformed concept, and therefore begins with God. God is the thesis, for God is truth. The believer is called to live antithetically by saying "Yes" to God, and to all that is pleasing to God.

However, there is a corresponding "No" in antithetical living. The covenant people are called to say "No" to all that stands opposed to God and to all that God hates. God set this calling before His people from the beginning—even in the garden of Eden. Part of God's purpose for the two special trees in the middle of the garden was to show Adam that he must say "Yes" to the tree of life, and say "No" to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That is living the antithesis.

The world in which we live is opposed to God and His Word. The calling of the believer is to live antithetically in the midst of this world. This is the reason why common grace is the death of sound Reformed education. It bridges the gap between the world and the church, between the Thesis (God) and the opposition (lie), between the life-style of the righteous and that of the ungodly.

If the Christian school will equip the covenant child to live antithetically, the instruction must be antithetical. Such a school will not merely teach a literal six-day creation, it will reject evolution. Truly Christian education will not merely teach the facts of history, it will expose the vanity (emptiness) of the philosophies of men and their kingdoms.

Antithetical, Christian education will both develop the taste for good music, and condemn the ungodly rock and country music. Such instruction will not merely teach some physical skills in sports, it will also put sports in the Christian perspective. Christian education condemns the worship of athletes and sports. The Christian

school likewise fights to keep its own sports program in the proper perspective with respect to the time required and the emphasis given.

Thus the Christian school develops the student's ability to *think* and *evaluate*. It teaches him to live by principle, not by mere laws. It warns against the current forms of evil, but also equips him to face the unknown future development of evil.

Reformed, Christian education is antithetical.

Progressive

Finally, Christian education is progressive. Man keeps growing in his knowledge and technology, developing the powers that God has imbedded in this creation. Natural man uses every new discovery to sin and to develop the kingdom of man. The Christian school must

keep abreast of these developments if it is properly to train covenant youth. This demands that teachers continue to study and grow.

It means also that the Christian school must provide the teacher with the material needs for progressive classroom instruction. Computers, for instance, are a necessity for properly equipping the covenant child to serve God in today's world. Think of the tremendous power unleashed by the computer—for good and for evil. Churches are using it for printing publications and for spreading the truth even on the Internet. Godless men are using the computer to establish communication for the one, worldwide kingdom of man (Antichrist's) and to spread vile filth on the same Internet.

This is not to say that the Christian school must be as well

equipped as the public school. In most instances, they neither can nor need be. At the same time, we must not simply ignore the advances in knowledge and technology. In every area where there is development or new discoveries (though not necessarily with every new invention) there is a good use, and there is an evil use. The purpose of totally depraved man is for evil. The covenant child must be equipped to press the new discovery or technology into the service of God, if it is possible to use it at all.

To accomplish its task, therefore, Christian education must be progressive.

This kind of education—Reformed, Christian education—is of the greatest value. That value we will examine concretely next time, the Lord willing. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

Jesus in the Garden and the Sea

(John 18:1-11)

i think i see Jesus now.

He is with the disciples launching out into a sea. It is the sea Gethsemane. Some see olive trees, and maybe a press to make oil of olives. But all i see is sea. And something pressing the perfect fruit of a virgin womb. Something pressing Jesus, Captain of the skiff. So much so, that something will soon come out of Him....

No apparent reason, at first. For, as the writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, record, when the boat first launches, and they enter into

the garden, it is a glassy sea, sanctuary calm. Fit for prayer. And so Jesus prays.

But what is this? In the midst of this peace and quiet—a tempest! The disciples, they are sleeping through it. But at the helm, fully alert, alone tipped to starboard and to port, and alone slammed against unseen wild waves is Jesus!

Tempest! Cyclone! Down under! In His soul!

Look! Agony. A soul exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Great drops of blood falling. The Captain is hit! Something has come down upon Him. And it is this, this wave of something, which is pressing the life out of Him. Look more closely. Don't you see? Upon Jesus in that sea that night—the

weight of our sins and the wrath of God!

Listen! Look! How does He fare? How does He navigate? He might check the stars, and alter His course. He might take in the sail. He might throw out the cargo. He might create another boat, or another sea. He might use that glory we just know He has to calm this storm.... But no!

Listen! "*Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done!*" And once again: "*Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt....*"

i think i see Jesus now.

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Bleeding in the sea. But resolute, courageous, faithful Captain! He will go to the cross. And not one of His boat-church will be lost.

They are weak.
But He is strong!

i think i see Jesus now.

Another tempest! Another raging now *contrary* sea. And sea-monsters! Or are they pirates? And is there not lurking not too far below the surface of that sea...that old serpent?

It is the sea of nations. Roman secular-world-pirates. Jewish Pharisee-Sadducee-religious-world-pirates. This sea, these pirates would sweep the Captain overboard, make slaves of His crew, and sink His boat. Their Black Beard leads them and kisses Him, and thereby betrays Him into their hands. They would board ship and take them all. They would do what waves and monsters and pirates do...their will...to destroy....

But wait! The Captain is Captain even over pirates, Lord over every sea, and Prince of every Poseidon!

"Whom seek ye?" He inquires.

"Jesus of Nazareth," they respond.

"I Am...," He declares.

And at Jesus' Word this devil storm falls back, is contained, is directed to do His will. The crew and the good ship are delivered. The Captain must go down alone. Without the ship....

i see Jesus now. Do i?

There are the disciples, sleeping through one storm, not able to man their posts for a minute, not able to watch, to pray as they ought. When they awake, and face the contrary sea, they still are not aware how the boat is to sail in the storm.

"Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" some ask (Luke 22:49). And WHACK! There is Peter, seeking to behead for Jesus' sake.

NO! Jesus says. Not by swords. Not by fisticuffs. Not by politics, or any such thing. I AM your salvation! I am your Way. I am your port. My Word is your cannon. My Spirit will fill your sails....

So do i? Do we see and under-

stand and *believe* Jesus? In the garden is a sea. The spirit is willing there, but the flesh is weak there! The disciples sleep, stab, and then slink away. Post-cross. Post-Pentecost. Now a twenty-first century Post-modern, Post-Christian sea. Is that the church I see—sleeping, not discerning? *Doing* swimmingly (as the news reports, and as efforts to improve society suggest), and yet not *sailing* by grace, *preaching* just the Word, *relying* only on the Spirit of God? Is that the church I see—with Rome? With the nations? Going in the same direction...?

God! Where is thy boat? Where is truth, and love for truth? Where is faith? Tell us, be with us, guide us I Am!

For Study, Meditation, & Discussion

1. Jesus' prayers.

What do we learn about Jesus from the passionate prayers He makes in the Garden?

2. Sin in the garden.

What is revealed about *sin* in the garden of Gethsemane (Note: the sin of Judas, of the mob, of the disciples)?

3. Jesus' suffering.

How does Jesus show His *suffering* in this history? What exactly was He suffering—was this an hour of temptation for Him? Was He bearing God's wrath here—even before Calvary? Did the disciples add to His suffering?

4. Sovereignty and divinity.

How does Jesus show here His *sovereignty* and *divinity*?

5. Truth and Comfort.

How are both Jesus' suffering and sovereignty a comfort to us?

6. The Christian and swords.

What is revealed in Gethsemane about Jesus' view of Christians using swords to advance His cause? Is there evidence that the church today is crossing swords or *joining* swords with the wicked? What is the church's true instrument of power? How does she use this? What kind of kingdom will such power establish?

7. Perspective (John 20:31).

What would you say is the *main revelation* of Jesus Savior in the Garden of Gethsemane? How is this an encouragement to your faith? How is this an encouragement to stay in the boat, to stay on course, and to be at peace in the midst of today's stormy seas? □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Denomination Activities

Each January my foreman at work reminds me that now is the time to make vacation plans for the coming

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

year. Summer seems so far away, yet I know it will be here before too long. The same can be said about our churches' up-coming 75th anniversary celebration scheduled for June 19-23, 2000. Now it seems like a long way off, but before we know it, and probably before all the committees working on it would like, that celebration

will be here.

Now is not too early to mark your calendars. The Publicity Committee of the PRC 75th celebration would certainly encourage you to do that. Make plans now to attend. Enjoy fellowship with your entire family and with friends by spending that week on the campus of Calvin College in Grand

Rapids, MI.

Plans I have seen indicate that Revs. J. Kortering and C. Haak, along with Prof. D. Engelsma, have been asked to speak. They will, D.V., develop the theme, "Living Out Our Heritage." Activities are being planned from morning until evening each day, and I am sure more information will become available the closer we get to that week in June.

Congregation Activities

You may remember that a few issues back we mentioned that the Young Adults of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ were testing the waters to see if there was enough interest from young adults in our denomination to warrant sponsoring a Young Adults' Retreat for later this year. Well, apparently there was, since Covenant has set the week of May 24-27 for that retreat. So, if you just marked your calendar for our churches' 75th anniversary celebration, maybe you could mark it also for Covenant's retreat this May.

At their annual congregational meeting in early December, the members of the Hudsonville, MI PRC approved a proposal from their council to add a new line item to their annual budget called "New Building Expansion Fund." This fund will have the broad purpose of being used for any new church expansion, daughter or sister, of our denomination. We all realize how expensive new construction has become, and by establishing this fund Hudsonville hopes to be in a position to help ease the financial burden of families called upon to form a new congregation.

Hudsonville's council also decided that the catechism collections collected this year will be used for a special fund in Singapore called the Emergency Fund. According to Rev. J. Kortering, our minister-on-loan in Singapore, this fund "is designed for meeting the needs which cannot wait for formal consideration by the deacons and which we encounter in our travels to countries in Southeast Asia."

The Randolph, WI PRC recently approved plans to add air conditioning to their sanctuary and some new replacement windows to their parsonage.

The Building Committee of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI reported recently that they are working on several projects, one of which is consideration of relocating their parsonage to their church property or to property near the church.

Our First PRC in Holland, MI recently made two changes in connection with their partaking of communion. At two points in the prayers given in our "Lord's Supper Form," their members will be asked to join in orally. The first is in the first prayer where the Apostles' Creed is recited. The second is in the closing prayer where the Lord's Prayer is recited. Two reasons were given for this change. The form itself implies such participation, and the united prayer and confession are in harmony with the idea of the Lord's Supper which is the fellowship we have one with another in Christ.

Evangelism Activities

Students attending Grand Valley State University in Allendale, MI were invited to attend a lecture/discussion about courtship and dating, sponsored in part by the Grace PRC in Standale, MI and Christianity on Campus. Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, was the guest speaker that night, and he spoke on the topic appropriately entitled "The Courtship of Rev. & Mrs. Bruinsma."

The council of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL approved an Evangelism Committee recommendation to begin a book ministry similar to the "Reformed Bookshelf" of South Holland, IL PRC.

The Evangelism Committee of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI continues to send all Heidelberg Catechism preaching tapes to our mission group in Pittsburgh, PA. Plans called for this to continue until they have a complete set of all the Lord's Days.

Minister Activities

From the November 15th bulletin of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI we learned that Samuel Laning, the infant son of Rev. and Mrs. J. Laning, born about three months prematurely, continues to do well. He has been moved from intensive care to intermediate care. His weight is now above three pounds.

Food For Thought

"The believer's talents are not to be laid out for self but laid out in service." □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NOTICE

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will be hosted by the Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California on Wednesday, March 3, 1999 at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the classical agenda is to be in the hands of the Stated Clerk thirty days before Classis convenes. An Officebearers' Conference on "The Doctrines of Sovereign Predestination" is also being planned for Tuesday, March 2.

Rev. Steven Key, Stated Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of First PRC, Grand Rapids, express Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Dan Baldwin and their children in the passing away of Mary's mother,

MRS. JULIA KORHORN.

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2, 3).

Rev. J. Slopsema, Pres.

Ron DeVries, Clerk

NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Larry Meulenbergh (453-8466). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 22, 1999, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Larry Meulenbergh, Secretary