



**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

The Standard Bearer

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Remembering the Poor

Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

Galatians 2:10

The Jerusalem council did not lord it over the apostle Paul and give him all kinds of orders. They did, however, ask him for one thing: that he would remember the poor of the churches of Jerusalem and Judea. There had been a great famine which devastated the people. Paul and Barnabas had already brought money from the church of Antioch to help relieve that great need. But there had been and still was much persecution of the church by the Jews, which left the churches of Jerusalem and Judea in great need. Thus there was a request for continued financial help for the relief of the poor in the church.

Rev. Houck is pastor of Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois.

This is a situation which the church will always face, for the poor are always with us. That was true in the days of Moses. We read, "For the poor shall never cease out of the land..." (Deut. 15:11). That was true in the days of Christ. He said, "For ye have the poor always with you..." (Matt. 26:11). We live in a very affluent society. Generally speaking, we have much more than people in other lands. But there are still poor people in our midst and always will be.

God gives these needy families for a reason. We read, "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD" (Zeph. 3:12). God leaves an afflicted and poor people in the church to remind us of the fact that we are to trust in Him and not

upon our own strength and resources. That fact obligates us to take care of the poor. James, Peter, John, and the other leaders of the church of Jerusalem understood that. That is why the one thing they requested of Paul was that he remember the poor. The apostle Paul also knew that. He proclaims, "...the same which I also was forward to do." The words "was forward to do" mean "to exert oneself, endeavour, give diligence." The apostle exerted himself. He was very diligent in remembering the poor. He saw to it that the Gentile churches which he established took collections for them.

That is our calling too. God requires us to remember the poor with the same zeal as did the apostle Paul. We may not neglect them. God says in Deuteronomy 15:7, "If there be among you a poor

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man of one of thy brethren ... thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother."

What does it mean to remember the poor? First of all, it means that we have a good attitude toward them. "The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends" (Prov. 14:20). The poor are often despised, not because of any evil in them, but just because they are poor. We may not do that. We may not be hard, cold, and indifferent toward the poor. Our calling is to have mercy and compassion for them.

Out of that attitude of mercy we are to treat them well in general. We are not to oppress them or be hard on them. We are to show kindness to them. That is not always done. Sometimes favoritism is shown to the rich because they have money. That is not right. The poor are to be treated just like everyone else, in spite of their poverty.

Out of that attitude of mercy we are also to give them financial and material help so that they have what they need to live. "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" (Matt. 19:21). We are not to be so attached to our money that we will not give help to the poor when we ought to, especially if we have been given much. It may be that the Lord gives us more than others just so that we can help the needy. Even if we are not well off, we have an obligation to the poor. Our money and possessions should not mean more to us than keeping Christ's command to care for the needy.

This obligation relates especially to our brothers and sisters in the Lord. It is not that we may not give to the relief of unbelievers. If we have neighbors who are poor, this is part of our calling to love them and show kindness to them.

But we are especially to care for the poor of the church. Thus we read, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). We are to do good to the household of faith because this is a manifestation of our love of the brethren. We all belong to Christ, therefore we are to care for each other.

There is also an obligation which the poor have in this matter. They are not to be ashamed or afraid of accepting the help which is offered to them. Sometimes we are proud. We don't want the help of others. We don't want anyone to know our needs. This is wrong. No one who has true needs ought to be afraid or ashamed to make his needs known. The very fact that God commands us to care for the poor implies that the poor are not to be ashamed or afraid. Receiving help is to be a blessing. It is to be a means of receiving the mercy of Christ.

Besides that, we have God as our example. He has in His heart a very soft spot for the poor. God is merciful and compassionate to the poor among His people. He takes care of them and helps them in their needs. We read, "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him" (Ps. 12:5). The Lord hears the cry of the poor and needy. He fights against all who oppress them. Since God so cares for the poor and needy, ought not we have the same compassion and give of our prosperity to help them?

There are two basic means of giving to the poor. First of all, we are to give to the poor through the official benevolence collections of the church. This is the way the apostle Paul had the Gentile believers give. We read, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given

order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (I Cor. 16:1-2). Here the apostle gives instructions to the church of Corinth to take collections on the Lord's Day.

Thus we have the principle that the church is to take benevolence collections on the Lord's Day in the worship service. The fact that these collections are to be taken during the worship service means that they are acts of worship. We give not to a poor person, but to God. While we give to God, we worship Him and thank Him for what He has given to us.

When we give to the poor by giving to the benevolence collections, we also support the office of the deacon. For the deacons have the special calling to collect and distribute the alms. The advantage of this method is that the deacons go to the poor as representatives of Christ, with the mercy of Christ. The poor are made to see that this money is not from a person or even the church, but from Christ. It is a manifestation of Christ's compassion and love for them.

It is also proper for individual believers to give directly to the poor. There are many passages of Scripture which indicate this.

"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (I John 3:17). If we truly love God, we ought to be willing to give to our poor brother in his need. "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not

No one who has true needs ought to be afraid or ashamed to make his needs known.

works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:15-17). True faith, faith that is not dead, will manifest itself in giving to the brother in his need.

There are several characteristics of proper giving. First of all, we are not to give grudgingly or of necessity. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:7). When we give of necessity, we give because we have to. We know that it is our calling, but we would rather not give. We feel forced into giving. When we give grudgingly we give in sorrow, pain, grief, or annoyance. We weep within ourselves because we have lost some of our money. This kind of giving is not truly giving, even though we put money in the collection plate.

Rather we are to give cheerfully and from the heart. Even though we know that giving is required by the Lord and is therefore something which we ought to do, we do it because we want to. We do it because we love our Lord. It does not cause us pain. We are happy about it and rejoice in the opportunity to show our love of God.

In the third place we ought to give liberally. "...Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land" (Deut. 15:11). We are not to open our hand just enough to let out a little. We are to open wide our hands. We are to give to him in abundance. Our generosity ought to be based upon the Lord's generosity to us. He was so liberal in His giving to us that He gave His only begotten Son. We may not be stingy. Remember the words of II Corinthians 9:6, "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."

Finally, we are to give to the poor without ostentation. We are not to show off when we give, or boast in how much we give. We

read, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:1-4). The Pharisees sought after the glory of man, so they gave their gifts in the streets where all could see them. They even had their servants blow trumpets to let the people know that they were going to give. We may not give that way. We are to give for God's glory and not our own. Therefore, we ought to give in secret.

Whether we faithfully give or neglect our calling, there will be certain consequences. We read, "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard" (Prov. 21:13). If we do not hear the cry of the poor and help them, God will not hear our cry for help. He will be just as hard and unconcerned as we are. "Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail.... The LORD hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works.... Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood; and it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt" (Amos 8:4, 5, 8). This is the judgment which the Lord brings upon a congregation that swallows up the needy. He sends a flood, as it were, which will destroy that people and bring them to mourning.

That is because the refusal to care for the needy is a reproach of the Lord. "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker..." (Prov. 17:5). If we mock the poor by not helping them in their need, by that action we also mock God who made the poor and gave them to the church.

Not only that, our punishment is great because by neglecting the poor we neglect Christ. Jesus said,

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart

from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and

in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me" (Matt. 25:41-45). By neglecting the poor we reveal that we are not true children of God. We are only hypocrites as the Pharisees were.

On the other hand, if we are faithful in this calling, there is a reward for us. There is a reward for us as individuals. Jesus said to the rich man that if he would sell all that he had and give it to the poor he would have treasures in heaven. That is true of us too. We may not have much on earth, but we will have a whole treasure chest full of jewels in heaven. We will have all the spiritual blessings and gifts given to us by Jesus Christ. However, we do not have to wait for heaven to be rewarded for giving to the poor. We have a reward here and now. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). The poor receive a wonderful blessing by re-

*We
are not
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little.*

ceiving the mercies of Christ, but those who give receive even more of a blessing.

The same is true of the church as a whole. The congregation which helps the poor will also be richly blessed of the Lord. When a congregation helps the needy in her

own midst, there is manifested the communion of the saints and the brotherly love which exists among all the members. There is unity, peace, and contentment, for God's mercies are seen in her midst. When a congregation helps other

congregations who have needy people, the unity of the body of Christ is manifested. The congregations are made to feel more and more that they belong to that one spiritual body to which all of God's people belong. That is a great reward. □

Editorial

A Timely Question about "Preterism"

A reader has asked about "preterism." The question is occasioned by the series of editorials defending (Reformed) amillennialism (*Standard Bearer*, Jan. 15, 1995 - Dec. 15, 1996). The subject is worthy of editorial treatment.

The question and my response follow.

Question

I have read your articles on amillennialism and have learned much. I have some dealings with people who hold to a postmillennial view. Lately, some people have come to our church who hold to a preterist view. Do you know much about this view? Do you know what good books or articles I could read? They deny the second coming of Christ and many other important truths. I hope that you can help me.

Michael Mc Cullough
Ripon, CA

Response

What "Preterism" is

Your question is timely.

"Preterism" is a heresy that, astonishingly, is creeping into Reformed and Presbyterian churches. That it does so is largely due to postmillennial Christian Reconstructionism. Against this error I was fighting in the series of editorials that occasioned your question.

Your question is also timely because preterism is about time, specifically the time of Jesus' second coming, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the renewal of the creation.

Preterism holds that the time of Jesus' second coming (Greek: *parousia*) was A.D. 70. The second coming of Jesus was the destruction of Jerusalem in that year. Preterism holds that the second coming of Christ promised in Scripture was *exclusively* the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. A.D. 70 was the end of the ages prophesied by Scripture. Christ came then; the dead were raised then; the final judgment took place then; creation was renewed then.

To expect a visible, bodily coming of Jesus, a resurrection of the

dead, a final judgment, and a cataclysmic destruction of the present creation in the future on the basis of any prophecy of Scripture is mistaken. All is past.

Hence, "preterism." The term itself derives from a Latin word meaning 'past.'

Basic to the heresy is its interpretation of Matthew 24 as referring exclusively to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The preterist insists that verse 34 is decisive for this interpretation: "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

Preterism also makes much of the fact that Scripture teaches that Jesus' coming is "near," or "at hand." Explaining this "nearness" in terms of a very brief period of time according to man's standards, preterism concludes that the New Testament predicted the coming of Christ within 40 years at the most. This prediction was fulfilled in A.D. 70. It was completely and exhaustively fulfilled in A.D. 70.

Preterists

A recent book promoting preterism is *The Promise of His Coming: Interpreting New Testament Statements concerning the Time of*

Christ's Appearance (Chicago: Laudemont Press, 1996), by R. C. Leonard and J. E. Leonard. The book contends that all the eschatological prophecies of Scripture have been fulfilled in the past, in A.D. 70.

Since the coming of Christ, as predicted in the New Testament documents, has already taken place, little scriptural basis exists for perpetuating the doctrine that it still lies in the future (p. 216).

We have presented the evidence that the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 represents the fulfillment of what the apostolic church knew as the promise of Jesus' coming and the end of the age. The future hope of today's church, therefore, lies in another direction... (p. 219).

For today's Christians, the last days to which the New Testament refers lie in the past. Our task is not to anticipate the end, but to live in the new community inaugurated by Jesus Christ (p. 220).

Present-day preterism, including the teaching of the Leonards, draws heavily from a book by the 19th century Congregational writer, James Stuart Russell. The book is *The Parousia: a Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*. A new edition of this work, first published in 1878, was published in 1996 by Kingdom Publications in Bradford, PA. The references that follow use this recent edition.

According to Russell, the second coming of Christ that is foretold in I Thessalonians 4:13-17 and in II Thessalonians 1 and 2 happened in A.D. 70 in the destruction of Jerusalem (pp. 165-190). The resurrection of the dead promised in I Corinthians 15 happened in A.D. 70 in the destruction of Jerusalem (pp. 199ff.). The public, final judgment of Matthew 25:31-46 is not the future, "final judgment of the whole human race, but that of the guilty nation ... of Palestine

... whose day of doom was now near at hand" (p. 108). The renewal of creation described in Romans 8:19-22 is not a coming deliverance of the "irrational and inanimate creation," but the liberation of groaning, "suffering and down-trodden humanity" when "the whole visible fabric and frame of Judaism were swept away" in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (pp. 222-232).

The entire book of Revelation, with the embarrassing exception of the millennium of chapter 20, found its complete fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem (pp. 362ff.).

Russell's preterism is consistent. Every prophecy of Scripture about the coming of Christ and the end of the world was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

We are compelled ... to conclude that the Parousia, or second coming of Christ, with its connected and concomitant events, did take place, according to the Saviour's own prediction, at the period when Jerusalem was destroyed, and before the passing away of "that generation" (p. 549).

As this quotation indicates ("according to the Saviour's own prediction"; "passing away of 'that generation'"), Russell's interpretation of New Testament eschatology is squarely based on his explanation of Matthew 24 as referring exclusively to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Russell affirms that the language of Matthew 24 (and 25) "is not only appropriate as applied to the destruction of Jerusalem, but that this is its true and exclusive application" (p. 82).

This is heresy.

It is gross denial of the second coming of Christ and, with it, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the renewal of the creation of the heaven and the earth.

No one can possibly fail to detect the false doctrine.

Preterism destroys the Christian hope: the soon-coming of Jesus Christ our Lord in the body to raise our bodies from the dead and to take us unto Himself in the perfected fellowship of the covenant. With the scoffers of II Peter 3:4, it asks, "Where is the promise of his coming?" With Hymenaeus and Philetus, it says that "the resurrection is past already" (II Tim. 2:18).

It is rejection of the Christian hope with a vengeance. Nothing of our hope is left.

Russell admits as much. Having annihilated the expectation of Christ's coming on the part of the church and the Christian, he imagines his readers asking, "Whither are we tending? What is to be the end and consummation of human history?" Indeed! What are our prospects? What were the prospects of the believers and their children after A.D. 70?

Russell's answer?

"Scripture prophecy guides us no further" (p. 549).

And, "Where nothing has been revealed it would be the height of presumption to prognosticate the future" (p. 550).

God's Word leaves us completely in the dark as regards the future.

The church and the believer are hopeless. Since we are saved by hope, according to Romans 8:24, preterism strips us of salvation.

Preterism... is rejection of the Christian hope with a vengeance. Nothing of our hope is left.

The Preterism of Christian Reconstruction

This grievous heresy, postmillennial Christian Reconstruction is promoting in Reformed and Presbyterian churches today, although it claims to avoid full-blown, consistent preterism. The close relationship between the fully developed, consistent preterism of James Stuart Russell and the Leonards on the one hand and the less fully de-

veloped, inconsistent preterism of Christian Reconstruction on the other hand is evident.

The new edition of Russell's *The Parousia* features glowing recommendations of the book by Gary DeMar and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. DeMar writes: "Russell's *Parousia* takes the Bible seriously when it tells us of the nearness of Christ's return.... Reading Russell is a breath of fresh air in a room filled with smoke and mirror hermeneutics." Although not agreeing with all of Russell's conclusions, Gentry praises the book highly and confesses his own dependence on it:

I highly recommend this well-organized, carefully argued, and compellingly written defense of preterism to serious and mature students of the Bible. It is one of the most persuasive and challenging books I have read on the subject of eschatology and has had a great impact on my own thinking.

DeMar and Gentry are mainstream champions of Christian Reconstruction.

Also, the Leonards, consistent preterists, appeal to Christian Reconstructionist David Chilton in support of their consignment of the whole of the book of Revelation to the past (*The Promise*, p. 156).

In addition, the reading of Russell's *The Parousia* brings to light the dependence of the Christian Reconstructionists on Russell for their interpretation of such passages as II Thessalonians 2 and the entire book of Revelation.

As for the protest by Christian Reconstruction that it wants to retain the hope of a future coming of Christ and a future resurrection of the dead on the basis of a few New Testament prophecies that still apply to the church today, that is, that it wants to hold an "inconsistent preterism," three things make this impossible.

First, Christian Reconstruction teaches that Matthew 24:1-35 ap-

plies exclusively to the destruction of Jerusalem, not at all to the coming of Christ in the future. Such is the basic importance of the prophecy of Matthew on the reckoning of everyone that if Jesus' eschatology has only the destruction of Jerusalem in view the same is true of all the eschatology of the New Testament. Matthew 24 is the issue. The interpretation of Matthew 24 is the difference between the hope of the Christian faith and the hopelessness of preterism. The four articles in which I examined, criticized, and refuted J. Marcellus Kik's preterist interpretation of Matthew 24 and then set forth the right explanation of the passage were the heart of the series of editorials, "A (Reformed) Defense of Amillennialism" (*SB*, April 1, April 15, May 1, and May 15, 1996).

Second, Christian Reconstruction insists on explaining the New Testament's teaching that the coming of Christ is "near" and "at hand" as meaning that Christ would come in the second coming within a few years, that is, in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. If this is, in fact, what is meant by "near," "at hand," and "quickly," Christ came in A.D. 70, and everything connected with His coming, e.g., the resurrection, took place at that time in the past. Scripture's prophecy of the end has been fulfilled. It has been fulfilled completely. It has been fulfilled completely in the destruction of Jerusalem. There is no further revelation of any future coming.

Third, Christian Reconstruction is committed to a consistent preterism, despite its protestations to the contrary, inasmuch as the one, great good in the future that Christian Reconstruction has its heart set on, looks forward to, and hastens toward is the earthly kingdom of its dreams. The hope of Christian Reconstruction is not the

second coming of Christ. To a future coming of Christ, Christian Reconstruction pays lip service. The hope of Christian Reconstruction is a carnal kingdom of earthly power, prosperity, and peace.

When the Leonards—consistent preterists—get around to telling us why they have shoved all of New Testament eschatology into the past, thus annihilating the expectation of Christ's coming, this is what they say:

The interpretation of Matthew 24 is the difference between the hope of the Christian faith and the hopelessness of preterism.

(This) provides the incentive for the church militant, the followers of Jesus Christ engaging the distortions and inequities of a godless culture, and laying the foundation for the continual reconstruction of society according to the principles of God's covenant law. Christians have no biblical warrant for withdrawing from this struggle in the hope that Christ will appear, sooner or later, to execute the sanctions of the end. The last days have come and gone, leaving the church on earth where Christ intended it to be (*The Promise*, p. 208).

Sound familiar?

The carnal kingdom of "Jewish dreams"!

Christian Reconstruction is committed, willy-nilly, to the full-blown, consistent preterism that strips the church and the Christian of all hope and all salvation.

The gospel of hope is Reformed, amillennial, biblical eschatology.

Jesus Christ is coming. He is on the way now. He will come in the future. He will come personally, bodily, and visibly. He comes quickly. His coming is near. We live daily in the expectation of Him. His coming is our hope.

Come, Lord Jesus! ☐

— DJE

Abound

Three things abound in this present world; yea, four things abound. The sins of the ungodly. The wrath of God. The grace of God. And the good works of the righteous. The Hebrew and the Greek word both express abundance in quantity or excellence in quality. It is used in the declarative, comparative, and superlative degrees. Sometimes the word is translated abundance, abundant, or abundantly.

Just as before the flood "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5), so just before the end of the world "iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24:12). The wicked trust "in the abundance of their riches" (Ps. 52:7), but "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). One of God's purposes with the law was that where "the law entered the offense might abound" (Rom. 5:20). The man whose besetting sin is anger "stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgressions" (Prov. 29:22). Surely the abounding lawlessness that we see today in every area of society indicates to us that the end of the world is at hand.

That God's anger, wrath, and sore displeasure abound is testified abundantly in the Scriptures. These terms are used hundreds of times in the Bible. More often, in fact, is the wrath of God mentioned than is the love of God! How strange that so little is heard concerning the wrath of God today! God's wrath is not a blemish upon the Godhead, but it is one of His perfections. His wrath is an aspect of the love which God has for Himself. It is an aspect of His holiness which cannot countenance sin. It stands related to the perfect jealousy that God demonstrates toward all those that oppose Him, for "the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man" who walks in the imagination of his heart (Deut. 29:19, 20). The anger of the Lord is great (Jer. 21:5), it is hot (Ex. 22:24), it smokes (Ps. 74:1), it is fierce (I Sam. 28:18), and at His wrath "the earth trembles" (Jer. 10:10). The wrath of the Lord is everlasting (John 3:36). It is constant, for "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11). It runs in generations, for "the curse of the Lord is in their homes" (Prov. 3:33). Is there anything greater than the wrath of the Lord?

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God's grace is! Because our God is the God of all grace, this virtue abounds in quantity and excels in quantity! "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). Those who turn unto the Lord discover that "he will abundantly pardon" (Is. 55:7). That God's grace is greater than sin and death is shown in Romans 5:15: "For if through the offense of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." And: "They which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." And: "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:17, 20)! We are taught to pray to God, for He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). God works all things for our good, "that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God" (II Cor. 4:15). The grace of our Lord is "exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 1:14). God confirmed His promise to us with an oath because He was "willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of His counsel" (Heb. 6:17). With grace comes mercy; "according to his abundant mercy hath (He) begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Pet. 1:3). Always this grace is in Jesus Christ, always it is particular for the elect, always it produces fruit unto God.

"A faithful man abounds with blessings" (Prov. 28:20). Grace leads a man to "abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13). He "abounds in consolation, even as the sufferings of Christ abound in him" (II Cor. 1:15). Though the Macedonians had great trials, "the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality" (II Cor. 8:2). The saints "abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us" (II Cor. 8:7). Yea, they abound in every good work (II Cor. 9:8).

Because the child of God knows that the works he performs are themselves the evidence and the fruit of divine grace — powerful, undeserved, saving — he abounds in thanksgiving (Col. 2:7). And in the world, where the foundations are being shaken, "he abounds in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as he knows that his labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58). God will use the labors of His people for much good in His kingdom, and when Jesus returns He will crown those labors with even greater grace. □

Signs of the Times (2)

The Rise of False Christs

And Jesus answered and said unto them: Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

Matthew 24:4, 5

As they were leaving the holy city Jesus' disciples were deeply disturbed by the Lord's powerful indictment upon Jerusalem and its inhabitants, since He had declared in no uncertain terms that Jerusalem would be destroyed and Israel as a nation would cease to exist. Likely they were discussing all these things among themselves, for when they reached the Mount of Olives Andrew and Peter with James and John approached Jesus with the question: "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3).

Jesus gave them many signs, as recorded in Matthew 24, among which was the sign of false Christs (v. 24). These false Christs, Jesus warned, will be very many and very deceptive, and the Lord's disciples must not allow themselves to be deceived.

The name Christ means "anointed," that is, to be ordained of and qualified by God to a certain task, in this instance to be the Savior of the world.

As Jesus foretold, there have been many throughout this present

dispensation who have presented themselves as saviors or deliverers, able to solve the problems of humanity. The Caesars, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, and Hitler have attempted to gain world power under the pretense of seeking the good of all.

There have also been many so-called religious leaders who claimed to have been sent of God. In a cloak of piety they have sought to bring about great revivals, attempting to spread Christianity far and wide and thus "convert" the whole world.

The apostle John writes in his first epistle: "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time."

At the time of the great Reformation in the sixteenth century, our fathers did not hesitate to brand the pope as the Antichrist. They did so because he calls himself the "Vicar of Christ," the successor of the apostle Peter. He maintains that Christ is bodily present in the Eucharist, so that those who partake of the wafer actually eat the body of Christ. He also maintains that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was holy, and did not actually die but was taken up into heaven (the assumption of Mary). He believes that in heaven Mary is the Mediatrix, who intercedes with the Son for those who pray to her.

Today there are many in the Reformed church world who are ready to compromise with the Roman Catholic Church. Some seek

a common bond of fellowship and talk of meetings to discuss uniting together. They argue that there are far more points of agreement than of disagreement between them, therefore the points of agreement should be stressed and the points of disagreement ignored. There are also those in Reformed circles who consider the statement in our Heidelberg Catechism that refers to the mass as an accursed idolatry to be too harsh, and who argue that it should therefore be removed.

But the Roman Catholic Church has not changed as far as its fundamental doctrines and tenets are concerned. The pope is still worshiped by thousands wherever he goes, even by many who profess to be protestants. He is still a power that should not be ignored.

There have been and still are many who call themselves evangelists, but who seek nothing more than their own popularity and profit. Peter speaks of them in his second epistle saying: "Through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not" (II Pet. 2:3).

It could not be said more emphatically. They are covetous, they seek themselves, they are hirelings who break into the fold in order to rob the sheepfold of God, to kill and destroy the sheep. They speak, Bible in hand, the language of the Scriptures, yet they deny its most fundamental truths. Often their lives are not in harmony with what they profess to preach.

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These so-called preachers emphasize love. Love is the solution to all the world's problems and to everyone's personal problems. They campaign for brotherly love among all peoples, languages, and races. Yet they fail to see that all true love is rooted in God, and that we cannot love the neighbor unless we love God.

Especially in our day there is also a strong influence of charismatic movements of various sorts. The charismatics speak of the power of the Holy Spirit. They profess to be able to prophesy, to speak in tongues, to heal the sick, and to cast out devils. Some maintain that they have a special gift of the Spirit whereby they are able to live sinless lives. While not claiming to be without sin, they insist that the ability not to sin is there.

Even the Jesus of the Arminian, and of all those who teach a free offer and who proclaim a Savior who died for all men and who is dependent upon man's acceptance to save, is not the Jesus of the Scriptures. The Jesus of the Scriptures laid down His life for His sheep, for those given to Him of the Father, the elect. He does not merely offer or attempt to save, but He actually saves His own.

Jesus warns His disciples and us that these false Christs are very deceptive.

They come as ministers or preachers who profess to preach the Word of God. But a true minister is called of Christ to be His ambassador. He has but one message, the message of the King as contained in the infallible Scriptures. He proclaims to the utmost of his power: "So saith the Lord." He is faithful, not to the whims of man, but to his God. The Holy Spirit works through the pure preaching of the Word, applying that Word to the hearts of God's people.

All the false teachers mentioned above have one thing in common: they preach a doctrine that centers in man and appeals to

man, they depend on man for the gathering of the church, or, as they say, "to win souls for Christ and stars for their crown." They have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. They use choirs, soloists, drama, and all sorts of public entertainment to try to draw an audience and save, if possible, the whole world. From such turn away.

It must be stressed anew that the power unto salvation is in the Word of God, the holy Scriptures. God works through means, but that means is always the pure preaching of the Word. God is not dependent upon man. Christ alone gathers His church. And He does so through the preaching of His Word and by the Spirit, who works mightily in the hearts of God's elect. Paul writes in I Corinthians 1:23, 24: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." We read in Luke 16:31: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." And Romans 10:14, 15 teaches: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?"

Jesus Himself teaches us: "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. ...And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:14, 16). It cannot be stressed too emphatically in our

time that God Himself gathers His own unto Himself through Christ and the Spirit of Christ by means of the pure preaching of the Word.

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Take heed that no man deceive you! That is the warning that Christ gives to the church throughout the new dispensation and most emphatically to us in these times.

Implied is that the end is not yet. God's counsel must be fully carried out. But in our day it also implies that the end is drawing near, possibly much nearer than we realize.

In the meantime we are called to be alert, not to allow ourselves to be deceived. We must watch in prayer.

As the end approaches, the false church grows numerically and in power, while the true church is called to come out from among her and be separate.

The time is coming when the true church will undergo severe persecution at the hands of the false church. Then each must

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take a stand for the truth or be swallowed up by the powers of Antichrist. In that day there will be no hypocrites in the church, for the persecution will demand that we are ready to give up all our possessions, even members of our family and our own lives for Christ's sake.

The true church will be very small in comparison with the multitudes who boast that they are the followers of Christ, yet their Christ is actually Antichrist.

There will be a mere remnant, a mere 7,000, who do not bend their knee to the beast. They will be like a hut in the vineyard, a besieged city.

Jesus urges us: "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11). □

Judging: the Christian's Duty (3)

A Positive Explanation of This Duty

In examining various Scripture passages which speak of judging, we concluded in the last article that God hates hypocritical judging, but loves righteous judging on the part of His children. In other words, it is the Christian's duty to judge. To a positive explanation of this duty we now turn.

What is judging?

Judging involves two main factors. First, it involves a pronouncement concerning whether something is right or wrong. It is to be critical. In fact, the noun "judge" in the New Testament of our King James Version is, in most instances, the translation of the Greek noun *kritees*, from which is derived our English word "critic."

In being critical, one does several things. First, he observes an action or hears an opinion of another person. Second, he evaluates what he has observed, considering the positive and negative aspects or implications of the action or opinion. Third, he reaches a conclusion and expresses an opinion regarding whether that which he has observed was good or bad. To use the example of a judge who must adjudicate a criminal case, we

would say that he first receives the evidence against the accused, then weighs the evidence, and finally expresses his conclusion regarding the innocence or guilt of the accused.

The second main factor involved in judging is that of sentencing. If the judge finds the accused to be guilty of the crime, he sentences him to an appropriate punishment. If the judge finds the accused innocent, he lets him go free of punishment. To order the release of the one who is acquitted is also a sentence: the innocent person deserves life.

In saying that the Christian must judge, we have in mind primarily the first sense of judging, that of deciding what is right and what is wrong. All Christian judgment involves such a determination. However, only in some instances will our duty to judge also involve pronouncing a sentence. For example, when a consistory excommunicates an impenitent sinner from the church, a sentence is pronounced — one of death, of life apart from God, of exclusion also from heaven (Matt. 16:19). Even in such a case, this sentence is always contingent on the sinner's continued impenitence. The consistory never pronounces it absolutely, because God is the ultimate judge who gives a sentence. In many instances, the Christian who judges whether another's actions are right or wrong must leave the sentenc-

ing to God. This is because, although all of us sin and deserve of ourselves to die on account of our sins, *Christ* bore the sentence of death for the sins of God's children, while He did not bear this punishment for those who are not God's children. God will sentence to everlasting punishment those who are not His children, and to everlasting life those whom Christ has redeemed.

What must we judge?

Some things we cannot judge. Whether or not another person is elect, or whether or not the faith which he professes to have is genuine, is known only to God, and not revealed to us (I Tim. 2:19). Some might object by saying that we can indeed determine whether or not the faith of another person is genuine, because we can judge by the works which that person performs; for true faith brings forth good works (James 2:18, 26), and good trees cannot bring forth bad fruit, nor bad trees good fruit (Matt. 7:18). However, in saying this, one must be sure that he is looking for *fruit*, not simply for fruit to a *degree* that not every child of God always bears it. For, while every child of God does indeed bear good fruit, it remains a fact that every child of God also gives evidence of the corruption of his sinful nature, which remains in him until death.

Because we do not know the hearts of others, we must not judge

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secret motives (I Cor. 4:5). God will judge these.

We are also forbidden to judge others in things indifferent (Rom. 14). Should someone feel bound by conscience to do something which I would not do, I may not judge him to be wrong, so long as his actions are not clearly contrary to God's law. Whether or not we eat, we drink, or we regard a day as holy, our choice must be motivated by faith and love for the Lord, and we must not condemn the actions of others in matters that are indifferent. In this connection, Paul says in Romans 14:13: "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." Paul's point is that we may not condemn the practice of the Christian brother as wrong just because we would not do it that way.

Positively, we must judge whether the practices or teachings of others are in accordance with the law and Word of God.

That we must beware of false prophets has already been pointed out (Matt. 7:15). We must "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). We must guard against those deceivers and antichrists "who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh"; and we must not receive into our houses those who teach false doctrine (II John 7, 10). All of these texts speak of our duty to distinguish the truth from the lie. Our standard in this regard is Christ and Scripture, for Christ is the truth (John 14:6), and God's Word is truth (John 17:17). After the Christian understands clearly what is truth and what is not truth, he must confess the truth and oppose the lie, as well as ally himself with other believers and separate himself from deceivers.

Our duty with regard to the actions of others is also clear. We must judge sin to be sin (I Cor.

5:1ff.). In this regard we follow the example of Jesus (Matt. 5:13ff.). The standard of our judgment of sin is the law of God, for Christ commands us to judge "righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Judging sin, we must also separate ourselves from those in the church who persist in their sins (I Cor. 5:13).

Not only must we judge the wrong teachings or sins of *others*, but we must also judge our *own* sins and wrong thinking. The warnings against hypocritical judging certainly make the necessity of doing this clear. How do our own actions measure up to God's law? How do our own ideas measure up to the teaching of Scripture? If they do not measure up, what will we do about it? Will we condemn ourselves, or continue in our sins, hold to our wrong ideas, and insist that the standard is faulty?

This duty to judge falls both on individual believers and on the church as a whole.

It falls on individual believers, because they are *Christians*. This title indicates that we are partakers of the anointing of Christ — that we are prophets, priests, and kings. Particularly as king we fight against sin and Satan in this life (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 32). One aspect of the work of a king is to judge, both within and without his kingdom. Within, he judges whether or not his subjects have obeyed his laws. Without, he judges (discerns) who is the enemy, and fights the enemy. So the Christian, as king, judges sin within himself as well as outside himself to be sin, and fights against sin and Satan. The Christian, believing child of God will not hesitate to judge as wrong and speak out against the immorality which plagues our society today. Using the Bible as his standard, he will say, "All murder, including that of abortion, is wrong. All fornication, including that of homosexuality, is wrong. All Sabbath desecration,

including the playing of professional or collegiate sports, and including the buying and selling of merchandise, is wrong." He does not tolerate these things. Furthermore, he must be consistent in this respect. He must judge as wrong not only abortion and homosexuality, but also the murder of homosexuals and of those who perform abortions. *All sin is wrong!*

He does the same with respect to false doctrine. He judges as wrong the notion that Christ is not the only savior. He denies that God's love will, in the end, prevail over His justice, and that every person will somehow be saved. He repudiates the notion that Jews, Mormons, Buddhists, or other religious groups, have the truth apart from Christ.

The church as a whole must also judge, through her office-bearers (pastors, elders, deacons). In the preaching of God's Word by the pastors, she must set forth the truth over against the lie, the right way of living over against the wrong way. On the basis of the Word, the pastor must judge right to be right and wrong to be wrong. In the work of church discipline which the elders are called to exercise, sin is judged. A member who commits gross sin against the law of God must himself judge it to be sin, confess it, and repent of it. Elders must judge and discipline those who fail to confess their sin and who remain impenitent. The elders must also guard the pulpit by subjecting the pastor's preaching to the test of Scripture, and calling the preaching heretical if it is that. That the church must judge is evident from I Corinthians 5, in which Paul commands the church to judge the sinner, and if need be to remove him from her midst.

Though it is clear that it is our duty to judge, the question of *how* we judge is important.

To judge by using a standard

other than the law and Word of God is wrong. Using the standard of God's Word, we judge sin to be sin, knowing we are right even if society accuses us of intolerance. Our judgment will then be in accord with God's judgment in the Judgment Day, because He will also use His law and Word as His standard of judgment. (Remember, that in this case we are not speaking of pronouncing a sentence — i.e., heaven or hell — but we are speaking of whether or not God will find a certain teaching or action to be right or wrong).

To judge hypocritically is wrong. We ought to judge others only after examining ourselves first. This does not mean that we may not judge another for a sin which we once committed; rather, it means that we must be sure we have completely turned from our sin before we can speak to others of their sin (Matt. 7:1-5).

Sometimes, in pride, we imagine that we would never commit the sins which we judge in others. At other times we judge rashly, not having examined the evidence carefully enough to know whether or not a real sin has been committed. Or we might judge in ignorance, judging the actions or ideas of others as wrong simply because they differ from what we have always thought to be right, without evaluating whether our own thoughts are in accord with Scripture. All such judgment is wrong.

Proper judgment must be carried out in a spirit of humility, in mercy and readiness to forgive, and in accordance with God's law. It requires us to remember that we too shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. It is also done with authority and boldness, for God calls us to do it, makes us partakers of Christ's anointing in order that we might do it, and gives us His Word as the standard by which to do it.

We have several incentives to carry out this duty.

The chief incentive is our love for God. In love for Him we must defend His Word and law. To fail to judge sin is to condone sin. But God does not condone sin; rather, He hates it! To condone abortion, homosexuality, and false teaching is to deny the Word of God and show hatred for God Himself.

Second, and related to the first, is the fact that we will stand in judgment. God will judge us according to our works, whether they be good or evil. To judge evil to be good in this life will surely bring upon us His judgment of condemnation and everlasting destruction. To judge evil to be evil will bring upon us His judgment of innocence and everlasting life — not because we have earned it by our good judgment, but because our good judgment is evidence that His Spirit works in us all the blessings of salvation, one of which is the privilege of testifying to the truth.

Third, we are motivated to judge by our desire for the salvation of our neighbor. We desire his repentance! We desire his submission to the will of God! We desire his speaking the truth as God revealed it! So we judge his sin as sin, that he might repent. Paul instructs us regarding this, when he says that the goal which the Corinthians must desire in excluding the fornicator from their fellowship is the salvation of his spirit in the day of Christ (I Cor. 5:5).

Let us then judge righteous judgment! Persist in doing so!

Such judgment will surely bring upon us the ridicule not only of the world, but also of many who call themselves Christians. It could bring upon us the contempt of brothers or sisters, parents or children, friends and loved ones! To judge righteous judgment will not make things easy for us in this life. It didn't for Christ — it brought Him to the death of the cross.

However, we must persist in judging righteously, with the assur-

ance that *God's* condemnation will not come upon us on account of our judgment, and with the comfort that the world's condemnation of us for judging righteously actually serves their own condemnation in the day of Christ.

So my prayer for you, dear reader, is the same as Paul's prayer for the Philippians (1:9-11): "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in all knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." □

It is Good

New dawns the Day
and it is good.
A Bud springs forth
From Aaron's wood.
Incense perfumes
the prayer-filled bower.
High noon commends
the open Flower.
And when the Wind
its pollen stirs,
True justice and
true love concur.
The Flower fades,
but not to mourn:
The essence of
the Seed is born!
The rip'ning Fruit
'neath ev'ning's hood,
Is tasted and
finds it is good.

Connie L. Meyer

Establishing Schools to Provide Reformed – Covenant Education (2)

The first article in this series initiated an endeavor by this writer to uncover and review the background for the development of the Protestant Reformed Christian Schools. (Cf. *Standard Bearer*, November 15, 1998.)

During the first twenty-five years of the existence of the Protestant Reformed Churches, most of the parents in the PRC enrolled their children in schools which had been established primarily by parents who were members of the Christian Reformed Church. When I began school in the 1930s, my PR friends and I attended the Pella, Iowa Christian School. Later I attended the Christian school of Randolph, Wisconsin, located at that time in a diminutive farm village called East Friesland, Wisconsin. At that time only one school established by members of the Protestant Reformed Churches existed—the First Reformed Christian School of Redlands, California. We will have more to say about the history of the Redlands school and the rest of the PR schools in future articles.

It should be noted that Herman Hoeksema was not in favor of withdrawing children from the Christian schools and sending them to the public schools. Even though the Christian schools were not as Reformed in fundamental principles and basis as Hoeksema and

others wanted them to be, he was in favor of using the schools that existed and also advised working for improvement in these schools. He realized, however, that because of ideological and theological differences that came to expression in the 1920s during the debates concerning Abraham Kuyper's common grace ideology and theory and his world-view, resulting in the formation of the PRC, this was an impossibility. Therefore, during the very early years of the existence of the PRC he began to write about the necessity for Protestant Reformed Christian Schools.

In this article and subsequent articles I continue a review and summary of several early articles that appeared in the *Standard Bearer* concerning education. I contend that the articles by our early leaders were a significant and effective means employed by God to convict and convince our people that the development of Protestant Reformed Christian schools was a necessity and that this was the calling of the parents and grandparents. This began as early as the 1930s and continued in the 1940s and early 1950s. That this calling and desire has not changed is obvious when we observe PR parents continuing to develop our schools and make plans to establish additional schools, particularly high schools, in which efforts will be expended to provide the best instruction and education possible for children and young people.

It will also become very apparent that the fundamental issues re-

garding the establishing and maintaining of the Christian school, i.e., the Protestant Reformed Christian school, have not changed or disappeared. For this reason those who are responsible for the planning and establishing of these schools should study the writings of the past, particularly some of those written during the early days of the PRC.

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We stated in the previous article, published November 15, 1998, that the first of more than 300 articles published in the *Standard Bearer* regarding Christian education was the text of a sermon by the late Herman Hoeksema when he was still a pastor in the CRC in Holland, Michigan. More careful research indicates that the number is nearly 400 articles and that this article was not the first. This sermon, published September 1, 1927, Volume 3, pages 532-536, was preceded by three articles by Rev. G.M. Ophoff concerning schools. These articles, entitled "Dr. Clarence Bouma's New Platform," were published in the same volume (Nov. 1, 1926, pp. 62-67; Nov. 15, 1926, pp. 80-85; Dec. 1, 1926, pp. 117-119). They are a painstakingly thorough, thoughtful, and lengthy series of articles analyzing and critiquing a speech by Dr. Clarence Bouma at a meeting of the National Union of Christian Schools Convention in Chicago, Illinois, August, 1926. Dr. Bouma was one of several speakers at the Convention, and his speech was one of ten lectures that were published in a

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booklet bearing the title *Educational Convention Papers*. The speech by Professor Bouma was entitled "Can the Distinctive Character of the Christian School be Maintained if we Solicit and Obtain the Cooperation of all Orthodox Christians?" Bouma contends that schools should reach out beyond the Reformed and CRC community and include all "orthodox" Christians.

I intend to quote extensively from the three articles by Rev. George M. Ophoff. It is worthy of note that the speech was given only two years after the deposition of Herman Hoeksema, George M. Ophoff, and others from office in the CRC and that Dr. Bouma was one of those who recommended that these men be deposed from office in the church.

Although the articles of Rev. Ophoff and others writing in these early days are unfamiliar to many of us, they are part of that legacy with which we should become familiar. We should know how important the cause of distinctive Reformed education was to the men who were cast out of the CRC. What they wrote was not the result of mere contentious feelings, but they were sincere arguments that were important for the cause of good Christian education and are therefore still significant for an understanding of the purpose and goal of Reformed schools.

Some readers will certainly recognize that the question of interdenominational schools continues to be an issue in many communities and schools.



Rev. Ophoff begins his critique (confer *SB* Nov. 1, 1926, pp. 62-67) by stating that a better title for the speech would have been "How can the Distinctive Character of the Christian School be Maintained if we Solicit and Obtain the Cooperation of all Orthodox Christians?" Implicit in this suggested change is the belief and opinion of Rev. Ophoff that the distinctive charac-

ter of the Christian school movement cannot be maintained if the cooperation of all Christians, even those denominated "orthodox," is solicited.

Dr. Bouma's description of the difference between those who *do* and those who *do not* wish to widen and generalize the platform of our schools hinges on the question: "Just what does each consider essential and accidental in the platform upon which our school system stands?"

In his critique Ophoff quotes a paragraph from Bouma which Ophoff describes as wordplay but which quote at the same time illustrates the basic belief and contention of Clarence Bouma.

Our platform must be distinctive, but it must in no sense be ecclesiastical. The doctrinal standards of this or that denomination are not to be taught in our schools. What should be taught is that specific world and life view, which we commonly call Calvinism, and Calvinism in this sense is bigger, more inclusive, and a differently articulated thing than the particular standards of any denomination. Calvinism in this sense is not one of many church creeds; it is fundamental Christianity come to its fullest and richest expression in present-day thought and life. To be sure, its theological implications are expressed in various creeds of the Reformed and the Presbyterian Churches, but Calvinism as a world and life view is not an ecclesiastical standard. Calvinism in its fundamental implications is nothing but Christian Theism come to its own. Taken in this sense Calvinism is not exclusive in relation to the standpoint of ecclesiastically non-reformed fellow Christians. It is inclusive.

To all of this Rev. Ophoff writes as follows:

...What is that Calvinism which is a bigger, a more inclusive, and differently articulated thing than the particular standards (creeds, AL) of any denomination? Define

and exhibit, please, the content of this more inclusive Calvinism. Dr. Bouma avers that it is difficult to state in final form and in a definite complete set of propositions what that distinctive view of life really is. Great spiritual principles and realities, says the doctor, often elude our grasp.

Ophoff tellingly concludes:

That is true, and therefore I would recommend that we permit the Christian school to continue on its present distinctly Reformed platform until Dr. Bouma succeeds in grasping and defining these great spiritual principles and realities.

The expressed desire in the speech by Dr. Bouma was that a certain number of distinct groups of orthodox Christians should be enabled to cooperate in the matter of Christian instruction. Dr. Bouma also insisted that the groups must retain their distinctiveness.

Bouma is forced to ask,

Does this mean we are introducing ecclesiastical divisions into what ought to be a united Christian school movement? Does this mean that we say to all that do not belong to a Reformed or Christian Reformed church: "You cannot join hands with us"? Does this mean that we demand of Christians not belonging to these denominations that they shall occupy with us the platform of the creed of our particular denominations? Far from it.... But if some err on the one side by failure to be distinctive, it cannot be denied that we are at times in danger of falling into the other extreme of making the Christian school movement ecclesiastical, denominational. This is likewise a mistake.... The Christian school is not a denominational affair.

Ophoff offers the following as the fundamental question proposed by Dr. Bouma to the audience of educators.

How can we maintain the distinctiveness of our Christian schools and obtain, in the matter of Chris-

tian instruction, the cooperation of various non-reformed Christian groups, which groups shall, even though they cooperate, maintain their distinctiveness?"

Ophoff continues in his explanation and analysis of the proposal by Bouma as follows:

Did the doctor actually succeed in solving the problem? He did not. The problem cannot be solved. Let us be thoroughly aware of the implications. The distinctive character of the platform upon which our Christian schools rest must be maintained. The non-reformed groups, whose cooperation is sought, shall also maintain their distinctiveness. Yet their cooperation must be obtained and that on the basis of a platform constituted of those essential elements expressive of our distinctiveness. Let me repeat: it cannot be done. It will never happen. It ought to be plain why it cannot be done. If certain non-reformed groups agree to cooperate with us on the basis of a platform constituted of these essential elements expressive of our distinctive character, it means that they have embraced those elements responsible for our distinctiveness. In other words, they will have become like unto us. For Dr. Bouma will have to concede that, in general, parents want their children taught only those things which they, the parents, themselves believe. I repeat, if parents of non-reformed faith agree to cooperate on the basis of our distinctive platform it is because such parents have changed their religious views and are now at one with our distinctive platform. In other words, they will have become like unto us. Yet, Bouma, it appears, insists that these non-reformed groups shall, even though they agree to cooperate, maintain their distinctive character.

Observing the humor and tragedy in the situation, GMO writes:

We now grasp the situation. Dr. Bouma appears before a group of educators for the purpose of telling them how a thing can become like unto something else from

which it differs and yet remains what it is. In other words, Dr. Bouma will explain to the group of educators how the impossible can be done.

Ophoff provides an answer to the question by declaring:

...These non-reformed groups must become Reformed or we must cease to be Reformed relative the platform which is to serve as a basis for the Christian school.

Ophoff observes, however, that Dr. Bouma has another solution. He would place the Christian school upon a vague, neutral, indefinite, indistinct, colorless platform that expresses the doctrinal distinctiveness of no group. Bouma's paper clearly indicates that this is the very thing he wants. To prove the point we are asked to attend to the following by Bouma:

Let us maintain unwaveringly whatever is really fundamental, essential, distinctive in the basis of our Christian school system as we have it. But, you immediately interpose, precisely what is essential, fundamental, and distinctive in our Christian school system? This is the crux of the matter. Ultimately the issue between those who do, and those who do not wish to widen, to generalize the platform of our schools hinges on the question, as to just what each considers essential and accidental in the platform upon which our school system stands today.

Ophoff notes that Dr. Bouma is a member of the group that wishes to widen and generalize the platform of our Christian schools; he guarantees that this is the case. In order to widen the platform, Bouma must attempt to make a distinction between what he calls the essential and non-essential. Ophoff contends that Bouma is referring to *doctrine* and that this becomes clear in the following quote from Bouma.

Now it seems to me the essential, the distinctive character of our

Christian school system can be reduced to two propositions. The first pertains to the method, the "how" of this school training. The second pertains to the content, the "what" of this school training. And in reply to the "what" of this school training I would say: The Calvinistic outlook upon the world and attitude toward God and fellow man forms the warp and woof of all instruction and training. Does this mean that we are introducing ecclesiastical divisions into what ought to be a united Christian school movement? Far from it. The doctrinal standards of this or that denomination are not to be taught in our schools.

Concerning this Ophoff writes:

It is plain that Dr. Bouma is letting the terms essential and non-essential apply to the *truth*.... It is the Calvinistic outlook upon the world and attitude toward God and his fellow man that forms the warp and woof of all instruction and training. The pedagogue, laboring in the Christian school, shall teach Calvinism. Not that Calvinism of which our creed is an expression, but a bigger, more inclusive Calvinism — Calvinism in a sense in which it is not a church creed....

Bouma contends that although many understand that the school is to be neither a church school nor a denominational affair, many have the idea that the only basis that ought to be expressed in the constitution of our organizations must be the Three Forms of Unity of the Reformed churches. This Bouma declares to be a mistake. He writes as follows:

Now this is a mistaken conception. The Three Formulas of Unity are not an adequate platform for our Christian school movement.... In the propagation of the Christian school idea we should do all in our power to avoid and eliminate the ecclesiastical and denominational setting which seems to linger in the minds of many supporters of the movement. As ecclesi-

astical standards these formulas form the basis for all teaching and preaching in the Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches. But these Formulas of Unity of the Reformed churches are not to be looked upon as the Three Formulas of Unity of the Christian school movement. After all, the adoption of certain standards by a given denomination is a church matter, an ecclesiastical affair, and our schools are not church schools.

To all of this Ophoff finally adds the following:

Will Dr. Bouma be so kind as to

define the various elements constituting the platform of that nature.... Such a platform must lack distinctiveness. It will have to be amazingly general and vague. A school standing on such a platform will also lack distinctiveness.

According to Ophoff, the child when born will be christened "Calvinism." "Not the Calvinism found in John Calvin's *Institutes*, but a Calvinism which is bigger, a more inclusive, and differently articulated thing than the particular standards of any denomination."

We have already stated that some readers will recognize that the matter of interdenominational Christian schools remains an issue in many communities. Related to this issue is the important concern debated seven decades ago concerning the relationship of the Reformed confessions and creeds to the basis and work of the school. Many current leaders in Christian education contend that we need an educational creed that does not rely upon the Reformed confessions and other creeds. □

... to be continued.

Ministering to the Saints

Prof. Robert Decker

Visiting the Sick (2)

We concluded our last article by discussing the question of the relationship between the parishioner's sickness and his sin. We noted that there are instances where the connection between the sickness and the sin must be pointed out. The drunkard who suffers from cirrhosis of the liver needs to know that his sickness is the result of his sinful, excessive drinking. In other instances, where the relationship between the illness and sin is not clear, we advised the elders to leave the whole matter to the parishioner and the Lord. If the sick person himself opens up concerning this question, the elders can deal pastorally with him.

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

But the above is only part of the answer to the why of sickness. If Christ bore the wrath of God on account of our sins and if, therefore, the punishment for our sins has been removed in the way of Christ's perfect satisfaction of the justice of God, why must the child of God still suffer the effects of sin? Why must he still suffer sickness?

The answer, at least in part, is that God chastens those whom He loves and scourges every son whom He receives (Heb. 12:3-11). God does this chastening by various means, and sickness is one of those means. Also by means of sickness the Lord causes us to "number our days and apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Ps. 90).

But it is also true that, because of the victory of Jesus Christ over our sin and death, God uses sickness to work together for our good. Sickness has a sanctifying effect on the Christian (Rom. 8:28). This is the viewpoint of our Heidelberg Catechism when it asks, "Since

then Christ died for us, why must we also die?" (Q. 42). If Christ's death is the death of our death, why must we still die? The answer is, "Our death is not a satisfaction for our sins, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life." Sickness is part of the process that leads to the "abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life" through the death of the child of God.

These truths must guide the elders in their work of visiting the sick.

Turning now to the practical aspect, the question becomes, "How ought a visit with the sick be conducted?" There are three rules or practices by which the elders ought to be guided. 1) The elders should not visit the sick unless they are called by them or by their loved ones. If the elders visit the sick even when not called, others will expect the same. This obviously can lead to difficulties, since the elders are not always

aware of who is sick or of how serious the illness may be. 2) But when the elders are called, they must promptly respond with a visit. Especially is this important if the person is critically ill. This may occasionally mean making a sick call at 2:00 A.M. or at some other inconvenient time. 3) Elders should make clear to the congregation that they are available at any hour of the day or night and that they want to be with them and minister to them in their times of crisis.

In connection with rule three above, there is an important word for God's people to remember. They must not bother the ministers and elders whenever they experience some little ache or pain. Generally speaking, for example, minor outpatient surgery or a routine tonsillectomy do not warrant calling upon the elders for a visit. Let God's people use their sanctified good judgment in this regard. In the larger congregations the elders, and especially the ministers, are much too busy as it is. They should not be called unless the illness or injury is serious.

Let the elders, when making the visit itself, be very careful about what they say. Undersigned knows of an instance where a member of one of our churches was comatose and on a respirator. The person was being taken from his room to another floor of the hospital for a test. His elder happened to get on the same elevator. Upon seeing his parishioner, the elder remarked, "He looks like warmed over death." The parishioner, though comatose and unable to talk, heard that remark and was deeply hurt by it. One more example of this sort of thing happened in Pine Rest Christian Hospital (a mental health facility) in Cutlerville, Michigan. An elder (not from the Protestant Reformed Churches) came to visit a deeply, clinically depressed parishioner. Meaning to encourage the woman, the elder said to her, "Depression is not so serious, you

know; no one ever died from it." The poor lady replied, "True, but I wish I could."

The elder, when making the visit, should be his natural self. He needs to avoid over-bearing solemnity. He ought to strive to be Christ-like. That is, the elder should demonstrate as much as possible the care, the concern, and the compassion of the Great and Good Shepherd of the sheep.

Elders must listen to the sick person so as to determine his/her specific need. The elders must take seriously what the sick say. They must never minimize what to the sick person is an important or troublesome problem. Elders must not dominate the conversation at the sickbed, but rather let them guide it so as to keep it on a spiritual level.

Let the elders be reminded, in this connection, of the two main activities which *must* take place at every visit of the sick, *viz.*, the bringing of the Word of God and prayer! The Word of God must be brought to the sick. No matter the various and specific circumstances of the sick, they all need the Word!

Elders must bring the Word of God briefly, pointedly, and simply. Briefly. The elders must not read twenty-five or more verses at the bedside of the sick. Let them keep the passage brief. Just a few verses will suffice. Pointedly the Word must be brought. By this we mean that the elders ought to explain a verse or two as it applies to the need of the sick person. And the Word must be brought simply. A sick visit is not an occasion for elders to launch into a long, complicated, profound, and doctrinal exposition of a passage. Simply the Word must be brought. One or two simple truths must be laid out for the comfort and encouragement of the sick.

The elders must always pray when they visit the sick. Even under the most adverse conditions, they must pray. Also in noisy emergency rooms, with phones

ringing, doctors and nurses bustling about, and people moaning in pain, the elders must pray. The need of the sick must be brought to the throne of grace where they will obtain mercy and find grace from God through Jesus to help in their need (Heb. 4:16). God gives His grace and Holy Spirit only to those who with sincere desires continually ask them of him and are thankful for them (cf. the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 45). And, to cite no more, Scripture commands the sick to call for the elders of the church and let them pray over them the prayer of faith (James 5:14, 15).

Bringing the Word of God and praying over the sick calls for careful, prayerful preparation. The elders need to know, as much as this is possible, what the specific need or needs of the sick are. They must select appropriate Scripture passages in order to address those needs. The elders must briefly explain those passages. If need be, they ought to jot down a few notes. The elders must think about the prayers they are to offer over the sick.

The elders should keep the visit brief, but must never leave the impression that they are in a hurry. The elders are not coming to the sick to socialize with them. They are not coming to talk about the weather or world affairs or what have you. The elders visit the sick in order to bring God's Word to them and to pray with them. That's the purpose of these visits. Five to ten minutes ought to be sufficient to accomplish this purpose. In addition, the elders, and all of God's people for that matter, must not forget that the sick are weak. Physically, and often emotionally too, the sick are weak. This means they cannot endure a lengthy visit of thirty or forty minutes or more. It is much better and much more effective that the elders visit the sick more frequently than that they stay too long. This is especially important for those who are very se-

riously ill or recovering from major surgery.

We conclude this article with a few practical suggestions which this writer has found helpful in his own ministering to the sick among God's people. Avoid making sick calls during visiting hours, both at hospitals and at nursing homes. Doing this enables the elders to visit the patient privately and without a great many distractions. It is often wise to phone the hospital before making the sick visit to be certain the patient will be in the room

and not undergoing tests, therapy, etc. It is also the better part of wisdom for the elders to get on good terms with the hospital staff. Respect their rules and regulations. Be friendly and courteous with receptionists, nurses, doctors, and other staff people. Ask permission before entering restricted areas such as intensive care units.

Ignoring these suggestions often makes for tension if not outright hostility between the elders and hospital personnel. The latter can "make life miserable" for the elders. Implementing these sug-

gestions will make the elders' visiting of the sick much easier. Hospital staff usually recognize and respect the rights of pastors and elders to visit their parishioners. Hospital personnel have a right to expect Christian courtesy from the clergy and elders of God's church. And when they get that, they are all the more willing to help the elders do what they are called to do when they visit the sick, *viz.*, bring them the Word and pray for them. □

to be continued....

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Steven Key

Confessing Our Lord (2)

We believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. He is Lord over all. But we confess that He is Lord over us, His redeemed people, in a particular sense. We must understand how that lordship was established and what it means for us.

Determined by God

Before the foundation of the world God had determined to reveal His lordship and to be known and acknowledged as the only Lord. He would do so in Christ Jesus.

From eternity God had determined to reveal His own covenant life, the life of His fellowship and love, to a peculiar people, His elect. Nor would that revelation of His covenant fellowship and love to

them be incompatible with His lordship over them. For He determined that revelation and realization of His covenant of grace to be in and by Christ Jesus, who would be Lord of all.

So we read of His Son, Jesus Christ, in Colossians 1:15ff., as the "firstborn of every creature." The reference obviously is not to Christ as the firstborn from a natural point of view. The reference rather is to Christ as the firstborn in the eternal counsel of God, the counsel of our salvation.

And then we read this concerning Christ: "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

That is the exclusive lordship of Christ Jesus. That has now been accomplished. According to this eternal good pleasure of God, the only begotten Son, the eternal Word, became flesh and dwelt among us.

John emphasizes the Godhead of the Son throughout his entire gospel account. God became flesh in Christ Jesus our Lord. This means that our Lord, whom we had rejected, and against whom we had rebelled, came very near to us, spoke to us face to face, and united Himself with us in an inseparable union. He reached down into our misery, into our darkness of sin and death, where in our folly and by the divine sentence of this same just Lord we were held in the bondage of sin and Satan because of our guilt. And He redeemed us! Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, redeemed us!

We had rejected God's lordship over us by virtue of creation. In Adam we rebelled and refused to acknowledge Him as our Lord. We

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rejected His Word and subjected ourselves to the deceitful lordship of Satan, under the bondage of sin and corruption.

But when Christ redeemed us in fulfillment of God's eternal decree, that Son of God our Lord delivered us from all the power of the devil, and made us His own property. He has redeemed us, body and soul, from all our sins. Not that He paid the price of redemption to the devil—for the devil had no right over us other than what was implied in God's righteous sentence of death over us. But Christ, our Lord, paid the price of our redemption to the Father, whose revelation He is.

Jesus is our Lord, because He bought us! You are bought with a price, says the inspired apostle in I Corinthians 6:20. He bought us with a price of infinite measure, a price that you and I could never have paid.

Peter expounds that truth in I Peter 1:18,19: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

When you read about the appearance of Jesus to Thomas, recorded in John 20, you find that the price that Jesus paid was a price that Thomas could not fathom. He could not comprehend it, even when Jesus first stood before him in the appearance of His crucified flesh! For the price that our Lord paid was not from the treasures of His creation. Though He owns all things—all silver and gold, the cattle on a thousand hills, all fields and oxen—not all His creation would have been sufficient unto our redemption.

Christ redeemed us with His own precious blood. It was the price of eternal and infinite love! And so He accomplished for Himself the right to make us His property.

An Accomplished Lordship

By redeeming and delivering us, our Lord revealed His lordship as an accomplished lordship.

We had been His property, of course, from eternity. That is the truth of sovereign, eternal election—which also implies necessarily the truth of sovereign, eternal reprobation.

But before the bar of divine justice, in the way of God's righteousness, this is how Christ became our Lord in the sense of which we confess Him now. He is our Redeemer and Deliverer of whom we confess, "My Lord and my God!"

He became our Lord, not merely to rule over us as possessions with which He may do as He pleases, but as a precious property of love, even as His own body. He obtained for Himself that right of lordship according to which we may once more, and now in a deeper sense than ever before in Adam, love Him, trust in Him, and serve Him as our Lord. So Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, the Lord over all by virtue of creation, now also became *our* Lord in unfathomable love!

But the question arises: How do we ever come to confess Him and acknowledge Him as our Lord?

That also comes by the accomplishment of Christ's sovereign lordship!

There are those who present it far differently. Those who follow the erroneous teachings of Arminius say that this Lord of all sends forth now the message of His love as an offer to all men. He offers us His lordship instead of the deceitful lordship of the devil, and asks that we be persuaded by the sight of His beautiful love to forsake the service of Satan and to enter His service.

Such teaching is a denial of the accomplished lordship of Christ, and actually exalts man to the place of Lord alongside of Christ. By such a teaching the accomplish-

ment of Christ's lordship is dependent upon what man does with this supposed "offer." We grieve that such false teaching has made deep inroads even into Reformed churches. That is not the truth of Scripture at all.

On the contrary, Christ Himself realizes His lordship also in us.

So unique is His lordship, that even our confession of Him as Lord is dependent upon His sovereign exercise of His lordship over us. For you to confess from the heart, "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, our Lord," is only a wonderful manifestation of His mighty and sovereign lordship as executed by the Holy Spirit. That is I Corinthians 12:3: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."

We never make Him our Lord.

No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the work of His own sovereign Spirit. And as Paul writes in Romans 8:9, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Christ exercises His lordship over us. He Himself, having destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, now comes to visit us in our prison of sin and death, and delivers us. By the power of His Word and Spirit He dethrones the devil from our hearts. By the irresistible power of His grace, ministered in the preaching of the Word, He breaks the shackles of sin and corruption by which we have been held in bondage. He dispels the darkness of our folly, enlightening us from on high. He sheds abroad in us the love of God. All those things are the Lord's work in the hearts and lives of His own.

And when the Lord so works in us, we come to Him. When the Lord so works in us, we see the folly of our sin, the terribleness of enslavement to the devil. When the Lord so works in us, we begin to love Him, to long for Him, to cry out to Him from the depths of our hearts. In adoration, with

humbleness of heart, we cry out, "My Lord and my God!"

That truth and our confession

of it also has a powerful influence in our lives. "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether

we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8). □

Book Reviews

Ready To Give an Answer: A Catechism of Reformed Distinctives, by Herman Hoeksema and Herman Hanko. Grandville Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1997. 238 pages. \$24.95 (hardcover). [Reviewed by Rev. Arie den Hartog.]

We commend the Reformed Free Publishing Association for the publication of this book and thank Prof. Herman Hanko for his contribution to this work. The largest part of the book is a reprint of materials found in a long out-of-print book by Rev. Hoeksema, titled *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*. This part of the book presents the doctrinal issues of the common grace controversy, which in the Lord's providence led to the beginning of the Protestant Reformed Churches. It is written in an interesting catechism format of questions and answers.

We believe that it is valuable to have this material available in a new book. It is of value for the members of the Protestant Reformed denomination. It is also of value for those outside of these churches who are interested in reading what we believe is an excellent defense of doctrinal issues that continue to be of great importance for the Reformed churches and the preservation of the truths of God's Word which should be the basis of these churches.

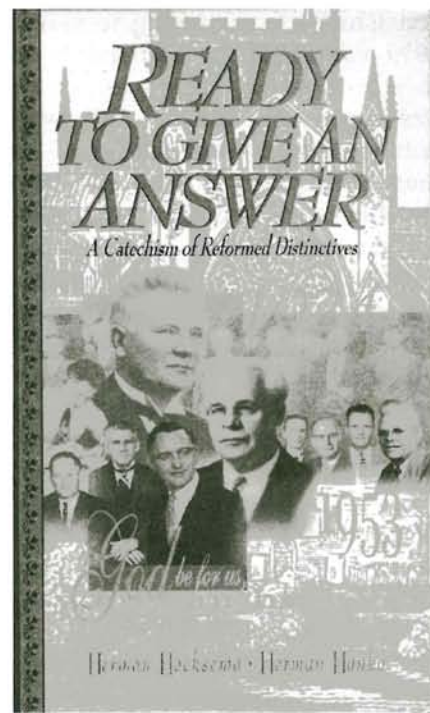
Reading this material refreshed my appreciation of what a great theologian Rev. Hoeksema was. He was outstanding in his ability to reason carefully and sharply in defense of the truth. Above all, his reasoning was based on extensive, penetrating, and careful exposition of the Word of God. We do not be-

lieve that the common grace controversy should be ignored. It is our hope that, after years have gone by, and some of the emotionalism and subjective criticism have cooled down, a more objective evaluation of the position set forth by Rev. Hoeksema and others who loved the truth which he stood for can be made, for the benefit of the cause of the truth and the truly Reformed church. It cannot be denied that Rev. Hoeksema gave his life for the defense of the central and most glorious truth of the gospel, namely the truth of God's wonderful, sovereign, and particular grace in saving His people in Christ Jesus.

Prof. Hanko follows this same catechism format to detail the doctrinal issues involved in the controversy of 1953 that very seriously affected the Protestant Reformed Churches. Prof. Hanko does an excellent job in showing how this controversy involved basically the same issues of sovereign grace as the history of 1924. Whatever may be said about what took place in the turbulent years of controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the early 1950s, it is clear that at stake were the precious doctrines of sovereign grace. We are not ashamed of these doctrines. I had the great privilege of being a student for my seminary years in the church history classes of Prof. Hanko. I have no doubt that the excellence of Prof. Hanko in teaching New Testament Greek exegesis was equal to his outstanding ability in teaching church history. The greatest virtue and wisdom of his church history instruction was his ability to trace the history of the church of Jesus Christ as it was bound up with the clear, bold, and courageous defense and

maintaining of the great truths of what today is called the Reformed faith.

The last part of the book is an appendix. It is a reprint of the "Declaration of Principles" drawn up by the Protestant Reformed Churches in the midst of the 1953 controversy. This declaration was made in connection with missionary policy for the work of home missions being done at the time among immigrants, especially those coming to Canada from the Liberated Churches in Holland. The declaration has often been criticized for being some sort of additional confession appended to the three forms of unity, which are the confessional basis of many continental Reformed churches. The Protestant Reformed Churches were and are criticized for doing something which they had no right to do when they adopted this dec-



laration. May this part of the book also help, after the dust of historical controversy has settled, so that some, hopefully many, will be able

better to judge whether the declaration is a new creed or nothing more than a clear and necessary setting forth of the truly Reformed

doctrine of the creeds. We believe the latter is definitely the case. The copious recitation of references from the creeds proves this. □

Report of Classis East

January 13, 1999

Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, January 13, 1999 in the Byron Center PRC. Rev. Barry Gritters was the chairman for this session. Each church was represented by two delegates.

This was a lengthy session of classis. Classis had several issues on its agenda that warranted considerable discussion.

First, Rev. R. Flikkema appealed the decision of Covenant PRC not to transfer his ministerial credentials to his home church, the Faith PRC. Classis considered this matter to be illegally before it on the ground that this matter was not finished in the minor assemblies.

Second, two brothers and a consistory are appealing to synod 1999 a decision of classis taken on their protests by the September 9, 1998 session of classis. It is difficult to report extensively on this matter since part of the procedures for this matter occurred in closed session at the May 13, 1998 and September 9, 1998 sessions of classis. The matter under appeal deals (1) with divorce and the understanding of how legal separation relates to divorce and (2) with whether a member of the church may consent to an unbiblical divorce. The brothers contend that classis was in error in its decisions taken in a case dealt with at the May 13, 1998 classis. The brothers protested that decision, classis did not sustain their protests, so now the matter is being appealed to synod. Classis decided to forward

the appeals of the two brothers to synod with the advice that synod reject their appeals. Classis forwarded the appeal of the consistory to synod with the advice that synod not treat this appeal because, in the judgment of classis, no protest had been filed with the classis prior to this appeal.

Third, classis heard two appeals from a brother dealing with decisions taken by his council/consistory. The first appeal asked that his consistory be instructed to give him a letter that, in his judgment, touched this case. Classis sustained this appeal on the ground that all documents that touch a case should be given to a member who requests such. The second appeal from this same brother asked classis to instruct his consistory to answer his protest more fully and completely. Classis did not sustain this appeal, rather deciding that the consistory had indeed responded to the protest in question.

Classis heard the reports of its stated clerk, its church visitors, and the Classical Committee. The church visitors were mandated to discuss with Covenant PRC its continuing large subsidy as a small church as communicated to classis by the synod of 1994.

In voting matters, the following: Elected as delegates to synod: **MINISTERS:** *Primi*—W. Bruinsma, R. Cammenga, Dale Kuiper, J. Slopsema, R. VanOverloop; *Secundi*—M. Dick, K. Koole, Doug Kuiper, A. Spriensma, C. Terpstra; **ELDERS:** *Primi*—J. Buiter, D.

Doezema, C. Kuiper (SW), D. Lotterman, D. Ondersma; *Secundi*—J. Engelsma, D. Gunnink, C. Kamstra, D. Kregel, S. Miedema, Jr. Rev. C. Terpstra was elected to a three-year term as *primus* delegate *ad examina* and Rev. R. Cammenga to a three-year *secundus* term. Rev. R. VanOverloop was elected to a three-year term on the Classical Committee. Elected as church visitors were the Revs. Dale Kuiper and K. Koole, with Rev. R. Van Overloop as alternate. J. Huiskens was appointed to another three-year term as stated clerk.

Subsidy requests for the year 2000 of \$19,000 for Kalamazoo and \$37,500 for Covenant were approved and forwarded to synod. Classis also approved and forwarded to synod the request of Covenant to reallocate \$5,000 of its 1999 subsidy for evangelism to the pastor's salary. Classis also approved and forwarded to synod Grandville PRC's request for a reduction of \$5,850 in 1997 synodical assessments and \$5,200 in 1998 assessments due to loss of families. Grandville was also instructed to give further evidence to synod of the economic hardship caused by this loss of families.

The expenses for this session amounted to \$1,499.53. Classis will meet next on May 12, 1999 at Grace PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
w.s. Jon J. Huiskens,
Stated Clerk

Mission Activities

Our readers may remember that, back in the summer of 1997, questions arose concerning our churches' possible work in Ghana. At that time our Foreign Mission Committee learned that the Ghanaian government had changed their procedure for the immigration of our missionary to Ghana. Because of these changes, and the many implications of them for our work, it was necessary for the FMC to investigate whether there was a biblical and ethical way for us to send a missionary to Ghana without compromising the truth that we would bring. While these questions were being answered, our FMC also advised the Hull, IA PRC, the calling church for a missionary to Ghana, to delay calling one to serve in Ghana.

Now, thankfully, the FMC has been able to come to a determination regarding this whole matter. After a lengthy investigation of the questions of sponsorship and of entering Ghana independently, they have decided to advise Hull PRC to resume calling a missionary to Ghana with a view to entering there independently as synod of 1996 initially decided. Soon after this decision, Hull's council concurred with that advice of the FMC and immediately formed a trio of the Revs. M. Dick, R. Moore, and A. Spriensma. Hull was to call, the Lord willing, on January 25. We ask that you remember the FMC, our Hull PRC, and the pastor to whom a call is extended, that they all might be guided by the Spirit to discern God's will for this field.

The Adult Bible Society of the Doon, IA PRC hosted a slide presentation on January 10 by their

pastor, Rev. R. Smit, of his and Rev. A. denHartog's recent trip to the Philippines on behalf of our churches' FMC.

Young People's Activities

Looking over recent bulletins, I was reminded of some unusual and interesting topics for discussion considered by several of our churches' Young People's Societies. One considered, "How do I handle a sinning friend?" Another looked at "Should Christian young people witness to their faith by wearing WWJD and FROG bracelets?" And yet another society looked at the topic of "Christian College vs. Public University."

We have also seen several church bulletins in the Chicago, IL area ask young people if they are interested in inexpensive airfares to Ontario, California for this summer's Young People's Convention. Doesn't warm sunny California sound good about now?

Speaking of this summer's convention reminds me that the young people of Hope PRC, this year's host society in Redlands, CA, recently organized a sub-sandwich fund-raiser for that convention. More than six hundred subs were sold, which means, if our 1998 Yearbook is correct, that they made enough subs for each man, woman, and child in their congregation to have three.

On December 28 the post-high young adults in the Grand Rapids, MI area invited family and friends alike to join them for an evening at the Sports Exchange. Included were pizza, swimming, basketball, volleyball, soccer, and mini-golf. Proceeds were to benefit the young adults' retreat this year in Loveland, CO.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Loveland, CO PRC continues to get a good response from

their web page on the Internet. A recent contact wrote Loveland to ask some very thought-provoking questions concerning the Reformed faith. The writer asked if the Bible says "that God hated Adam after his sin or does it say that God hated Adam's sin." He also asked if God created some men to damn them to hell. He also wondered if God could have created a totally depraved man capable of turning to Him, and finally what Jesus means when He says, "I stand at the door and knock." All good questions, and Rev. G. VanBaren, pastor at Loveland, evidently thought so too, because he asked his Essentials Catechism class to answer those questions. Besides that, he also invited anyone else in his congregation to do likewise. He promised to put the best answers in upcoming bulletins. So consider, how would you answer those questions?

Denomination Activities

On Sunday evening, January 17, an overflow crowd gathered at the First PRC in Holland, MI to hear what I believe was the first public program by the quartet "One in Hymn," a group of four young ladies, Holly and Amanda Ondersma, Lindsey Pipe, and Michelle Streyle, accompanied on the piano by Mary Velthouse. Also accompanying them on one song and providing a couple of special numbers was a Brass Quartet. All in all, it was a very nice way to bring a Lord's Day to a proper God-centered conclusion. I hope we hear from them again in the future.

Minister Activities

In early January, Rev. G. VanBaren submitted to his consistory in Loveland, CO a request for honorable emeritation as of August 31, 1999. This request has been forwarded to Classis West, which meets in Redlands, CA

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

The Standard Bearer

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on March 3, then on to synod, which meets at First PRC in Holland, MI in early June.

Food For Thought

"Three things," says Luther, "make a Divine — prayer, meditation, and trials." These make a

Christian; but a Christian minister needs three more, talent, application, and acquirements.

—Charles Simmons □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TEACHERS NEEDED:

Heritage Christian School is seeking applications from persons interested in one full-time teaching position in the junior high and two full-time positions in the upper elementary or intermediate grades, beginning in the fall of 1999. Applicants must be confessing members of a Protestant Reformed Church and qualify for a Michigan Teaching Certificate. Interested persons may call Jerry Kuiper at home (616-669-5427) or at school (616-669-1773); or Mr. Ken Elzinga (616-878-9657). Résumés or letters of inquiry may be sent to Jerry Kuiper at

Heritage Christian School
4900 40th Avenue
Hudsonville, MI 49426.

The **Hull Protestant Reformed School of Hull, IA** will need a teacher for the 1999-2000 school year. Inquiries or applications should be made to Mr. Pete Brummel, Principal, 218 School St., Hull, IA 51239, (712-439-2490) or (712-439-1308), or to

Mr. Brian Kroese
301 Second St.
Hull, IA 51239
(712-439-1699).

Hope Christian School of Redlands, CA is in need of a teacher for the intermediate grades (3 & 4) for the 1999-2000 school year. The grade assignment, however, is flexible, with the possibility instead for an elementary position (grades 1 & 2). Interested persons are encouraged to send an application to Hope Christian School, Attn: Ed Karsemeyer,

1309 E. Brockton Ave.
Redlands, CA 92374.

You may also phone school (909-793-4584), Bill Feenstra (909-793-3597), or Mike Gritters (909-793-4439).

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of First PRC, Grand Rapids, express Christian sympathy to Rev. George Lubbers, Miss Agatha Lubbers, and Mr. and Mrs. Tom Newhof, Jr., with their children and grandchildren in the passing away of Rev. Lubbers' wife,

MRS. RENA LUBBERS, on December 24, 1998. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

Rev. J. Slopsema, Pres.
Ron DeVries, Clerk

CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 1999 - 2000 academic year should make application at the March 18, 1999 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school.

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 18 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Grandville, MI 49418.

Jon Huiskens, Secretary

* * * * *

The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.