



**A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine**

# ***The Standard Bearer***

## **In This Issue:**

Meditation — <i>Rev. Cornelius Hanks</i> <b>The Trial of Abraham's Faith</b> .....	194
Editorial — <i>Prof. David J. Engelsma</i> <b>A Defense of the Gospel of Grace against ECT</b> .....	196
Marking Zion's Bulwarks — <i>Prof. Herman C. Hanks</i> <b>Apollinaris and the Doctrine of Christ (2)</b> .....	198
Search the Scriptures — <i>Rev. Mitchell C. Dick</i> <b>Peter, I, &amp; the Eye of God</b> .....	200
Church and State — <i>Mr. James Lanting</i> <b>Recent Developments in Church and State Law</b> .....	202
That They May Teach Them to Their Children — <i>Prof. Russell Dykstra</i> <b>The Great Value of Reformed, Christian Education</b> .....	204
Contribution — <i>Martin Swart</i> <b>The Relation of the Deacons to the Consistory (3)</b> .....	206
A Word Fitly Spoken — <i>Rev. Dale H. Kuiper</i> <b>Fullness (Fill)</b> .....	209
Contending for the Faith — <i>Rev. Bernard J. Woudenberg</i> <b>"Neither a Supralapsarian nor an Infralapsarian"</b> .....	210
In His Fear — <i>Rev. Daniel Kleyn</i> <b>The Difficult Life</b> .....	213
News From Our Churches — <i>Mr. Benjamin Wigger</i> .....	215

**Vol. 75, No. 9  
February 1, 1999**

# The Trial of Abraham's Faith

*By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*

Hebrews 11:17-19

I wonder if anyone was ever tried to the extent that God tried his friend-servant Abraham. This patriarch was a man of faith. God richly endowed him with the gift of faith and the necessary grace to walk in faith before His face. Scripture refers to Him as "the friend of God." He had experienced various trials earlier in his life. God had called him out of Ur of the Chaldees to go to a land that God would show him. He was a stranger in the land of Canaan, moving from one part of

Canaan to another. He waited long, even until all hope had vanished, for the birth of a son, the promised seed that would inherit this land and out of whom the Savior would be born. But never had he been subjected to a trial like this one, when his son Isaac was a lad, possibly in his late teens.

Genesis 22 says that "God did tempt Abraham." Trials and temptations are closely related; in fact, the same word is employed for both in Scripture. God never tempts in the evil sense of the word, but He does try His people. When God tries us He is motivated by love, He does so in an open and sincere manner, often even warning us, and His purpose is to seek our welfare, that is, to strengthen our faith. It is Satan who tempts. His motive is hatred against God

and His people, his tactics are cunning and deceitful, and his purpose is to cause us to fall into sin and bring God's judgment on us.

Because of our sinful nature, trials readily become for us severe temptations. And on occasion we fall, even deeply. It is only by the grace of God that we can resist temptation. For that reason we pray, as our Lord teaches us: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

In this particular instance God tries Abraham by demanding of him that he sacrifice his son Isaac. God tells Abraham that He is well aware of the fact that he loves Isaac. Abraham even had a special reason to love this son. It was, after all, his son, his only son (Ishmael had been sent away), a son of his old age. Besides he was the child

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

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

**Postmaster:** Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

#### REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

#### EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

#### EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

#### BUSINESS OFFICE

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

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

#### CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

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

#### NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

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

#### UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

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

#### SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

#### ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.



of the promise. God had promised Abraham: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7). God had even added: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. 21:12). Out of Isaac the promised Savior would be born, so that all Abraham's hope of salvation centered in Isaac.

Yet God had said: Offer unto Me thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest. Had God suddenly taken him by death, that would have been extremely painful for Abraham. Or if he could have acted on the spur of the moment without giving much thought to all that it implied, that also would have been extremely difficult. But God demanded that he make a three-day journey. He must take Isaac with him, and go to the land of Moriah, where God would designate the mountain upon which the offering was to be brought.

We notice that Abraham does not hesitate to obey God's demand, be it with anguish in his soul. He starts out early in the morning, takes Isaac and his two servants with him, and also the wood and fire for the burnt offering.

God has given him three days to consider all that is implied in fulfilling His demand. As he travels day by day he turns the whole matter over in his mind, and at night he lies awake under the stars, pondering all the implications involved in obeying God's demand.

A sacrifice was not strange to God's servant. He had built an altar wherever he dwelled. On that altar he offered a lamb or some clean animal as a sacrifice to God. It was a reminder of the coming of the Savior, in whose atoning blood was the forgiveness of all his sins, so that at the altar he could bow in worship, adoration, and thanksgiving before his God.

But now God requires of him that he offer up his son, his only

son, Isaac. He would not question God's right to demand this, for the earth and its fullness belong to the Lord. Isaac also belongs to the Lord. Abraham is also deeply aware that he is a sinner who adds daily to his guilt by his sins, and therefore deserves divine wrath and punishment. Who is he to say that God is unjust in His demand that Isaac be taken from him?

But never in all the past history had God ever demanded a human sacrifice. In fact, in later years God showed that a human sacrifice was an abomination to Him. Yet there is no doubt in Abraham's mind that God demands that he must completely surrender Isaac unto the Lord.

God has reminded Abraham that He is well aware of the fact that Abraham loves his son and that it is hard to surrender him to the Lord. God is aware that it is especially hard to kill him with his own hand. Still worse, it is heart-rending to lay him on the altar as a sacrifice, and then, as a corpse smolders and burns, to bow down in worship, praise, and adoration. Yet God has spoken, and His servant has but to obey.

Even more is involved. If Isaac, the child of the promise, dies, how can God's promise of salvation through the coming Savior ever be realized? God Himself had said that the covenant promise of a Seed centered in Isaac. All salvation in time and eternity rested upon God's promise in Isaac.

There is but one solution to the entire problem. His son must die. Abraham must obey God in offering him as a sacrifice to the Lord. He must surrender him willingly, in humble worship before his God. *But God's promises cannot fail!* God can and will raise Isaac, the son of his love, even from the dead!

Truly by the grace of God faith has triumphed!

Finally Abraham and Isaac, along with the servants, reach the land of Moriah. Abraham instructs his servants to remain at the foot

of the mountain while he and the lad go up and worship, and come again to them.

Little does Abraham realize that he must go to mount Moriah because it would be near here that God Himself will offer up His own Only Begotten, the Son He so dearly loves, as a sacrifice and atonement for the sins of all His people.

Silently Abraham and the lad climb the mountain together. Then suddenly Isaac breaks the silence by asking the all-important question: "My father, behold, here is the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" To which his father responds: "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." This is as much as to say, whatever lamb the Lord may choose is the one that shall be our sacrifice.

We are not told what passed between father and son when they stood there together before the altar on which the sacrifice would be brought. It is sufficient for us to know that when the altar was prepared and the wood was laid upon it, Isaac was bound and laid upon it, and Abraham was ready to make the greatest sacrifice he could possibly make.

According to the account in Hebrews 11 Abraham does actually offer up the son he loved. In his mind he is fully prepared to make his son an offering to God. Nothing remains but to carry out the deed. He stretches forth his hand and is about to plunge the knife into the heart of Isaac, light the fire, and bow in worship before the Most High, his sovereign God.

It was at that very last moment that the Angel of Jehovah, the Old Testament manifestation of the Christ, intervenes. It is enough! The voice from heaven assures Abraham that this was sufficient evidence that he did not withhold his son from God.

We cannot help but pause to consider that Christ Himself intervenes at this moment. He is God's



assurance to His servant that from all eternity He has prepared His Son as the substitute, the perfect sacrifice for Abraham's sins, for Isaac's sins, and for the sins of all His people. The Lord even gives a visible evidence of that by causing at that very moment a ram to be caught by its horns in the thicket. Abraham need but release the ram and bring that as a sacrifice to God in humble worship and adoration.

Isaac is spared. In fact, as Hebrews assures us, it was for Abraham as if God had raised him from the dead, "from whence also he received him in a figure."

Abraham was given a glimpse into the future, when God Himself will set up the altar of the cross to give the only begotten Son of His love as a ransom for our sins. For

whom there is no substitute, no ram caught in the thicket. He sees that God, as it were, plunges the knife into the heart of His only begotten as He commits Him to torments of hell in His holy justice.

Here already in prophecy God reveals that, even as Isaac was received from the dead in a figure, so God would raise His Son from the dead as the firstfruit of all those who die in the Lord. Christ is the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in Him, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

Quite fittingly Abraham calls this place Jehovah-jireh, that is, "God foresees," or, as interpreted at that time, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen." From the dawn of history this was the ap-

pointed place where the temple would stand, the same area where God would offer up the only begotten Son of His love, and the Son would surrender Himself as a willing sacrifice for the sins of His people. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

It is Christ who declares of Himself in prophecy:

The offering on the altar burned  
Gives no delight to Thee;  
The hearing ear, the willing  
heart,  
Thou gavest unto Me.

Then, O my God, I come, I come,  
Thy purpose to fulfill;  
Thy law is written in My heart,  
'Tis joy to do Thy will. □

## Editorial

# A Defense of the Gospel of Grace against ECT

**T**he editorial in the previous issue of the *Standard Bearer* (Jan. 15, 1999, "ECT in the Pitiless Light of the 1998 Bull on Indulgences") showed that the recent papal bull on indulgences exposes ECT as evangelical capitulation to Rome, sellout of the Reformation, and apostasy to the false church.

The influential movement known as Evangelicals and Catholics Together, or ECT, is a threat to the gospel of grace proclaimed in Holy Scripture and recovered by the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

ECT is a fellowship of prominent Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants including Richard John Neuhaus and Avery Dulles among the Roman Catholics and James I. Packer and Charles Colson among the evangelicals.

The purpose of this union of Roman Catholics and evangelicals is threefold. First, they intend to fight the culture war in North America together. ECT speaks of "co-belligerency" in the war against abortion, sexual license and perversity, and assisted suicide.

Second, they plan to cooperate in the evangelizing of the lost.

Third, they want to manifest the oneness of the church of Jesus

Christ, which, according to ECT, is badly divided. ECT is definitely an ecumenical movement. The spokesmen for ECT speak of "ecumenicity in the trenches." By this they refer to the uniting of the churches, not by the official consultations of the rulers in the churches but by the people themselves. The evangelicals defend ECT by calling attention to the fact that members of evangelical churches are already involved in such "grass-roots" ecumenicity by their participation in Promise Keepers and the Billy Graham Crusades. ECT is building on such ecumenical activities on the part of the people.



## Oneness in the Gospel

The threat to the gospel of grace is that ECT roots the fellowship and cooperation of evangelicals and Roman Catholics in their oneness in the faith.

The document in which ECT gave expression to its purpose, and burst onto the ecclesiastical scene, is called, "Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium." This was published on March 29, 1994. The document states that the cooperation of evangelicals and Roman Catholics is grounded in a oneness in the faith, or gospel, of Jesus Christ: "The mission that we embrace together is the necessary consequence of the faith that we affirm together." A little later, the document states: "Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ."

Affirmation by ECT that evangelicals and Roman Catholics are one in the faith compromises the Reformation's biblical confession of the "gospel of the glory and grace of God," as Luther described the gospel in the 62<sup>nd</sup> of his 95 theses. Particularly, this affirmation compromises the fundamental gospel-truth of justification by faith alone.

As soon as the document, "Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," has affirmed that evangelicals and Roman Catholics are one in the faith, it makes a confession about justification that is supposed to prove the doctrinal agreement of evangelicals and Roman Catholics. But this crucially important statement surrenders the Reformation's biblical belief of justification to the Roman Catholic heresy regarding justification. The truth of justification is lost.

Because justification is central to the entire gospel, with the loss of the Reformation's biblical confession of justification by faith alone is lost the entire gospel of grace.

The threat of ECT calls for a vigorous defense of the gospel of grace by those who have received the love of the truth.

## The Centrality of Justification

Even though the entire gospel is at stake in ECT, it is fitting that justification is on the foreground. It is on the foreground. The framers of the ECT-document deliberately made justification prominent. Subsequent debate has focused on justification. The reason, of course, is that justification was the main gospel-truth that was proclaimed by the Reformation. It then occasioned the excommunication of the Protestants by the Roman Catholic Church. This truth has separated Rome and Protestantism ever since.

The allegation that the centrality of justification is merely a theological quirk of Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers is absurd. Richard John Neuhaus, who as an apostate Lutheran theologian knows better, tries this tactic in his defense of ECT.

The arguments surrounding the *sola fide* (faith alone—DJE) formula are the preserve of a relatively small number of professional theologians, mainly Lutheran and Calvinist, in North America and Western Europe. This does not mean the arguments are wrong; it does mean that they are not, and cannot be, at the center of the global proclamation of the gospel and the Christian mission in the third millennium.

Luther's motif of righteousness before God ... has been embraced by many Christians as the most powerful construal of the gospel and the most faithful to Paul's understanding of salvation. But to declare it to be the article by which the Church stands or falls in a manner that excludes other ways of saying the gospel is to turn it into a sectarian doctrine ("The Catholic Difference," in *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, ed. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, Word, 1995, pp. 204,

207).

Apostolic Scripture makes justification central to the gospel of God. No one can deny that the epistle to the Romans is the full presentation of the gospel in the compass of one book. At the heart of this presentation of the gospel is the theme expressed in 1:17: "therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith." This theme—the very heart of the gospel—the apostle then develops in the rest of the letter.

Or, consider the book of Galatians. That the apostle is concerned to defend the one, true gospel, he makes plain in 1:6ff. He marvels that the Galatians are so soon removed from the grace of Christ to "another gospel" (v. 6). He warns that some "would pervert the gospel of Christ" (v. 7). He curses all who "preach any other gospel" (vv. 8, 9). He reminds the Galatians and us that he received the gospel that he preached from Jesus Christ Himself (v. 12).

And then, on behalf of the gospel, the apostle condemns a false teaching of *justification* and defends the truth of *justification*:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (2:16).

The teaching of the apostles that justification is central to the gospel is squarely based on the ministry of Jesus Christ Himself. Justification is the forgiveness of sins, and the ministry of Jesus was, fundamentally, the forgiveness of sins of penitent, believing men and women.

He taught this as His ministry in the parable of the publican and Pharisee in Luke 18:9ff.



He *practiced* this ministry when He said to the woman taken in adultery, "Neither do I condemn thee..." (John 8:11).

And He *mandated* this ministry—the forgiveness of sins—upon His church when, after His resurrection, He breathed the Holy Spirit upon His apostles and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose

soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20:21-23).

False teaching about justification is "another gospel that is no gospel."

Teaching the truth about justification is the proclamation of the gospel of God and of Christ.

The Spirit of Jesus Christ led the Reformation into the biblical truth of justification, thus clarifying, developing, and correcting what had been taught before in the church.

Compromise of the Reformation's doctrine of justification, therefore, of which the evangelicals in ECT are guilty, is radical apostasy from the gospel of grace.

In light of this, it is necessary that we answer the question, "What is the biblical teaching on justification as faithfully confessed by the Reformation and by the true church today?" □

—DJE  
(to be continued)

**Marking Zion's Bulwarks**

**Prof. Herman Hanko**

## Apollinaris and the Doctrine of Christ (2)

### Apollinaris the Heretic

**A**pollinaris was not, I think, a heretic when first he began to propound his views. A heretic is one who teaches doctrines contrary to those which have been officially established by the church as the truth of Scripture.

This may sound somewhat strange, but it must be remembered that it has often happened in the hard work of developing the truth that one of the church's theologians, in struggling with a difficult theological or exegetical problem, came up with a "solution" to the problem which was wrong. This is not surprising, for all men in the church of Christ have imperfect understanding. And any one of the saints can come up with wrong

ideas about theological problems.

Incidentally, that is why we need each other in the church. It is why no one can ever develop theology "by himself." We need each other because only the church as a whole is guided by the Spirit into the truth, never one individual person. And so the saints are "checks" on each other, necessary correctors, together guardians of the truth who keep the truth running in the channel of Scripture.

But that is by the way.

Apollinaris came up with a solution to the problem of our Lord's humanity and divinity, and the relation between them, concepts which were not yet understood by the church. It was a wrong solution, and the church as a whole showed him unmistakably that he was wrong. They demonstrated that his views could not be sustained by Scripture.

It was at that point that he became a heretic. If only he had had the grace and humility to admit that he had erred, and that the so-

lution to the problem had to be sought elsewhere; if only he had said: "Yes, I see that. I see that what I proposed will not do. I shall abandon that position and continue to study in the confidence that the church will come to an understanding of the truth"—if he had said something like that, all would have been well.

But such humility is a rarity even in the church. We "discover" our own solution to a difficult problem, and our own solution becomes a kind of "sacred cow" with us, so that anyone who dares to attack our view is considered by us guilty of something profane. Every attack on our view is an attack on us. Such is pride. This is what often happens. It happened with Apollinaris. Sad.

So insistent on his own position was he that when the church officially condemned his views, he still clung to them, left the church of which he had been a part, and organized several congregations of his followers in the area of

---

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



Laodicea—for every heretic can gain a following if he tries a bit.

We may hope that Apollinaris repented before he died, although there is no evidence of it.

### **The Heresy of Apollinaris**

What was his heresy?

It seems to me that the problem with Apollinaris was that he had spent too much time with and had thought too highly of pagan philosophy. He was something of a rationalist. That was his downfall.

It did not seem rational to him that our Lord Jesus Christ could be wholly God and wholly man at the same time and still be just one Lord Jesus Christ. One cannot, Apollinaris argued, take two wholes which remain two wholes and make of them one whole. That is, on the surface, nonsense. One cannot (the figure is mine) take a whole orange and a whole apple and unite them in such a way that one has just one piece of fruit while that piece of fruit remains both an orange and an apple. It may be an orange so that the apple is gone. It may be an apple so that the orange is gone. It may even become some kind of orange-apple, a third kind of fruit, neither orange nor apple but a combination of both. But it cannot be one piece of fruit which in every respect is an orange, and in every respect is also an apple.

So our Lord Jesus Christ cannot be wholly God and wholly man and still be one Lord Jesus Christ. He may be wholly God without being a man; or He may be wholly a man without being wholly God; or He may be some kind of God-man—as indeed some proposed. But to be both God and man at the same time and remain both is impossible.

So reasoned Apollinaris.

Now that is a rationalistic approach to the question. It is not an attempt to solve the problem by studying the Scriptures. It is an attempt to solve the problem by

applying reason to the problem without paying a great deal of attention to what Scripture says.

One may never do that. Apart now from the problem of Apollinaris, the fact is that the doctrine of Christ teaches us that what man can never do, God does. What never entered the heart of man is God's perfect wisdom. God's works are great; and no work is greater than the work of Immanuel, God with us. Whatever else one is going to say, that had better be his starting point.

Now it is rather interesting (and we may just as well introduce the whole matter here, although it played a more important role in later controversies) that there was serious division in the church over this question. In an earlier article we pointed out that there were two seminaries of importance in the church: one in Antioch of Syria and the other in Alexandria of Egypt. And these two did not get along very well. They were always at odds with each other, sometimes in unseemly ways.

In keeping with a certain spirit of competition between these two seminaries, they held different solutions to the question of how Christ could be both God and man at the same time. The seminary at Antioch tended to emphasize the notion that this was possible only because Christ was two "persons." The seminary in Alexandria wanted to solve the problem by going in the direction of some kind of merger of the two natures of Christ so that the human and the divine nature were mixed together to form a third kind of nature.

What I write here is quite a simplification of the views of these two schools, because no one understood very clearly what such terms as "person" and "nature" really meant; and it was quite necessary to understand these terms to come to an understanding of the truth. But the fact is that these two seminaries tended to go in the direction which I described; and, in fact,

later would go precisely in those directions.

Apollinaris was more under the influence of Alexandria than Antioch, which is not surprising when one thinks of the fact that his good friend Athanasius was also from Alexandria.

Here, once again, Apollinaris had listened too much to Greek philosophy. He taught that man was composed of three parts: a body; a lower or animal soul, which is the power in man of the baser emotions, instincts, thoughts, and desires; and a higher soul or spirit, which was the power in man of higher and nobler thoughts, more powerful and significant ideas, etc.

Without getting too technical about all this, we can say that Apollinaris taught that in our Lord Jesus Christ, the "Logos," spoken of in John 1:1-14, who is truly God, took the place of the human spirit in a man. That is, the divine Logos assumed the nature of a man, but did so by eliminating one part of this man, the spirit, and taking its place. So the Lord Jesus Christ was one Savior, but with a human body and lower soul, and a divine higher soul or spirit. Thus Christ was a sort of mixture of human and divine, not wholly human, not really divine.

That notion would never do. It is possible that already in 362 a synod in Alexandria condemned his views. But surely several synods emphatically rejected what he taught: two synods in Rome in 377 and 382; one synod at Antioch, and later synods condemned his followers. Athanasius, his friend, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa (both of the latter, wonderful theologians in the early church) wrote against him. Yet, though he was so often condemned, these synods did not once mention him by name, nor did those who wrote against his views. He somehow retained the respect of those who opposed him even though he clung tenaciously to his errors.



He should have listened to them. But it was too much to expect.

One powerful argument was brought against his views, especially by Athanasius. It was so simple, yet so profound. It struck at the heart of the problem, and, more importantly, it took the problem out of the arena of philosophical speculation and put it right where it ought to have been: in the arena of salvation. The objection

was this. Since our sins have corrupted us in body, soul, and spirit, we need to be saved in body, soul, and spirit. And, therefore, if Christ has saved us, He had to be like us in all things except our sin. He too had to be a man with body, soul, and spirit. That is, He who was the eternal Son of God had to have a human body, and a human soul, and a human spirit. If that is not true, our salvation is impossible.

Apollinaris died some time before 392. He is now long forgotten. His story is only one chapter in the long book of the struggle for the truth. But it is an important chapter. It showed so clearly and for all to understand that our Lord Jesus Christ, to save us poor sinners, had to be like us *in all things*—except that He had no sin. Only then could He be truly Immanuel, God with us, our Redeemer. □

## Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

# Peter, I, & the Eye of God

(John 18:12ff.)

"I am not."

The above are the disciple Peter's words, recorded in John 18:17. With these words Peter did not deny his existence. He had not just staggered out of the local pub where, with his philosophy club-pub buddies, and by syllogism and sophistry and scotch, he had come to the conclusion that he was only a "figment of the imagination" — or not even that, a "not!"

Worse. With the words "I am not" Peter was denying he was a disciple of the Lord Jesus. After the betrayal in Gethsemane, Peter and another disciple, probably John, had followed from afar the band leading Jesus as He was taken to the house or palace of the high priest, Caiphas. The damsel that kept the door of the palace of the high priest had asked, "Art not thou also one of this man's dis-

ciples?" To *this* Peter had answered "I am not." He was saying: I do not follow this Jesus, I do not subscribe to His teachings, I do not walk in the way in which He leads others to walk.

Worse yet! Denying that he was a disciple of Jesus was denial of Jesus Himself. Peter was saying of Jesus: *He is not!* Peter was declaring that Jesus was not worth being a disciple of. He was asserting that no doubt there were others more worthy to follow. Or he was saying, I will be my own man, and follow no man, and Jesus, whoever he is, had better follow me....

Neither sophistry, nor scotch, does that to a man. Sin does. Sin (that Denier from the beginning!) made Peter fulminate "I am not!" Sin compelled the heart and forked the tongue of Peter to say, as the other narratives in Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22 attest, "I know him not," and even to swear and curse to make his point. Jesus had predicted this sin not many hours before (cf. John 13:36-38, Luke 22:34). Peter and all the rest

had said they would not deny and forsake Jesus (Peter boasting the most: Luke 22:33). But there was no stopping the course of this sin. Sin will do its denying thing.

Sin will say "I am not" of Jesus. "I am my own." "Jesus is not." "I am." "I!"

Proud I....

\*\*\*\*\*

"We are not." "God is not." "I never had sexual relations with...."

The denial has not stopped. Sin proceeds, apace, to deny Jesus, and truth as it is only in Jesus. The I roves the earth. Wherever it goes it holds truth under in unrighteousness. Millions of kingdoms of denial. Millions of proud I's. Today.

From the world whose Prince is powerful to compel to deny comes denials, left and right, of God, and Christ, and all truth. From a worldly (not Christian —

---

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



Judaeo, or otherwise!) nation, for example, which even coined the phrase "one nation under God," we are hearing now that the *real* truth of certain things or relationships may be denied, even under oath. Churches, as well, are continuing to deny the Truth. We hear from her leaders (!) that there may be one Jesus, but there are many Christs. There may be one God, but there are many ways to God. There may be one doctrine, but it is unknowable, or open to many interpretations. If there is truth preached and lived by, it is truth ruled by lord tolerance. So the tolerant church (TC) is now wide open to other truths and to people of every doctrinal stripe and pierced body part and life-style who are, despite being unbiblical and ungodly, nevertheless *sincere*. Homosexuals? The TC preaches that there is a place in our arms for them. Women? There are high places, even pulpits for them (Note: we love them too, but *not* in high places!). Romans (as in Roman Catholics)? With them let's be friends. Let us together be evangcatholics! Let us forget silly squawks about our differences concerning Mary, justification, and purgatory. Let us together get to the business of saving whales, rain forests, spotted owls, and people, and of establishing good economies, world peace, and the kingdom of God. And in that order.

And so we? We *must not deny!* We deny Jesus. Denial of Jesus is our sin. The denial of Peter, who after all *was and is* Jesus' disciple, is our sin. He said "I am not" one of Jesus' disciples. He said that in an extremely difficult and dangerous moment (in the enemy camp, and he, having just drawn the blood of one of them!). We do it all the time. "I am not" of Jesus. "Jesus is not." "I am." "I." We say.

True, we are in our heart of hearts disciples. God has been gracious to put in us His truth, and His Spirit of truth. There is this

love for truth which loves to assert truth, witness of Christ, give glory to the God of the gospel. There is this zeal and courage in our living for truth which is not daunted by damsels, does not cower even before kings.

But there we go again. Our flesh is weak. The old man lies. Covenant children deny the covenant when they refuse to stand for what is right on playgrounds, and in the halls among friends. Young people deny the Lordship of Christ when yielding to lusts and not to the Lord, and when they postpone for the sake of convenience confession of faith. Adult Christians, we deny our Lord by our complacent armchair Christianity. And we are even adept at citing doctrines to justify our lethargy. "God is sovereign, salvation is of grace, Christians have liberty!" Therefore, "I am not" one of those who is so legalistic never to allow for some (or regular) opportunity for overindulgence. "I am not ..." and do not need to be regularly at Bible Study. "I am not" fervently praying for the mission work of the church....

"I am not."

"God is not." "Christ is not worthy."

"I." Dirty I....

\*\*\*\*\*

God is. And God cannot and will not deny Himself. That is why Peter was not consumed. That is why we are not consumed.

We might justly be. For God knows, He sees, all the "I's," all the "I am nots," and all the proud, fear-of-man, love-of-the-world, refusing-to-stand-for-Christ natures and moments! If He were only to remember wrath, and to behold just our unclothed, Christ-denying iniquities we would perish. For, as Jesus says, "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which

is in heaven" (Matt. 10:33).

But the God who cannot deny Himself is Love. And He has set His love upon us. And, though we deny Him, yet He in King of kings' love will not be prevented from loving us I's still.

Behold, look at that look of love! Behold! Don't you see? There is Peter, having denied his Master three times. He looks, and there is *that* look! It is the Savior's look. "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter" (Luke 22:61a). Jesus, perhaps at that moment being led from Annas to Caiaphas, or from Caiaphas to a prison where He would be held until the dawn, Himself just spit upon, mocked, cruelly beaten, and unjustly sentenced by the darkness ... perhaps He Himself having heard Peter's cursing and swearing and denying ... *looks* upon Peter! To love!

Behold this eye of God! Not of contempt, not of wrath. But of love and compassion and pity. Never a word, but a thousand words with that one look. An eye-sermon with the theme: forgiveness to proud deniers! Sermon which broke Peter's heart, led him to go out and weep bitterly and despair (finally) of self, and to sorrow the godly sorrow of true repentance. A look which led him to champion Christ's cause, humbly, from then on.

Behold this eye of love upon all His own. With that eye Jesus will look and go steadfastly to the cross, and be looking upon us, surveying all the sheep, while He lays down His life on our behalf. His eye, His sinner-favoring countenance is why on the cross Denial is denied its right to condemn, and its power to hold. God's eye, seen in the eye of Christ looking upon us is why there is this Spirit sent from heaven to liberate us from I-tyranny, daily to lead us to repentance, and to dispense grace to overcome our denials and denying nature. His loving eye upon us is why we may look confidently forward to heaven where there will be no more denials....



Denied Truth lately? We must admit that not another, but we are the presidents of deniers. Then behold in the Scriptures, behold by faith that eye of God in Jesus Christ. Toward you. Convicting, humbling, forgiving eye. Look of love.

That will be profitable Bible study. Read. Weep. Be thankful that God will not be denied in showing the wonder of His redeeming covenant love. Be no more I. Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Deny Christ not. Follow Him. The joy, and goal of our life!

world? In our nation? In the churches? What are situations at school, work, home, church, or wherever which can be very tempting to us to deny the Christ?

## For Study, Meditation, & Discussion

### 1. History

a. From John and the other gospel accounts be able to "put together" the narrative of Peter's denial.

b. Think of instances in your own life in which you have been led down the path of "denial." How did you come out of it?

### 2. Dictionary/Concordance

Look up "deny" and "denial" in a dictionary, and in Scripture. Think also of examples in Scripture of those who have denied the faith.

Explain what exactly it is that sinners do when they deny Christ.

### 3. What sin?

What was the main sin behind Peter's denial (pride, worldliness, etc.)? What is it that causes you, sometimes, to deny Christ?

### 4. Twentieth-Century Denial

What are ways Christ is and can be denied today—by others, and by ourselves? How, for example, is Christ being denied in the

### 5. Purpose of God

What did Jesus say was the purpose for this trial of Peter (Luke 22:31)?

What purpose is there today for our being tempted to deny our Lord?

### 6. Positively Speaking

We are not to deny Christ. What does Revelation 2:10, 13 teach is the *opposite* of Christ-denial? How is *self-denial* important if we are to keep from denying Christ?

### 7. Perspective: John 20:31

In Peter's denial, in Christ's looking upon him...what have you learned of the holiness of the Christ? Of the love of the Christ? How shall we all grow, as individuals, families, and churches, in declaring and not denying Christ, in a doing, and not a dawdling Christianity? □

## Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

# Recent Developments in Church and State Law

## Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod Radio Station Escapes FCC Affirmative Action Demands

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates the licensure of radio stations and scrutinizes applications for license

renewals. One such FCC regulation requires license renewal applicants to satisfy equal employment opportunity (EEO) guidelines forbidding discrimination because of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex. Moreover, stations are specifically compelled to "adopt an affirmative action EEO program targeted to minorities and women."

The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod owns and operates an AM station and an FM station, both located on the Concordia Seminary

Campus in Clayton, Missouri. The AM station's format was religious and non-commercial, while the FM station featured a classical music format with a religious orientation and some religious programming. Citing the stations' religious mission, the church insisted that most employees of the stations have knowledge of essential Lutheran doctrine.

After review of the church's radio renewal application, the FCC determined that the church's hir-

*Mr. Lanting, a member of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, is a practicing attorney.*



ing practices were illegal. Admitting that FCC policies exempt religious broadcasters from the ban on religious discrimination, the FCC nonetheless limited this exemption to "employees reasonably connected to the espousal of religious philosophy over the air." Thus the FCC ruled that the exemption from religious discrimination would not apply to religious station employees such as receptionists, secretaries, engineers, and business managers, for whom knowledge of Lutheran doctrine would presumably be "unnecessary." The FCC also found that the church had not made sufficient efforts to recruit minorities for these positions.

The church appealed this remarkable FCC ruling to a federal court of appeals, arguing that the FCC imposed EEO regulations as a whole interfered with the church's ability to prefer Lutherans in hiring station employees. The church also contended that the EEO guidelines as applied to the religious radio station violated the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the Free Exercise Clause, and other constitutional guarantees.

The federal court ruled in favor of the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, declaring unconstitutional the FCC's requirement that religiously formatted radio stations must give preferential treatment to minorities in its hiring decisions as opposed to hiring those persons with knowledge of Lutheran doctrine. Rejecting the FCC notion of requiring the religious station "to make race-based hiring decisions" while ignoring knowledge of religious doctrine for most employees, the court ruled that unless the FCC had evidence that the church had demonstrated actual racial preference in its hiring decisions, the government claims of discrimination must be dismissed.

Commentators have suggested that this is an important ruling, not only for churches, but also for other religious organizations as well. This federal court decision reaffirms

the right of a Christian organization to practice hiring preferences for employees who embrace a knowledge of the organization's faith commitment.

### **Federal Appellate Court Affirms Convictions of Abortion Protesters**

Several years ago Congress adopted a new federal criminal law primarily targeting abortion clinic protesters. The Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE) provides criminal and civil penalties for those convicted of obstructing ingress or egress to abortion clinics. Eleven members of an anti-abortion group called the Lambs of Christ physically blockaded all the entrances of a New York Planned Parenthood clinic. They prevented access to the building by chaining themselves to the doors or welding themselves to large objects such as a car or picnic table. Although they did not engage in any violence, they practiced "passive resistance" while being removed by local law enforcement agencies.

The federal trial court convicted all defendants of violating FACE, imposed sentences, and ordered restitution to the clinic for the property damage caused by their activities. On appeal, the defendants argued that FACE was unconstitutional under the Commerce Clause and the Free Speech Clause.

Addressing the defendants' Commerce Clause argument, the federal appellate court declared that Congress has the power to enact legislation "to prevent the inhibition or diminution of interstate commerce." But how are abortions related to "interstate commerce"? Reviewing the legislative history of FACE, the court found that Congress had stated that "women travel interstate to obtain reproductive health services" and that "doctors travel state to state and often cover great distances to perform abortions." Moreover, the court

found that "clinics purchase medical and other supplies in interstate commerce." Accordingly, because abortion clinics are in these ways involved in "interstate commerce," Congress has the raw legislative power to regulate such activities.

The protesters also argued that FACE discriminates against those persons who are "ideologically or morally opposed to abortions." The court disagreed, claiming that "pro-choice" protesters are also prosecuted for violating the statute.

The court also pointed out that the protesters may nonetheless exercise their free speech rights by displaying signs, distributing literature, and by "speaking conversationally anywhere or anytime they choose," activities which are quite different from blockading entrances to the clinics.

Finally, the convicted protesters argued they lacked the requisite criminal intent since their sole objective was "to save the lives of unborn children." The court disagreed, holding that regardless of what the protesters' "ultimate purpose" may have been, they nonetheless blocked the clinic intending to prevent abortions, and accordingly violated FACE.

### **U.S. Supreme Court Allows Wisconsin Tuition Voucher Plan to Stand**

The school choice movement promoting tuition vouchers for private and parochial schools gained unprecedented momentum recently when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review Wisconsin's controversial school voucher program. Early last summer, Wisconsin's top court had ruled that the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) was constitutional even though it made state money available to religious schools, because the tuition reimbursement was payable to the parents, who then had the choice of selecting a public or private school. The controversial decision was im-



mediately appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court by voucher opponents who insist that such vouchers breach the constitutionally mandated separation of church and state.

But, by an 8-1 vote, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review the Wisconsin decision, thus lending its informal "approval" to the Milwaukee voucher program. The supreme courts of four other states are currently considering voucher programs similar to the Wisconsin tuition reimbursement plan, and any or all of those decisions will likely also be appealed to the highest court in the land. But for now,

anyway, the Supreme Court justices are declining to embroil themselves in a growing national debate over the use of public funds by private religious and parochial schools.

The experimental Milwaukee program currently would provide up to \$70 million for some 15,000 low-income students to attend private schools, whether religious or secular. The detractors insist that such schemes will divert sorely needed resources from public schools already in desperate financial need. Proponents argue vouchers allow poor students the opportunity to choose quality

schools and force inferior public schools competitively to improve their educational programs.

The U.S. Supreme Court's refusal to consider the Wisconsin voucher program will be interpreted as a partial victory for both sides, although it is clear that the Wisconsin program will now serve as a prototype for other states considering similar tuition reimbursement schemes. Still unanswered also is the ongoing concern of parental schools regarding the nature and extent of government regulations and intrusion that is inevitably linked to state funding of private organizations. □

**That They May Teach Them to Their Children**

**Prof. Russell Dykstra**

## The Great Value of Reformed, Christian Education (3)

**S**olid, Reformed, Christian education is of inestimable value. Believing parents and grandparents, and spiritually minded students give thanks to God for the Christian instruction given in a Reformed school. Yet it is also true that parents and children and the church as a whole are not always so conscious of the specific blessings of the Christian school. It is good for teachers, parents, and students alike to be reminded.

First of all, the Christian school is a tremendous gift from God to assist believing parents in fulfilling their obligations. These obligations are summed up in the baptismal vow. Believing parents "prom-

ise and intend to see [their] children ... instructed and brought up in the aforesaid [Reformed] doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of [their] power."

The Christian school is only a help to parents. Schools must not try to do the whole job. The parents can better instruct in many important aspects of the covenant child's training, as for example, teaching children to pray, instruction on matters of sexuality, and training in everyday practical living skills. On the other hand, parents are not to think they have fulfilled their obligations by sending their children to a Christian school. The school is a help to the parent, not a replacement of the parent.

When teachers are truly *in loco parentis*, are rearing children, instructing in the light of the Bible, and giving Christian nurture, the

school is a vital aid to the parents in the monumental calling to instruct their children "to the utmost of their power."

Secondly, Christian education is so valuable because it provides the covenant child with a firm foundation on which to stand. The foundation is the Reformed truth, it is the Bible itself. The foundation is well established for the covenant child because he is taught the same things in home, school, and church. Ecclesiastes 4:12 speaks of a threefold cord — "And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken." For the covenant child, the united, harmonious teaching of the home, school, and church is a threefold cord. By God's grace, the strength of that instruction will last throughout his entire life.

Thirdly, Christian education

---

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



prepares the covenant child to live in this world as a friend-servant of God. He has received the necessary training to function in the world. He can earn a living—for the cause of the kingdom of God. He can live and work as a believer, properly representing God's cause. That because the child knows God; he knows what God requires; he is equipped to seek God in all that he does.

Fourthly, Christian education is of great value because it gives the child a Reformed world and life view. A child so trained can think biblically, that is, in a Reformed way. He has the right view of the world. He correctly sees the world as a spiritual desert, as a battlefield, as a world set against God—not as a playground; not as a basically good or harmless or friendly place. He has the right view of history as the unfolding of the counsel of God. He has the knowledge of the principles needed to make right decisions.

Fifthly, much of the value of Christian education derives from the fact that it is communal rather than individualistic. Home schooling misses this communal aspect. The intent of this article is not to assail home schooling. We are well aware that some parents home school their children out of necessity. However, the purpose of the article is to demonstrate the benefits of the Christian school. We ought to note that there are advantages to the Christian school over home schooling, and this is one of them.

That Christian education is communal means that covenant children have the opportunity to interact with each other. This has great value socially, particularly in the sphere of the church. These children are a part of the church. They must deal with fellow saints all their lives—the good and pleasant interaction with people, as well as the unpleasant confrontations and even sins of their fellow saints. School is preparation for living in

the church. In fact, life in school is part of the communion of saints for the youth of the church.

This communal aspect of education has value academically because the classroom gives the students the opportunity to learn from each other. Students who help other students with the material currently taught in class come to know the material far better themselves. Class discussions make the facts and figures of the book or lecture to come alive, and thus to be remembered. Besides, students' questions open exciting areas of learning and discussion that profit the whole class.

In addition, communal education develops the thinking processes because there will be interaction in the classroom. In the classroom, students have the opportunity to formulate and express their views. They hear and evaluate the expressed thoughts of others, beyond those of their own family. Sometimes their own views are challenged by other students. This helps students think through issues. In such an atmosphere, their reasoning powers can develop, while they avoid a narrow view on all issues.

The benefit of the school is that interaction can take place in a controlled arena. Boundaries, as to the content and nature of the discussion, are determined by the Bible and the confessions. A trained leader and guide—the Christian school teacher—can and must direct the discussion and put it into the proper biblical perspective.

And, we might add, this communal aspect of the Christian school is good preparation for life in the kingdom, for God deals with His people covenantally, not individualistically. For the child this means not only living as a member of a covenant family, but also being part of the broader body of the church. In a school, the students are part of the whole, and learn to live and work together with other youthful saints for God's glory.

Here the covenant children learn corporate responsibility as well.

Finally, and most importantly, Reformed, Christian education obtains the goal of 2 Timothy 3:17—"That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." This text summarizes the goal of Christian education.

What does this text mean?

To be *perfect* means to be complete or mature. In all areas of life, the covenant child receives Reformed, Christian instruction. The Reformed *doctrines* that he learns in catechism and through the preaching are applied to all areas of life in the Christian school. He is nurtured in that instruction. No aspect of his rearing has been neglected. By God's grace, the covenant child matures physically, mentally, and spiritually under such instruction.

He knows God and he knows God's will. He is equipped to serve God. He is thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Such a believer is not set on building a kingdom of God on earth. Rather his desire is to serve God in whatever station and calling God gives—as a husband and father, or as a wife and mother. He is equipped to serve God wherever God calls him to labor—on the farm, in the office, or on the scaffolding. She is supremely equipped to be a mother in Israel, rearing covenant children; he to serve as an officebearer in the church. All are prepared to glorify God in all their lives.

This is the goal of Christian education: Equip the covenant child to praise God—now in this life, but also in eternity. The baptism form reminds us of that preparation for eternity. The concluding prayer asks that God bless these covenant children "to the end that they may *eternally* praise and magnify thee... the one only true God."

This is the chief end of man, to glorify God forever. This is the supreme value of Reformed, Christian education.



What a difference this makes in the view one has of the child's education! Christian education is not self-centered as in, "What do I get out of Christian education?" Nor is it focused on this world as in, "How will Christian education help my child succeed?"

Rather, the greatest value of Christian education is recognized and demanded as in, "How are covenant children being equipped to serve and glorify God?"

This is the great value of Reformed, Christian education.

It is our calling, our solemn duty, to provide such instruction for our covenant children. It is not an option. God commands it. May the believers (both parents and teachers) be encouraged to persevere as they recognize the great value of their labors. □

**Contribution**

**Martin Swart**

## The Relation of the Deacons to the Consistory (3)

From all this it is evident that the church has never insisted upon a sharp line of separation among the offices. The reason is obvious. Basically the offices are one, not three. There are not three offices, but a threefold or triple office. Although we recognize three offices as a manner of speaking, we must remember that they are but three aspects of what is basically one. This basic unity of the offices is constantly emphasized in Scripture. The offices are one in Adam. They are one in Christ. They are one in the apostles. The apostles functioned in all three offices. When finally distinction was made and deacons were appointed, it was done for practical reasons and not because the apostles felt that it was not their work. They were too busy to take care of it all. Later, no doubt also for practical reasons, distinction is made between elders who teach and elders who rule. Finally, the offices are also one in the

believers. Every believer is prophet, priest, and king and functions in that threefold office. In fact, that constitutes his whole calling.

In order to determine, therefore, what is the relation of the deacons to the consistory, we will have to take our starting point in this basic unity of the offices. This unity has all the emphasis in Scripture. According to Scripture the priestly office is a royal office, with the prophetic calling to show forth God's praises (I Pet. 2:9). The people of God are a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6). They that have part in the first resurrection shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Rev. 20:6). Christ is a High Priest, not after the order of Aaron who was only priest but after the order of Melchisedec, who was king as well as priest. Perhaps we may conclude, from what we read of him, that he was prophet also.

It is because of this basic unity of the offices that, although Scripture speaks of three types of officebearers, each one representing a certain aspect of the one office of Christ, these three are, nevertheless, so interrelated that all three aspects, in turn, are again present in each one of the types.

In other words, in each of the three aspects of the office, the one threefold office of Christ comes to manifestation. No officebearer is, or can be, exclusively busy in the peculiar aspect of the office which he represents. The very nature of the office makes this impossible. Each type of officebearers, in the exercise of his own peculiar office, automatically becomes involved in the things that pertain to the other offices.

This already follows from the fact that all three types exercise their office by one and the same means, namely, by means of the Word of God. But, in the second place, it also follows from the fact that all have essentially the same calling, namely, the spiritual well-being of the congregation. It is undoubtedly for this reason that there is no essential difference between the requirements of the various officebearers, according to I Timothy 3. The very nature of the offices, therefore, is such that although we may distinguish between the three aspects, they are, nevertheless, basically one. Separate them, and you no longer have a threefold or triple office, but three separate offices, each one with essentially the same calling.

Besides, this basic unity of the

---

*Martin Swart was an elder for many years in the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI. This article was originally an essay that Mr. Swart presented to the Men's Society of First Church.*



offices is demanded by the fact that the offices in the church are after all nothing but a concentration of the office of believers. It is through the offices that the believers exercise their threefold office in the church institute. Separate the offices in the church, and you separate them in the believers. But this is even more emphatically true if we bear in mind that ultimately it is Christ who exercises the offices in the church. The officebearers are after all nothing but the organs through which Christ exercises His one threefold office. And where the offices in Christ are one, though threefold, it follows that also the organs through which He exercises His office, though threefold, are nevertheless one. The offices in isolation in separate individuals could not present a perfect type of Christ.

Although, therefore, we speak of three offices, yet they are but three aspects of what is basically one. It is exactly in the consistory that the three unite. The confessions are undoubtedly correct when they present the consistory as consisting of ministers, elders, and deacons. The church is to be ruled by the one office of Christ, and the deacons are an aspect of that office. You cannot take one aspect of that office and separate it from the others. It is exactly because the distinction among the offices has been over-emphasized that the unity has been lost sight of.

Yet, strange as it may seem, although it is maintained that the deacons are to be excluded from the consistory because of the distinction of the offices, and although the Church Order seemingly excludes them for the same reason, the fact remains that this distinction is not, and never has been, consistently maintained. For, in the first place, no such line of distinction is drawn between the office of the minister and the office of the elder. Certainly, if the deacons are to be excluded from the consistory

because of an absolute distinction between the offices, then the minister will have to be excluded also for the same reason. Membership in the consistory will then have to be limited to the elders. Certainly, if the distinction among the offices does not require a line of separation in the case of ministers and elders, it can hardly be maintained that this distinction does require it in the case of the deacons.

But in the second place, this line of demarcation is not maintained with respect to the deacons either. For the Church Order not only permits the deacons to be added to the consistory when the consistory is small, but even demands this when the number of elders is three or less. Now certainly, if it is wrong for a deacon to function in the consistory because of the distinction between the offices, then it is wrong regardless of the size of the consistory. If therefore we do not want to bring the Church Order into hopeless contradiction with itself, we will have to maintain that there is no principle objection to including the deacons in the consistory.

The notion that we can escape this contradiction by limiting the function of the deacons in the consistory, in matters strictly belonging to the office of elder, to an advisory capacity simply does not hold. For in the first place, even though it be in an advisory capacity, the deacon then is nevertheless busy in the work that strictly belongs to the elders. Being busy in the work that pertains to the elders, even though it be in that advisory capacity, he certainly does not function in his capacity of deacon. It certainly does not belong to the office of deacon as such to serve the elders with advice. But if he does not function in the capacity of deacon, in what capacity does he function, if not in the capacity of elder?

The Rev. VandenBerg, in the *Standard Bearer* article referred to above, agrees with the Rev. Ophoff

that when the deacons are added to the consistory they are thereby made elders in addition to being deacons and have a decisive vote in all matters, including discipline. Yet he would limit the function of the deacon in the consistory, in matters strictly belonging to the office of elder, to an advisory capacity. Now that is simply a contradiction. VandenBerg agrees that when the deacons are added to the consistory they have a decisive vote in all matters and, at the same time, he would limit them in some matters. But aside from this, if it is true that when the deacons are added to the consistory they are thereby made elders, how can they possibly be denied the right to a decisive vote in all matters, including those matters which strictly belong to the office of elders? If, when the deacons are added to the consistory, they are thereby made elders, they not only have the right, but also the obligation to function in that capacity.

In the third place, if the deacons are to be excluded from the consistory because of the distinction between the offices, how then can the Church Order demand that even in the largest churches such important matters as the calling of ministers, the election of officebearers, the release of ministers when they desire to accept a call, shall be acted upon in the combined meeting of ministers, elders, and deacons. All these matters are a fundamental element in the government of the church. It certainly is fundamental to church government that the offices be maintained and that men be appointed to fill these offices. Yet in all these matters the deacons are on a level of absolute equality with the ministers and the elders. So much is this so that there is no officebearer in office, but that he is there with the judgment and vote of the deacons. It undoubtedly happens in some cases that the vote of the deacons is the deciding factor.

There are also other things in



which, though they are matters of government, the deacons, nevertheless, have an equal voice with the elders. Even the regulation of matters pertaining to the work of benevolence in general is a matter of government. The Rev. Vandenberg remarks (*Standard Bearer*, Oct. 15, 1959) that matters of doctrine, and the government or administration of the church belong to the jurisdiction of the elders. But, apart now from doctrine, it is exactly in these matters that the deacons do take an active part. Even matters of doctrine and discipline are not entirely excluded. In the matter of election of officebearers, the deacons certainly express judgment as to the doctrinal soundness and qualification of the men considered for office, and also as to their life and walk. They confirm that judgment by their vote. Besides, there are the matters of church visitation and mutual censure among the officebearers. In both these matters the deacons have the same say over the elders that the elders have over the deacons. It is evident, therefore, that a sharp distinction among the offices is foreign to the Church Order.

Finally, if the distinction among the offices requires a separation between the office of deacon and the office of elder, why does not that same distinction require a separation between the office of minister and the office of elder? Certainly, both the minister and the elder have their own distinctive office, the minister representing the prophetic aspect of the office of Christ and the elders representing the kingly aspect. In Scripture they are clearly distinguished as teaching elders and ruling elders. Yet, in spite of this distinction, the two are not separated. The minister is not only busy in the ministry of the Word, but in the consistory and at the classis and synod functions in the capacity of elder as well. The elder not only rules, but also ministers the Word and teaches, as well as the minis-

ter. If therefore the deacons are to be excluded from the consistory, it certainly will have to be on some other ground than that of the distinction among the offices. In fact, to separate the deacons from the consistory because of the distinction of the offices would really lead to the conclusion that there are but two offices in the church, the one exercised by the minister and elders and the other by the deacons.

But there is more. The deacons represent the priestly aspect of the office of Christ, and, therefore, have for their distinctive office the ministry of the mercy of Christ. But if the deacons are to be excluded from the consistory because of the distinction of their office, how is it to be explained that in the exercise of that office they are restricted to the care of the poor. It is undoubtedly due to this restriction that the office of deacon has generally come to be looked upon as inferior. In fact, if, while the ministry of the minister and the elders extends over the entire congregation, the ministry of the deacons is limited to a few poor in the congregation, one can hardly escape that conclusion. But if the distinctive office of the deacons is the ministry of the mercies of Christ, then the exercise of that office certainly includes far more than giving a little material aid to the poor in the congregation. In fact, that is not even the most important element in the ministry of mercy. Ministering unto the spiritual needs of the people of God is by far the most important side of the office. But looking at it from that spiritual point of view, the ministry of mercy does not merely concern a few poor, but extends over the entire congregation. All God's people are poor and needy and have need of the mercy of Christ. It certainly belongs to the ministry of mercy, to minister unto these spiritual needs of the people of God, to nourish their hungry souls with the bread of life, to pray and intercede for them, to visit the sick,

whether they be spiritually sick or physically, and to comfort the sorrowing. It is for this reason that the synod of Dordt (1574) declared it to be proper for the minister to ask the deacons as well as the elders to visit the sick and comfort them with the Word, since this was in harmony with their office.

From all this it is evident that although we may distinguish among the three aspects of the office, we cannot separate them. The distinctive offices are but three aspects of what is basically one office. You cannot take one aspect of that office and separate it from the others.

What is more, as has been pointed out, this distinction among the offices is not, and never has been, consistently maintained. For although the Church Order, on the one hand, seemingly excludes the deacons from the consistory, it at the same time, with the confessions, recognizes the one consistory, composed of ministers, elders, and deacons. The Church Order does provide that, in the interest of efficiency, separate meetings may be held by the elders and by the deacons. In other words, the Church Order provides for a limited measure of division of labor in keeping with the peculiar duties of the offices. But in the first place, the introduction of this division of labor plan is a matter which is left for each church to decide entirely for itself. In the second place, this division of labor may never be such that two agencies control the life of the congregation. In the third place, this division of labor is both limited and conditional. It is limited by the fact that much of the labor in the congregation is to be done in the combined meetings. And it is conditioned by the size of the congregation. Therefore, although providing for a limited measure of division of labor, an absolute separation of the offices is foreign to the Church Order. It is also in conflict with the very nature of the offices. □



# Fullness (Fill)

**T**he words fullness, fill, fill up, used scores of time in both Testaments, indicate a certain measure or amount that has been determined by God in His eternal counsel. Because God works all things according to the counsel of His own will, these predetermined measures are all filled up at the appointed time. It may even be said that when all things are filled up or fulfilled, then history is completed and Christ returns.

The God who has determined all these things is Himself the God of fullness. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" (Jer. 23:24). After Moses finished construction of the tabernacle, "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Ex. 40:34). "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). In His presence "is fulness of joy" (Ps. 16:11). "The whole earth is filled with his glory" (Ps. 72:19). When we know the love of Christ, "we are filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:19).

It pleased the Father "that in Christ should all fulness dwell" (Col. 1:19), so that, through the incarnation, "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). Accordingly, Christ is "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). "And of his fulness have all we received, grace for grace" (John 1:16). Implied in the cup which Christ prayed might pass from Him (Mark 14:36) is a fullness of suffering which the Father had ordained for Christ to endure.

Time is a measure, the fullness of which is ordained by God. Christ was born of the virgin "when the fulness of the time was come" (Gal. 4:4). With the birth and work of Christ, time is full, and "in the dispensation of the fulness of times Christ gathers together in one all things in heaven and on earth," until time shall be no more. Jesus performed His work according to a timetable set by God. When His mother would rush Him, He replied, "Mine hour is not yet come" (John 2:4), and when His disciples would have Him go up to the feast He replied, "I go not up yet unto this feast, for my time is not yet full come" (John 7:8). In the fullness of time, Christ

fulfilled the Scriptures (Matt. 26:54), prophecy (Luke 21:22), the Law (Rom. 8:4), all righteousness (Matt. 3:15), all the good pleasure of God (II Thess. 1:11).

God's sovereign determination extends to the reprobate also. "God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:29). They must "fill up their sins away: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (I Thess. 2:16). John sees in vision the seven last plagues in which "is filled up the wrath of God" (Rev. 15:1, 7).

But especially is the salvation of the elect described in terms of fullness. The fullness of the Jews (Rom. 11:12) and the fullness of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:25) are brought in by Christ. These all receive a full reward (II John 8), a fullness of blessing through the gospel (Rom. 15:29), a fullness of joy (John 15:11), and a fullness of righteousness (Matt. 5:6). Stephen was a man full of faith, power, and the Holy Ghost (Acts 6:5, 8). Dorcas was a woman whose life was full of good works (Acts 9:36). The purpose of preaching is that the saints might come "to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). As the saints walk in the way of good works which God has prepared for them to perform, they "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ" (Col. 1:24). God has ordained that Christ and His body, the church, must suffer a certain amount. While on earth, Christ filled His cup; now the church must fill up her cup of affliction which is left behind for her by Christ.

The most amazing aspect to all these fullnesses is that they shall all be reached simultaneously! When the fullness of the Jews and of the Gentiles shall have been brought in, when the world has filled up their sins to the brim, when the suffering of the church has finally reached its pre-ordained measure, then the fullness of God's counsel shall be attained. And the end may come, and shall come! Then the church shall be taken to glory, as the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:23), and God will be all in all. □

---

*Rev. Kuiper is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*



# “Neither a Supralapsarian nor an Infralapsarian”

*And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.*

Exodus 4:24, 25

Schilder, in the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter of his little book, *Extra-Scriptural Binding*, remarks, “I myself do not want to be either a supralapsarian or an infralapsarian.” One wonders what he meant. As he certainly knew, the lapsarian controversy had been a part of Reformed theological history for a long time, having to do with the order of the decrees in the counsel of God, or, more particularly, whether among those decrees election is to be considered as above the fall or below it. Schilder seems to say that he held to neither position. But, if so, what then? Did he conceive of a third possible order in the counsel? Or, did he believe that it had no particular order at all? Or, was it simply that he did not think God has revealed the order of His counsel to us, and we should not inquire into the matter?

In all likelihood, what Schilder actually was intending was to identify himself with the position of Herman Bavinck, when—as though

recalling an idea once expressed by Theodore Beza—he maintained that neither position can ever be affirmed to the exclusion of the other. Klaas Dijk, in his definitive study on this subject a few years later, put it as follows:

With all of the effort to reconcile these two positions, no one can escape the fact that there is no contradiction between Infra and Supralapsarianism. Everyone assumes one or the other of the two considerations without rejecting the other, or denying the worth of the other, which is to say, there is no supralapsarian that does not recognize the usefulness of infralapsarian terms; and there is no infralapsarian that does not finally return to the supralapsarian presentation.<sup>1</sup>

As Dijk saw it, both the supralapsarian and the infralapsarian positions have their place in the totality of Reformed theology, so that no one, when working in this area, can escape speaking as an infralapsarian on certain occasions, and as a supralapsarian at others—which was pretty much what Beza had said well before the whole controversy began.

Still, when it comes to this remark of Schilder, there would seem to have been more to it than that. All through the series of articles which make up this little book, in fact going back even further through the development of the problem between the Liberated and the Protestant Reformed Churches,

one gains the impression that Schilder had developed a certain disdain for systematic theological distinctions, particularly when it came to anything relating to the doctrine of election, and even more so when it reflected a supralapsarian viewpoint. When it came down to it, of course, Schilder in this book quotes mostly from noted supralapsarians—men like Theodore Beza and William Twisse—but never without making a point of it in a rather condescending manner, as though to say to Hoeksema that he didn’t have a high regard for them himself, but would come down to his level and use the words of men who thought as Hoeksema did in the hope that that would make him listen.

The reason for this may well have been in what had happened in the Netherlands as a result of Kuyper’s redefinition of the idea of “common grace.” For Kuyper’s followers it was like a notice that they were now free to leave the historical limits of exegetical theology, and use the philosophical methods of men like Kant, which had become so popular in their day. In an amazingly short time, not only the seminary halls but also the pulpits of the church were echoing discourses which sounded more like academic lectures than the powerful proclamation of the Word of

<sup>1</sup> Dijk, Klaas. *De strijd over Intra- en Supralapsarisme in de Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland*, J.H. Kok, Kampen, 1912 p. 50.



God. Strange, and not infrequently strained, abstract theories were propounded at length, based not uncommonly on the presumption that the members of the church were all elect, and should look for confirmation of this in their ability to master those theories which were being heard on every side.

It was against this that Schilder had reacted, being convinced that what was happening was undermining the spiritual life of the church. And so, in the things he wrote, and even more in the way he preached, Schilder worked hard—and hard it was, if we can judge from the phenomenal amount of sweating and drinking he is said to have done while in the pulpit—always in an effort to bring his listeners away from this bland, abstract way of thinking into the living tensions which he believed form the real content of Scripture.

Possibly few things illustrate this better than the never to be forgotten sermon Schilder preached at the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids at the beginning of his visit in 1939. The occasion was tense, for the leaders of the Christian Reformed Church had warned their people against listening to him. But their warnings, it would appear, had the opposite effect; for, when the time came for him to preach, that sizable sanctuary was filled to overflowing, with people seated everywhere, down the aisles, in the foyer, and on the platform as well. And then Schilder announced for his subject the strange account of the circumcising of Moses' children, found in Exodus 4:24,25: "And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me." There, for at least one full hour, Dr. Schilder, in spite of his rather weak voice and often confusing sentences, held his audience in rapt

attention, as with dramatic description he drew out for all to see that terrible tension which was created between Moses and his wife, Zipporah, over the demand of God that his covenant be kept through that painful sacrament of blood.

And that, in effect, was at the heart of all Schilder's preaching. Essentially everywhere in Scripture he saw this; and every sermon he preached was in its own way an effort to draw out that tension which always exists between the promises of the covenant and its demands. Every baptized person is born to this, he thought, and through baptism is made to stand between those two spiritual forces as they focus upon his life. The promises are given him, but can be lost, should he fail to keep the demands and so fall under the curse which is also a part of the covenant. With all the ability of the orator he was, Schilder would lay this out each time in terms few could ever forget.

In fact, with Schilder, this is the essence of covenant—God's rhetorical confrontation of man with promises and demands by which only can one be led to redemption; and there is no more awesome privilege one can have than to possess a place in the church of God where these promises and demands are laid before him again and again. Being born and baptized in the church of God means that one is to be raised in a Christian home, taught in a Christian school, and placed before the preaching and teaching of the church's ministry in such a way that he is made fully conscious of the covenant's blessings, and the responsibility which must be met if he is to remain within them. This is the law of God, and it constitutes the essence of the covenant.

In all of this, of course, there is a great deal which may be appreciated. Beyond question, those who are born, baptized, and raised within the church of God are privileged to participate in the life of

this church as it is manifest on the earth, which does include their being confronted regularly with God's words of promise and demand. Covenant children are to be raised in homes where the presence of God is known, and the responsibilities of living unto Him in prayer, obedience, and godly fear are expected and required every day. From childhood on, they are to be nurtured in God's Word by the parents in the home, teachers in the school, and pastors in the teaching and preaching of the Christian church, where they also take part in Christian worship, and are called to participate in the ordinances and disciplines which the church observes.

These are the advantages spoke of by Paul in Romans 9:4, 5, "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." And to which the epistle to the Hebrews refers in chapter 6:4, 5 when it speaks of "those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come." These are experiences which leave impressions on the soul which can never be erased, as Solomon noted in Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." They go with one all through life—with either positive or negative effects.

But, when all of this is said and done, the heart of the covenant is more than that—as Schilder might well have come to understand had he taken more time and given more effort to interacting with Hoeksema constructively when the opportunity was there.

To begin with, he might have come to see that the covenant is more than just law. As it was, of



course, Schilder had lived his life in the middle of Kuyperian preoccupation with the importance of law, arising perhaps from Kuyper's view of sphere sovereignty, in which everyone was to be concerned with his rights and responsibilities; and apparently, as emphatically as he rejected Kuyper's philosophical ways, and especially his view of presupposed regeneration, he could give up the hold which the idea of law had all about him.

But not so with Hoeksema. Hoeksema was certainly aware of Kuyper's teachings; but his theological roots were more traditional; and his own studies in Romans and Hebrews, both of which he had preached through in close detail, had brought him clearly to the conclusion that, while the law has indeed a real and important place in relationship to the covenant, it cannot be the covenant itself, as Schilder in essence claimed.

And so also, Schilder might have come to understand the consequence which would certainly come from making the covenant conditional. It was nothing new. Herman Bavinck, the great Dutch theologian with whom Schilder so often sought to identify himself, had said it quite clearly:

if ... salvation is not the sheer gift of grace but in some way depends upon the conduct of men, then the covenant of grace is converted into a covenant of works. Man must then satisfy some condition in order to inherit eternal life. In this, grace and works stand at opposite poles from each other and are mutually exclusive. If salvation is by grace it is no longer by works, or otherwise grace is no longer grace. And if it is by works, it is not by grace, or otherwise works are not works (Rom. 11:6).<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly Schilder had read this at some point, but apparently ignored it, repressed it, or simply passed it by. And it was that

which finally caused the break between him and Hoeksema, and between the Liberated and Protestant Reformed Churches. It was simply not something which could be accepted as part of the teaching of the Protestant Reformed, as the Liberated insisted it must if we were to continue working together.

But finally, and above all, what Schilder had missed, by confining the covenant to a rhetorical pronouncement of law, was the real nature of the covenant, the fact that it is not just a legal statement, but life itself, an organic union between God and man, which lives and grows from generation to generation, uniting all of His elect people as they are joined together into one church. As Bavinck had once said, "The second peculiarity or remarkable characteristic of the covenant of grace is that in all of its dispensations it has an organic character."<sup>3</sup> This the law cannot be, and cannot give. Law may serve the purpose of life, but by itself it kills, as Paul said in II Corinthians 3:6, "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament (or "covenant," BW); not of the letter (the law, BW), but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." The covenant is not a dead "letter," but a living, functioning relationship, as Hoeksema went on to point out, of friendship—reaching back to a thought of the old seventeenth century Dutch theologian of the covenant, Johannes Cocceius. Hoeksema spent his life reflecting on this concept of friendship, and how it is indeed the underlying principle of the covenant, which should infect the whole of our theology—a thoroughly biblical and rich concept which James related so graphically to the covenant with Abraham in James 2:23: "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God."

In the end what Schilder missed was the fact that such an amazing reality as God's covenant

with man, His taking man into a living relationship of friendship with Him, can only be a matter of pure grace. Only He can bring it to be, for it is literally life from the dead (Rom 4:17): the pure grace, spoken of by Jeremiah, 31:33, "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." It is not a conditional requirement man must meet, but that which God establishes with those whom He chosen, His elect:

"After all, when the covenant of grace is separated from election, it ceases to be a covenant of grace and becomes again a covenant of works. Election implies that God grants man freely and out of grace the salvation which man has forfeited and which he can never again achieve in his own strength."<sup>4</sup>

-----

Having known Hoeksema personally, and as a young man watched him through the course of this long and painful controversy, I find it hard to believe that for him there was any greater disappointment than to find that Schilder and, through Schilder's influence, so many who had learned their theology under Hoeksema, were not really interested in dealing with this whole matter of the covenant theologically. From the time they first met, Hoeksema had believed that in Schilder he had found an established theologian who was willing to interact with him seriously about the deep truths of the Reformed faith. And, after the dark curtain of the Second World War finally lifted, he waited in expectation that this would be done. But wait as he might, the most that

2 Bavinck, Herman, *Our Reasonable Faith*, W.B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, p. 272.

3 *Ibid.* p. 276.

4 *Ibid.* p. 272.



ever came was this rhetorical diatribe over words, long after any real possibility of constructive dialogue was past. The Liberated had made it quite clear that, unless we

were willing to take their law inspired view of the covenant into our churches, they had no real interest in interacting with us further. Sadly, for many of our leaders and those who followed them, this was

acceptable; but for Hoeksema, such ignoring of theological problems was not. And I am sure that inwardly, as he read these articles, Hoeksema must have wept. □

**In His Fear**

**Rev. Daniel Kleyn**

## The Difficult Life

**I**t is a fact that the Christian's life on earth is difficult. Every true child of God knows this from experience. And every true child of God knows this from the Scriptures.

God has not promised us an easy life. The Scriptures do not say: "In this world ye shall *not* have tribulation." The Word of God does not promise: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall *not* suffer persecution." The very opposite is true (John 16:33 and II Tim. 3:12). And it is not simply the case that the difficulties of life come along every now and then as small hurdles for us to cross, after which all is smooth and easy. Rather, believers are told "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). We can expect it. The life of the Christian in this world is the difficult life.

This is also the thought expressed in a passage we used recently as the theme for family visitation in our congregation. The passage is Matthew 7:13, 14. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

The text makes it clear that the Christian life is arduous by comparing that life to a narrow gate and a narrow way. The text is saying that both the gate and the way refer to the same thing, namely, the difficult life of the child of God.

The idea, first of all, is that the whole of the Christian life on this earth can be compared to an entering through a narrow gate. Every day of his life on earth the child of God must strive to enter through the narrow gate. The emphasis is on the fact that the gate is narrow—so narrow, in fact, that one can barely squeeze through it. There is no room to take along extras, not even a backpack. One must strip himself of many things in order to fit through this gate.

But our life in this world can also be compared to walking along a narrow way, or road. And again the point is the same—this road is so narrow that it is hard to travel. This is no highway. It is not even a low-maintenance gravel road in the country. It is a steep and winding pathway up a mountainside. As one climbs, his feet slip. He is hemmed in on all sides by trees and by rocks. He can barely make any progress along that way. And at times it seems he travels all alone.

One elderly man in the congrega-

tion put it this way. He said that living the Christian life is like driving a Model T Ford with a bent steering rod along a narrow road. Because of the defect in the steering, the Model T constantly pulls to the right, toward the ditch. The difficulty lies in keeping your hands firmly on the wheel and remaining on that narrow road. That, he said, is the life of the Christian. How true!

What is it that makes your life as a Christian difficult?

Many answers could be given. The struggles of life are unique to each family, to each individual, to each age group, and to each community in which we live. Every child of God will most likely, according to the varying circumstances of his or her life, give a different answer to the above question. Some are elderly and experience difficulties peculiar to the elderly—sickness, pain, loss of memory, inability to do things as they used to. Some are parents and face the problems related to raising children, especially as they are called to raise them in a world that increases in its wickedness and thus also in its power to tempt our children and young people. Some are young people and children who must deal with the trials and temptations that are peculiar to their age and situation in life. And so the way is narrow for all of God's children.

---

*Rev. Kleyn is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Edgerton, Minnesota.*



The way is narrow because of affliction. It is certainly true that the wicked also experience affliction, but very often it is more severe and more frequent for the believer. (See Psalm 73.) And it is never easy to suffer. There is sickness that threatens our very life or the lives of loved ones. There is pain that must be endured every day. There is mental illness. There is departure of loved ones from the faith. There are unexpected events in life that alter all our plans and purposes. There is death, sometimes even of one who is still young and, as we would say, in the prime of his or her life.

God sends these afflictions. His purpose, as we all know, is always good. Yet this does not alter the fact that affliction makes the Christian life difficult.

Then there is difficulty because of persecution. This is unique to the child of God. Those who live godly lives in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. The ungodly man hates the child of God. He hates him because of how he lives. He hates him because of what he confesses. He hates him especially when he confesses, unashamedly, that Jesus Christ is his Lord.

Persecution comes in many forms. For some Christians it is severe, even requiring that they die for what they confess. For others this persecution is milder, coming in the form of verbal attacks. In either case this is the persecution of a world that hates God and the people of God. The world will attack, you can be sure of that. Especially will they do so when we, by God's grace, withstand their attempts to get us off the narrow and onto the broad way. In throngs they stand as spectators along the sides of the narrow way. Ceaselessly they mock and deride the faithful believer, poking him with sticks and hurling stones at him as he struggles along.

Another reason for the straitness of the road is that the child of God is among the few. "Few there

be that find it," says the text. It is never easy to be with the few. Much easier to be with the crowds — to do what they do, to go where they go, to be involved in the life of ease and pleasure in which they are involved. Thus we are attracted to the broad way. For who wants to be with the few? Who wants to be among those who are despised? Who wants to be different?

Even though all these and numerous other things make the way narrow, the main reason for the difficult life has not yet been mentioned. What is it? It is our old sinful nature. It is on account of that sinful nature that we are attracted to the broad way.

That broad way is the easy way. It is the super highway of fun and pleasure. The travelers on this road may take along whatever they wish. They may live as they please and do as they please. In fact, the signposts along this way read: "Travel as you wish! Go as fast as you like! No restrictions!"

The broad way is the way of the world. And the language of that world is this: "Live it up! Enjoy this life to the full! If you want it, get it! If it makes you happy, it's right! If it feels good, do it! This is the life you deserve!"

The pressure to travel the broad and easy way constantly confronts the children of God. We see, hear, and read the signposts of the broad road daily — from every television show, from every radio station, and in every newspaper. As we travel the narrow pathway of life, pressed in on all sides by countless obstacles and restrictions, we notice the easy way and even give in, at times, to the tempting voices of the ungodly.

We listen all too intently, for example, to their seducing cries as they proclaim: "Wouldn't you prefer the easy way? Come join us. Enjoy the luxuries of life. Build a new house. Purchase a new car. Don't let the fact that you can't pay for it stop you. After all, you de-

serve a much better life than your parents and grandparents. You certainly don't have to live as they did. You certainly don't have to make the sacrifices they made. Make this world your home."

How often is it not the case that we heed these tempting cries? Then it is no longer the kingdom of heaven first, but "Me first!" Self-indulgence becomes our motive in life. And with that all sense of Christian stewardship is abandoned.

The faithful Christian says "No!" to all that the world offers. Self-denial is his motto, not self-indulgence. Deliberately he makes his choice for that which is difficult.

Difficult though it may be, the Christian must enter daily through the narrow gate and walk daily along the narrow way. It is not easy. But it is crucially important. Important because of where these ways lead. The wide way leads to destruction, to eternal destruction, to hell. The narrow way leads to life, to eternal life, to heaven. It is a matter of life and death! Which path are we on?

We Christians sometimes want to be road-builders. We certainly realize that the broad way is not the way for us to travel. Yet on the other hand we do not like the narrow way. We find it too restrictive. We find it too strenuous. So we begin building a new way along which to travel. We begin to construct a new road which incorporates a little (perhaps a lot) of the broad way and a little of the narrow way. Then the line of clear distinction between the broad and narrow ways is lost. We want to walk with at least one foot on the broad path. We want to make our motto, not self-denial, but self-indulgence.

Scripture, however, does not speak of a third way. Always the Bible speaks in language that is black and white. It is not both/and; it is either/or. God has not designed a third way. God has not



placed the Christian on a way that is only semi-difficult. There is only one way that leads to eternal life, and that is the narrow way. The way of self denial. The way of affliction. The way of suffering. The way of persecution. The way of the few. The way of the antithesis. Christ said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Yes, we are admonished to live the difficult life. And so difficult is that way that one cannot help but wonder why anyone at all travels it. The only reason is grace.

Left to ourselves we would rush headlong onto the broad way that leads to destruction. But God takes His children and places them on the narrow way. And not only does He place us on it, He keeps us there. His hand holds us back from fleeing for the life of ease and luxury and pleasure.

The means God uses to keep His own on the narrow way are many. Chief, of course, is the preaching. In order to have the strength to remain on the narrow way we need to shut our ears to the voices of the world and open

our ears to hear and heed the voice of Christ. But there is also the means of prayer. And the means of the reading and study of the Scriptures personally and as families. And the means of fellowship, not with those on the broad way, but with those who are with us on the narrow way. They are our friends to give us encouragement as fellow pilgrims on the way to eternal life.

Difficult though it may be, the Lord uses the narrow way with everything on it to bring us to the eternal blessedness of life in His kingdom. □

## News From Our Churches

## Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Mission Activities

The Foreign Mission Committee of our churches has postponed their next scheduled trip to the Philippines until the first two weeks of April. This was necessary in order to get a second minister to go with Rev. R. Moore, pastor of the Hull, IA PRC, and it also gives the FMC and the delegation more time to prepare for the investigating work they will be called upon to do, which apparently will focus on contacts in a different part of the Philippines than the last delegation visited back in October.

Speaking of that last trip to the Philippines in October reminds me that Rev. R. Smit, one of the delegates on the trip, was able to show slides of that visit at a Christmas Social for the Adult Bible Society of the Edgerton, MN PRC.

### Evangelism Activities

We pass along an interesting correspondence received through the evangelism efforts of the Loveland, CO PRC: "I thank my Lord for allowing you to cre-

ate one of the finest and definitely most needed pages about true God of the Bible and His Salvation plan ([www.prca.org](http://www.prca.org)). I am a member of the ... in New Jersey. I was born in Poland and right now I participate in a mail list with many people in my old country. I would like to ask you for permission to translate some of your material into Polish and to make it available for my Polish friends who seek for the Truth. Would this be possible?"

Loveland's Evangelism Committee evidently answered yes to that question, because their next bulletin contained a follow-up to that request. "Thank you very much for allowing me to use your materials. Every time I finish translating a pamphlet (into Polish) I'll send it to you. I will do my best to translate it as accurately as possible."

### Congregation Activities

It hardly seems possible, but the six-month internship of Seminarian Garry Eriks is already finished. It came to a close at the end of 1998. The congregation of the Loveland, CO PRC, where Garry served his internship, got together after their New Year's Day worship service for a time of fellowship and

farewell for the Eriks family. We also express our appreciation for his labors this past half year and may God graciously bless the work of Garry as he completes his final semester in our seminary.

At their annual congregational meeting in early December, the members of the South Holland, IL PRC approved three proposals brought from their council. First to remodel part of the balcony of their sanctuary for audio/visual/choir use. Second, to transfer their mission fund balance into their Evangelism Committee fund. And third, to repair their organ.

At a similar meeting in December, the membership of the Byron Center, MI PRC decided to repaint their sanctuary.

Winter weather has slowed down the progress of building on the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. Carpenters continue to work on the inside ceiling in the sanctuary, and by now perhaps the remaining windows have been installed.

Progress also continues on the sanctuary of the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL, with the latest information telling us that the installation of siding is complete and dry-wall-ing is nearing completion, with

---

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



# The Standard Bearer

P.O. Box 603  
Grandville, MI 49468-0603

**PERIODICAL**  
**Postage Paid at**  
**Grandville,**  
**Michigan**

much inside hardware also put in.

We trust that this past Christmas season you were able to spend some time celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ with the children of your church. Many of our Sunday Schools present their annual Christmas programs sometime in December. What a wonderful way to be reminded of the promise, love, light, and hope of Christmas. We want to thank all the children for again showing us adults how thankful we should be to Him for His unspeakable gift.

## School Activities

**W**e also want to pass along our thanks to the choir of Cov-

enant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI. We were there recently to show our support for two of our nieces who sing in the choir, and we really enjoyed the evening. Not only did they sing some good spiritual songs, but they did it with a smile on their faces. It truly makes for an enjoyable hour when the audience sees that those singing are really enjoying themselves, and, more importantly, expressing the joy of their salvation in song.

Members of the three P.R. churches in the Chicago, IL area were encouraged recently to join together for the annual school bus waxing at the DeJong Farm. We

assume this waxing is done inside a heated building.

## Minister Activities

**I**n a follow-up to our last "News," we are happy and thankful to report that Samuel Laning, infant son of Rev. and Mrs. James Laning, came home in mid-December after a hospital stay of approximately two months. We can all testify, "By thee have I been holden up from the womb" (Ps. 71:6a).

## Food For Thought

"I confess the devil is mighty, but he will never be All-Mighty, as my God and Savior is."

—Martin Luther □

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### CONFERENCE

on the Millennium

"Biblical Sanity Amid Millennial Madness"

February 5, 7:30 P.M. &

February 6, 9:00 A.M. and 11:00 A.M.

Speakers:

**Prof. David Engelsma**

"Taking a Proper Perspective  
of this New Testament Age  
and of the Return of Our Lord"

**Prof. Herman Hanko**

"Taking Note of the Dominant Signs  
of Our Times"

**Rev. Charles Terpstra**

"Taking Care to be Ready  
for the New Millennium"

Hosted by the  
Evangelism Committee  
First PRC of Holland  
located at:  
3641 104<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Holland, MI 49424

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hope PRC of Redlands, CA, expresses its heartfelt Christian sympathy to Clarence DeVries in the death of his wife,

**MRS. MARY DE VRIES,**

who was taken home to her eternal rest on November 26, 1998.

May he be comforted by the words of Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Rev. Arie denHartog, Pres.

Earl L. Grothman, Jr., Sec.

### 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 Meulenberg (Phone: 453-8466). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 22, 1999, D.V.

Student Aid Committee  
Larry Meulenberg, Secretary

### 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 Doctrine of Sovereign Predestination" is also planned for Tuesday, March 2. All delegates or visitors in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Redlands' consistory, Mr. Doug Pastoor, 172 Channing St., Redlands, CA 92373. Phone: (909) 792-9392.

Rev. Steven Key,  
Stated Clerk