



The Standard Bearer

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

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Elijah At Cherith

And the word of the LORD came unto him saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

I Kings 17:2-7

Several issues ago we were introduced to Elijah when he made his appearance before King Ahab. He had come to the king's court to deliver the mighty and powerful word of God, a word that was tremendously important and which would have far-reaching consequences. Israel had become wicked, for under Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel the worship of Baal had been introduced. The prophets of God were being

killed and persecuted, so that the faithful minority in the land were too afraid to identify themselves as belonging to the party of God.

Upon this scene arrives Elijah, sent by God to announce judgment and to assure the faithful that God forever remains the Sovereign One. Therefore there would be no rain or dew but according to the word of Elijah. Having spoken that word, Elijah disappears. God sends him to Cherith, a small brook which led to the river Jordan. Elijah as an instrument of God must disappear in order that the Word of God may run its course. God must receive the glory, not Elijah.

One may speculate as to why

Elijah was sent away. Was it for his own protection, seeing that Jezebel was killing God's prophets? No, Elijah was not afraid of her. He was a bold man, as evidenced by his coming in the first place to deliver this awful message of judgment. He would much rather stay and preach, since then he could apply the Word of God under just the right conditions. As he was preaching he could point to the brazen heavens and the parched earth and thus call the people to repentance.

But such it was not to be. He had done what the Lord wanted him to do; now he must leave the scene to God. At the brook he would receive no report concerning

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Ahab or the people, but he would be able to see that the Word of God was being fulfilled. Indeed, the heavens were as brass, and after a while the brook dried up. Elijah and we have to know that the servant as such is not important, for the battle was between God and Baal, not between Ahab and Elijah. God left the field to Baal to let it become evident what Baal could do. Elijah had to leave Ahab without any possibility of the rain-producing word. Baal would be left alone with the people. Let them look to Baal and see what he can do for them.

God must receive the glory. When the servant has performed his calling, he need not worry about the rest. His calling is to bring the Word of the Lord. When that is done, the rest is left up to Jehovah. So the servant must be kept humble, for which reason he is sent from the limelight into oblivion. God did the same thing with John the Baptist and the apostle Paul. This does not hinder the cause of God, but shows that He alone has the power to execute His Word.

At the brook Cherith Elijah would be in the care of God. Here he would receive the necessary rest. While Elijah was here, God would provide for all his needs. Under almost unbelievable conditions he would lack nothing. For his drink he had the brook, and for his food he would look to the ravens, which the Lord had commanded to bring him bread and flesh. We are not told all the circumstances of his stay at the brook, but we can be sure that he had only the bare necessities. He had no new car, nor several sets of new clothes. There was no colored television attached to a satellite and VCR, nor a computer so that he could spend much time surfing the Internet. Certainly he had no soft bed upon which he could rest his weary bones. Many if not most of these things we no longer count as luxuries, but as necessities in our life.

All these things and the equivalent for his time were entirely foreign to Elijah.

However, we do not have to feel sorry for Elijah. Oh, no! In fact, he had more than all these things, for he received morning and evening food with the favor of God. What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What benefit is it to the man who can fill his barns and tell his soul that it has much goods for many years, when that very night the living God will separate him from that hoard?

What we have here in God's caring for Elijah is a wonder of grace. That can be seen simply by looking at the ravens. Do you know what a raven is? A big black bird which is more at home eating dead and rotting flesh than bread and fresh meat. One often observes ravens on the road eating dead animals that have been run over by cars or trucks. This kind of bird was now going to bring Elijah good, clean, fresh food. Amazing!

This was a miracle which serves as a special sign to God's people. It was, first of all, a sign to Elijah. It told him not only that God was preserving him but that He would also take care of His people in Israel. This testimony came twice a day in the form of the ravens. God would not destroy the righteous with the ungodly. So he learned with childlike confidence that God would provide.

We as God's people also learn from this sign. God preserves us by the wonder of grace in a most wonderful way through Jesus Christ. As God delivered Elijah in the midst of a land of wrath, so He will deliver *all* His people.

There is more. Both Elijah and we must know not only that God does care for us, but that He will do so only in His way. That way is the way of obedience. Elijah obeyed the command of God to go to Cherith. He did not have to fear, for God *had* commanded the ravens. This was already done. It

was only at Cherith that the ravens would feed Elijah. If he would have gone west toward the sea instead of east toward the Jordan he would not have been fed. Not everywhere, only there.

So we must go to Cherith to be fed by the hand of God. There we will not find the pleasures and treasures of this world and of the flesh. There we cannot fill our barns for years to come and exhort our soul to eat, drink, and be merry. But we will receive our portion, no more and no less, every morning and every evening. After every meal we must look at the brazen heavens and trust that the Lord will come again and again and again. Do not be afraid. No, He *has* commanded that we be fed there. Before we go, our provisions are ready. Certainly there is no need even to think about yoking ourselves unequally with unbelievers.

Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. II Corinthians 6:14-17

In God's way, therefore, in the way of obedience, is His blessing. In God's way one experiences the kindness, love, and fellowship of the covenant God. You will not be afraid to lose your name, job, reputation, and honor in the world, for at Cherith you will receive bread with God's blessing. If you go the other way, the world will give you more bread than you can eat. Did not Satan offer Christ the whole world? Just remember that this is

the bread of wrath. It contains no nourishment, provides no protection, and fails utterly to make you strong for the day of battle. It is as empty as the wind, and they that consume it shall perish.

God has provided for us. He

has sent the Bread of Life. Just as there is only one Cherith, so there is only one Christ. He has provided for all our needs unto eternity. You will not find Christ in the courts of Ahab, for He is long departed. No,

you and I must go to Cherith. This is the way of obedience. Only in this way do we share God's blessings. For as the Captain of our salvation He sovereignly directs all things for the good of His own that are sheltered at the brook. □

Editorial

A Defense of the Gospel of Grace against ECT (3)

Justification by faith alone, as briefly described in the preceding editorial, is the heart of the gospel of grace. This is compromised, and thus effectively denied, by the movement, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (ECT).

In order to understand what this compromise is, as well as the seriousness of it, we must remind ourselves of the error warned against in the book of Romans and especially in the book of Galatians.

The Error of Works-Righteousness in Romans

Romans 3 and 4 warn against the sinner's working in order to be righteous. All our working and all our own works are excluded from the only righteousness that is acceptable with God. Romans 4:5 warns that if a man works to be justified, he will not be justified: "To him that worketh not ... his faith is counted for righteousness." Clearly implied is that for righteousness one may not add any of his own works to his faith in Jesus

Christ. If he does add a work of his own to the work of Christ for him, he is not justified.

The Galatian Heresy

This is the explicit warning of the book of Galatians. The error of the Galatians was not that they rejected faith in Jesus Christ as the way to be justified. Rather, they added a work of their own to faith in Jesus Christ as the way to be righteous with God. The work that they added was circumcision. The error, therefore, that the apostle exposed and condemned was that of teaching and practicing justification by faith *and works*. To put it differently, it was the error of adding a work of their own to the work of Christ for them as making up their righteousness with God.

When the apostle declares in Galatians 2:16 that a man is justified by the faith of Christ "and not by the works of the law," the meaning is three-fold. First, a man is not justified by his own works of obeying any part of the law of God, whether moral or ceremonial. Second, a man is not justified by his

own works that are added to the work of Christ for him. Third, a man is not justified by his own works that he performs by the power of the Spirit of Christ within him, which works are then added to the work of Christ for him.

The wickedness of the Galatians was that they were trusting mainly in Jesus Christ and His cross and partly in something they themselves did.

Rome's Doctrine of Justification

Exactly this was the Roman Catholic error concerning justification at the Reformation, and exactly this is the error of the Roman Catholic Church still today.

Rome has never denied that a sinner is justified by God's grace through faith on the basis of Christ's work. On the contrary, Rome has always affirmed this. The Roman Catholic theologian Avery Dulles is deceptive and misleading, therefore, when, in defending ECT, he encourages Protestants to "put to rest any suspicions that Catholics consider it possible to be justified by good works

without grace and faith" ("The Unity for Which We Hope," in *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, ed. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus [Word, 1995], p. 138).

No knowledgeable Protestant ever had such suspicions. Protestants do not suppose that Roman Catholics think it possible to be justified by works without grace and faith. We are well aware that Rome teaches that sinners are justified by grace and faith—and the sinner's own good works. This is the error of Rome. Just this! The adding of works to faith and grace for righteousness with God.

Rome has always taught that a man's own works are necessary for justification in addition to the faith in Christ by which Christ's works for him become his own. Roman teaching is that justification begins with a sinner's cooperating with God's grace by his alleged free-will. God responds by infusing His grace into the sinner, so that he can do good works. Then, partly on the basis of Christ's work and partly on the basis of the sinner's own good works, the sinner is forgiven and rewarded with eternal life.

According to Rome, justification is by faith *and by works*. A sinner's righteousness with God is partly the obedience of Jesus Christ *and partly his own obedience*. For righteousness and salvation, therefore, the sinner trusts in Jesus Christ *and in himself*.

This doctrine of justification by faith and works Rome has confessed in her creed, The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent.

Justification ... is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust becomes just, and of an enemy a friend.

The article continues with the

acknowledgment that the righteousness of justification consists of "the merits of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ (which) are communicated" to us. But not only of these merits, the article is quick to add. The righteousness of justification consists also of "the charity of God (that) is poured forth, by the Holy Spirit, in the hearts of those that are justified, and is inherent therein."

According to the Roman creed, righteousness with God in the matter of justification is, in part, our own love for God and the neighbor, including the works which we do to express this "charity," or love. Therefore, this article on justification in the Roman Catholic creed finds it appropriate, indeed necessary, to admonish us to "hear that word of Christ: If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Sixth Session, Chap. 7). The way to be righteous with God is, in part, our keeping the commandments.

Justification is by the law—in part.

Workers are justified.

The Curse of Rome Against Believers

Holding the doctrine of justification by faith and works, Rome curses, and *must* curse, with the solemn, damning curse of the "anathema" those who confess and proclaim justification by faith alone, that is, every genuine Protestant.

If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favor of God: let him be anathema (Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canon 11).

Related Roman Doctrine and Life

Vitally important Roman Catholic teachings and practices depend upon and express Rome's teaching of justification. One is that every sinner can and must "merit," or earn, justification and final salvation. He earns justification and salvation by his own good exercise of his alleged free-will, by his prayers, and by his other good works. He does this, in particular, every time he "goes to confession" and receives from the priest his prescribed "satisfactions."

Another related teaching is that the Roman Catholic Church can help guilty sinners merit justification and salvation by means of indulgences, which again are earned, or even paid for in cold cash, by the sinner. These indulgences represent the meritorious works of Mary and other saints that are now applied to the account of the sinner who earns them.

A third teaching is that every ordinary Roman Catholic must make a certain payment for his own sins by suffering the torments of purgatory after his death. Thus he himself finally accomplishes his justification and salvation. Rome herself makes perfectly plain that purgatory with its huge impact upon the lives of all the Roman faithful in so many ways is only the implication of her doctrine of justification. In that Sixth Session devoted to the "Decree on Justification," the Council of Trent included Canon 30:

If any one saith, that, after the grace of Justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise that there remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world, or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened [to him]: let him be anathema.

The Roman doctrine of justifi-

cation is essentially the Galatian heresy. It is the Galatian heresy in a bald, developed form. But it is the Galatian heresy.

With this heresy, ECT, particularly its evangelical membership, has compromised. By doing so, ECT has fatally compromised the

biblical and Reformation truth of justification by faith alone. □

— DJE
(to be cont.)

Letters

The Church Fulfills Israel

Your defense of the amillennial position was great! (*Standard Bearer*, Jan. 15, 1995-Dec. 15, 1996) It certainly focused on the errors of the postmill eschatology. I did not realize that they believed that the persecution of the church by

Antichrist has already been fulfilled by the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70 and the Roman emperor Nero.

Now, how about a similar series of articles on dispensational premill. To me the fundamental and potentially dangerous error of

both pre and postmill is the denial that the church is the fulfillment of O.T. Israel. From this denial, everything starts getting distorted.

May Christ's love continue through your work to edify His people. □

Bob McDaniel
Sealy, TX

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ A Matter of Semantics?

An increasing number of articles have been appearing both in the secular and the religious press which comment on growing trends toward unity of the major church bodies. Is that not a further indication that just as the world at large is growing increasingly to be a "one world" and global society, even so the churches have increasingly been drawn together—if not in organic unity, nevertheless into unity of purpose and intent? It is strange indeed how the leaders of denominations can gloss over differences and minimize the importance of doctrinal issues.

The *Chicago Tribune*, February 1, 1999, reports one such event in an article titled "2 faiths find common ground" (sub-heading: "Catholics meet with Lutherans").

Leaders in the Catholic and Lutheran religions were hosts to a prayer service in Park Ridge Sunday to highlight an emerging consensus between the two faiths over a nearly 500-year-old argument.

The split centered on the question of whether the route to heaven is through "good works" or faith in God.

"The Lutheran criticism of Catholics was: 'You were always working your way into heaven,'" said Hugh George Anderson, presiding bishop of the 5.2 million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "The Catholics say [of Lutherans], you're not doing a thing—you're just sitting there."

Cardinal Francis George, leader of Chicago's 2.3 million Catholics, joined Anderson for the service at St. Luke's Lutheran Church.

After 10 years of meetings between Lutheran ministers and Catholic priests, the two sides have chosen carefully parsed language both can agree on, which is expected to be signed by top leaders of both faiths later this year:

"Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by

God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works."

What exactly does that mean? Some people who attended Sunday morning's prayer service and dialogue, including one Catholic priest, said they did not understand but they were encouraged the two sides were talking.

Does the Catholic Church still think good works have an effect on one's chances of salvation? "It depends what you mean by 'effect,'" George responded with a smile.

Catholics might believe the good works have an effect on their relationship with God while Lutherans might believe that their relationship with God leads them to do good works, George said.

The document, called the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," has been approved by the Church of Sweden, the largest Lutheran denomination in the world, and was set to be approved by the No. 2, the ELCA, and the Catholic Church last summer—until the Vatican expressed some last-minute concerns.

George took the unusual step Sunday of apologizing for the delay.

Rev. VanBaren is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.

"The Holy See's timing was a source of embarrassment to the ELCA, and I regret that deeply," George said.

Anderson threw George a hot-potato question at one point, inquiring why Pope John Paul II appeared to be resurrecting the practice of granting "indulgences," an old practice of granting people time off of purgatory in exchange for doing good deeds on Earth....

...George said a 3- or 4-year-old girl playing in the mud is told to wash up before coming in to greet her grandmother—even though her grandmother would welcome her dirty or clean, George said. In the same way, even though a sin may be forgiven, the effects of sin must be cleansed before one enters heaven, George said....

... "We are reading from the same map and we will, one day, in God's providence, walk together," Anderson said.

Members of the congregation gave Anderson and George a standing ovation after the dialogue.

As they were sitting down, Phyllis Bertram, a Lutheran, turned to her friend, Gerri Pospala, a Catholic, and whispered, "semantics." "Um-hm," Pospala responded....

So the Reformation was only a matter of semantics? One wonders if this is simply not a "page" taken from the political arena of today. ("It depends how one defines 'sex,'" or "It depends on how one defines 'is.'")

This drive towards unity is evident also on other fronts. The *Religious News Service*, as quoted in *Christian News*, February 1, 1999, states,

Leaders of nine of the nation's prominent mainline Protestant religious bodies have forged a proposal aimed at establishing greater church unity beginning by the year 2002.

For almost four decades, the groups have struggled to find ways to work together – first holding out the hope of organic merger but, in recent years, reaching

agreement on a way presenting a unified Christian voice on issues on which they agree.

At the conclusion of a five-day plenary meeting Sunday (January 24), the Consultation on Church Union decided on a new name—Churches Uniting in Christ—and proposed their member churches work especially hard on combating racism.

"From the moment of inauguration, the life of these churches is visibly intertwined as never before," says the final text of the adopted plan. "Their relationship, with God's help, will not be one of friendly coexistence and consultation but of binding community that actively embodies the love of Christ which ties them to one another."

The 16-page report expresses the hope all nine bodies can take part in a liturgical celebration and public declaration in 2002 of their new relationship during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which occurs in January.

"This is really substantive commitment to say that starting in January 2002 our life together will not be the same," said the Rev. Michael Kinnamon, chairman of the committee that drafted the plenary's report, and a professor at the Lexington Theological Seminary in Lexington, Ky. "These nine remain distinguishable churches but from January of 2002, they cannot consider who they are apart from the others...."

The same paper quotes another *Religion News Service* article:

Delegates from nine mainline Protestant denominations will meet in St. Louis January 20-24 to continue discussions about Christian unity as part of the Consultation on Church Union. This discussion, which began formally in 1962, is just one of many interdenominational dialogues that are continuing across the country and beyond. Here are some examples of other relations between denominations participating in COCU.

—The African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Meth-

odist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church are part of a joint study commission looking at ways to build relations between the four bodies.

—The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ are in "full communion," which means they recognize each other's ministries and sacraments.

—The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) also has an ongoing international dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church.

—The Episcopal Church is seeking full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and is participating in an ongoing Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue.

—Some ministers of the International Council of Community Churches are also affiliated with the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

—The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is involved in dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church and with Orthodox churches. It also is in full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ.

—The United Methodist Church has a formal dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church.

—All nine denominations that are member groups of COCU are also affiliated with the National Council of Churches, a national ecumenical group with 35-member denominations.

It behooves one to read again the passage of Revelation 13—especially verses 11-18 which speak of the beast which arises out of the earth. Are we not seeing that beast arise even today?

■ Mission to the Heathen

The churches have the urgent call of Christ to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. There are many who have never heard the gospel. Many have worshiped

idols all of their lives. So the call comes to preach the gospel and teach—baptizing those that believe.

But sometimes we think that the heathen are far removed from us. There are still some who call our country a “Christian” country. Nothing can be farther from the truth. In an interesting report appearing in a Denver newspaper, the reporter stated this about a local church in the city—and speaks of the spiritual condition there:

...Recently, the pastors dropped

the church’s old name, *Denver Fellowship*, in favor of the *Peak*, to better suggest the seeking of spiritual heights. It also better reflects Denver, which is notorious for being the sixth-most unchurched city in America. (Portland and Seattle rank No. 1.)

“Less than 10 percent of people in Denver attend church,” says Wilkerson. “In New York, money was the idol that kept people away. Here, it’s the spirit of adventurism. The real competition isn’t other churches but 300

days of sunshine. But we say God’s the greatest adventure of them all.”

Apart from the fact that churches, including that one mentioned in the article, seek to use all kinds of devices and gimmicks to “attract” that 90% of unbelievers, it is nevertheless striking, if the report is accurate, that in this U.S. city only 10% attend church. How many “heathen” countries, far afield, have less than that who claim to serve God? □

That They May Teach Them To Their Children

Miss Agatha Lubbers

Establishing Schools to Provide Reformed Covenant Education (3)

In two preceding articles (Nov. 15, 1998 and Feb. 15, 1999) I have reviewed important early writings about Christian education and Christian schools. These articles by Herman Hoeksema and George M. Ophoff in the earliest years of the publication of the *Standard Bearer* influenced and helped in the eventual development and formation of the Protestant Reformed Christian schools.

When I began my teaching career in the Protestant Reformed Christian schools in the early 1950s, I was not aware of the discussions and articles about the Christian schools and Christian education in

the 1920s and 1930s that preceded the organization and development of the PR Christian schools. Many teachers like myself in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when our Michigan schools were just beginning, were teaching 30-40 students, most often in multi-grade settings. During my first year in teaching (1951-52) at Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School I taught 33 students in grades 3-5. This gave little time for research like I am doing to write this series of articles.

Familiarity with the articles about Christian schools and Christian education in the *Standard Bearer* would have been helpful to the teachers, but daily preparation in order to teach each day and survive in the classroom was more important. Research into the early writings would have eradicated some of the wrong thinking that existed. Many undoubtedly

thought the Protestant Reformed Christian schools came into existence because parents were cantankerous and simply organized PR schools because of some trouble in or dissatisfaction with other schools. Research into the early articles would have resulted in a better understanding of the way in which parents became concerned about creating good Christian schools.

Many who are currently parents and teachers of children attending our PR schools are also not aware of the early discussions and articles published in the *Standard Bearer*. For some the issues and controversies during these earliest years in our churches may seem to be of minimal significance as they carry out their responsibilities in the training of the covenant children and the maintenance of the Christian schools God has provided.

Miss Lubbers is a member of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In the current series of articles I am contending that significant articles were written in the early issues of the *Standard Bearer* that forged the theological and ideological background — the *raison d'être* or justification for the existence and development of the Protestant Reformed Christian school movement. This writer believes that the articles written seventy years ago by the early leaders of the Protestant Reformed Churches were God's means that served to convince and convict the members of the PRC that the development of PR Christian schools was a necessity and calling of parents and grandparents.



In a series of editorials in the *Standard Bearer* (SB) running from November 15, 1931 to August 1, 1932, Herman Hoeksema subjected the existing Christian school movement to a thorough examination and judged it to be a "failure." The occasion for this series of eleven editorials, entitled "The Christian School Movement Why a Failure?" was a lecture presented by the well-known R.B. Kuiper, president of Calvin College. In this speech for a meeting of the Michigan Christian Teachers Institute, held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Kuiper stated that the Christian schools were facing moral and financial crisis. That the schools were in a financial crisis is understandable in view of the time of the speech — August 1931. Financial support for the Christian schools in the 1930s was affected no doubt by the Great Depression of the 1930s. However, it was the "moral crisis" that most interested Herman Hoeksema. For this reason Hoeksema quoted R.B. Kuiper as follows:

... The moral peril threatening the Christian School movement consisted in the fact that our people are losing the conviction

that the Christian School is necessary for Christian education. Among the causes of this decline in interest our people evince in the cause of Christian instruction, the speaker enumerated the following.

1. The attempt to introduce religious education in public schools, which would seem to make the separate Christian School superfluous and only cause unnecessary expense.
2. A tendency in the churches to place all emphasis on missions at the expense of Christian education at home.
3. An inferiority complex in the hearts and minds of many of our people caused by the superiority in equipment and buildings of the public schools.
4. A failure to realize the greatness of the threatening danger of modernism.
5. A growing desire to conform to the world in the realm of education. (Cf. SB, November 15, 1931.)

Even a cursory review of the issues identified by R.B. Kuiper affecting Christian schools near the beginning of the twentieth century will indicate that many of these are issues that continue to hamper the cause of Christian education at the end of the twentieth century.

Also the fundamental theological and ideological issues have not changed. George M. Ophoff and Herman Hoeksema argued in articles on the school issue that the parentally controlled Christian schools that had been established in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by members of the CRC were heading in the same wrong direction that the CRC had taken in 1924. They contended that the fundamental principles that gave direction to the schools established by members of the CRC were erroneous and heterodox. As a result the schools would not be distinctively Reformed, and therefore in this sense they were a "failure."

Out of deep concern for the Christian schools George M.

Ophoff wrote three articles in the *Standard Bearer*, Volume 3, Nov. 1, 15, and Dec. 1, 1926. The same concern for the schools and Christian education was the cause for Herman Hoeksema's series of eleven articles in the *Standard Bearer*, Volume 8, Nov. 15, 1931 through August 1, 1932.

Ophoff and Hoeksema reviewed and critiqued the pamphlet *Basic Principles of Christian Schools of America* published July 1925 by the National Union of Christian Schools (NUCS) now Christian Schools International (CSI). These were the principles that had been espoused and recommended by Professor C. Bouma in his speech of August 1926 (cf. SB, Nov. 15, 1998).

Ophoff and Hoeksema contended that these principles are not true to the Calvinism found in John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* but that they are influenced and determined by the wrong theories prevailing in the Christian Reformed Church and adopted by the CRC synod in 1924.

Ophoff writes that Dr. C. Bouma's Calvinism "is a bigger, a more inclusive, and a differently articulated thing than the particular standards (i.e., creeds and confessions, AL) of any denomination" (SB, Nov. 1, 1926, Vol. 3, p. 66).

Hoeksema wrote: "This declaration is specific only in the sense that it embodies all the errors of the Three Points of 1924. It stands very specifically on the platform of the Christian Reformed Church.... It certainly excludes the possibility of any Protestant Reformed man's signing it" (cf. SB, April 15, 1932, Vol. 8, pp. 318-319).

This article will initiate the review of the critiques by Herman Hoeksema and George M. Ophoff of the "Basic Principles of Christian Schools of America" adopted and published by NUCS in 1925. In this way we intend to continue to establish our contention that one must know the writings and controversies of the past to understand

the thinking, the theology, and the ideology that influenced the forming and establishment of the PRC school societies and schools.

In the first article in this series (Nov. 15, 1998) I spoke of the earliest school that was established by members of the PRC — the First Reformed Christian School of Redlands, California. It is worthy of note that the First Reformed Christian School was established when the articles under consideration were written. This was more than a decade before the PR schools were established in Grand Rapids or other communities. Worthy of note too is the fact that this school was established under the leadership of the late Rev. Gerrit Vos, a student of H. Hoeksema and G.M. Ophoff. Parents and grandparents who had left the CRC and organized the PRC of Redlands believed that a school based on truly Reformed and scriptural principles must be established for the instruction of their children and grandchildren.

I will have more to say about the First Reformed Christian School and the development of our PRC schools in future articles.



We have indicated that the "Basic Principles" critiqued by H. Hoeksema and G.M. Ophoff were adopted and published by the NUCS in July 1925.

At the outset of his third articles in the series, "The Christian School Movement Why a Failure," H. Hoeksema wrote that he was not aiming at the destruction of the Christian school but at its upbuilding. "I would consider it a day of great calamity when people would forsake the principles that all our education, primary and secondary, must be positively Christian." He stated that his critique "was not directed at any particular school but that he was dealing with the Christian School movement in general" (*SB*, Jan. 1, 1932).

Hoeksema also indicated that he was not a lone voice in claiming that there is something fundamentally wrong with the movement of our Christian education and its development. Although Hoeksema did not believe that R.B. Kuiper pointed out the underlying cause of "failures" in the Christian school movement, he expressed agreement with some of the concerns of R.B. Kuiper in his speech of August 1931.

When Kuiper, therefore, pointed to the danger of mistaking a religious education for a Christian education, he certainly was right. Religious education in the public schools I consider more dangerous still than the intentional avoidance of all mention of religion as far as this is possible.

He (Kuiper, AL) was right, too, when he emphasized that our Christian schools must be distinctive. We must not be satisfied with a little biblical instruction added to the curriculum, which in other respects is entirely like the instruction given in the public schools; but the principles of the Word of God must permeate all the instruction and the school life. Naturally, it is true that this distinctiveness of Christian education will appear more emphatically in some branches than in others. There is, in this respect, a great difference between mathematics on the one hand, and history and general science on the other. But it remains true, nevertheless, that the whole of education must be based on and permeated by the principles of the Word of God (*SB*, Dec. 15, 1931).

He also referred to a speech by Dr. Herman Kuiper given at the Educational Convention of the National Union of Christian Schools at Holland, MI the previous year, August 26, 27, 1930. The subject of Dr. H. Kuiper's speech was "How Should We Seek to Guarantee for the Future the Distinctive Character of Our Christian Schools?" In this speech the speaker cited the results of a ques-

tionnaire that he had sent to leading men in the teaching profession. Answers to many of the questions indicated a weakness in the schools. Hoeksema includes eight of the answers to these questions. Although it is impossible to reproduce all the responses received to questions in the Kuiper questionnaire quoted by Hoeksema, the answers all indicated that serious effort would be required to assure the future distinctive character of the Christian schools. Following are three answers that are representative (*SB*, Jan. 1, 1932).

We are today facing the sad fact that a great proportion of our people, and among them a large number of the graduates of our Christian schools, exhibit a noticeable lack of interest, not to speak of enthusiasm for Christian instruction.

A good many of our teachers don't know the real difference between a Public school and a Christian school. Many of our teachers cannot apply the Christian principles as they should, i.e., permeate all instruction with Christian principles. Too many of our teachers do not grow in the right direction. If they take courses they get them at the wrong place. All extension work is full of Dewey's, Thorndike's and Kilpatrick's principles.

The majority of our teachers have not sufficiently grasped Calvinism as a world and life view. For them religion is too much a thing apart. They do not see its basic significance for all knowledge imparted in school.

Before going on to the review of the critique of the "Basic Principles" we should note that Hoeksema expressed his basic love for Christian education. He wrote: "Do not imagine that I write these things to induce our people to send their children to the public school. My eyes are open to the good elements there undoubtedly are in the instruction that is offered in the Christian schools even as they are. I rather would warn our people,

that they should not abandon the principle of Christian instruction, neither remove them from the Christian school even as it is today."

He also writes: "I have great respect and am very thankful for the heroic efforts of some Christian school teachers to base their instruction on the Word of God throughout. But it depends almost entirely on the efforts of the individual teachers, whether their instruction shall be distinctive or not.... Although, therefore, I am always ready to express my appreciation for the efforts of individual teachers in this direction, the fact remains, that there is something fundamentally wrong with the system as such" (SB, Dec. 15, 1931).



Review of the Basic Principles of Christian Schools of America

George M. Ophoff and Herman Hoeksema individually reviewed and critiqued the six "Specific Principles" that were written and published in 1925 to give direction to Christian schools of America. Professor C. Bouma in his speech to the Convention of 1926 recommended these "Principles." The "Principles" received his recommendation because he pronounced them to be consistent with the new Calvinism that he recommended and believed needed development.

We begin our review of these "Basic Principles" as both Ophoff and Hoeksema do by quoting the six "Specific Principles" written and adopted by NUCS in 1925. I suggest that you refer to the first article in the series (Nov. 15, 1998) to compare the "Specific Principles" proposed and written by Herman Hoeksema with those quoted here from the NUCS document.

SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES

The following is an attempt to interpret the more specific religious principles basic to education

to which orthodox Christian school communities are committed:

A. The Bible is the Book of books. By virtue of its divine organic inspiration (II Pet. 1:21) it is unique among all books. The Bible is not only the infallible rule of faith and conduct, but also the infallible guide of truth and righteousness. All school administration, instruction, and discipline should be motivated by biblical principles.

B. God is triune (Matt. 3:16, 17). He is the Creator of all that is, the Sustainer of all that exists, and the ultimate end of all things (Rom. 11:36). God who is transcendent (Is. 40) and immanent (Ps. 139) is the absolute loving Sovereign over all (Dan. 4:31); men should seek to do His will on earth as it is done in heaven.

C. Man is a fallen creature (Gen. 3). Though depraved man is nevertheless an image bearer of God (Eph. 2:5), and through restraining grace he is able to do civil good (Rom. 2:14). Though lost in sin, man can be saved through faith in Christ (John 3:16); and through restoring grace, in principle, is able to do spiritual good (I John 3:9).

D. The world is steeped in sin. All aspects of life, individual and family, social and political, industrial and economic, even the animal world, nature, and things inanimate, show the marks and scars, the subversions and perversions of sin (Rom. 8:22). The virtue, order, and beauty which is still present in the world is a manifestation of God's goodness (Matt. 5:45).

E. The all embracing objective of the school is to promote the glory of our covenant God: (a) by seeking in humble dependence upon God to equip the pupil for his supreme task, namely, to realize himself as God's image-bearer (II Tim. 3:17); and (b) by seeking in the same dependence upon God to reconstitute the sin-perverted world by realizing God's Kingdom in all spheres and phases of life (Matt. 6:33). This is possible at least in principle through Christ, who is not only the Creator (as the Logos) but also the

Recreator (John 1).

F. In determining the Course of Study to be offered, in preparing the lesson material, in giving the daily instruction, the above purpose shall be consciously present as the all-embracing objective. To accomplish this great task, the teacher must have the fear of God in his heart and the determination to live it out in his profession; and he must utilize to the full whatever light God's Special Revelation sheds upon the various realms of human knowledge. (Cf. SB, Nov. 1, 1926, and Jan. 1, 1932).



Concerning these "Specific Principles" Herman Hoeksema wrote that he did not know who the original authors were. He did not care because his purpose in this analysis and critique was not to fight persons. He was interested in the cause of Christian instruction. He asserted that the platform of "Principles" was unfit to serve as the basis of Christian education. He concluded that "on such a basis our Christian school must totter into ruins."

Hoeksema continues as follows: "Partly it is altogether too vague and colorless. Partly it is erroneous characterized by omission of the most vital elements. Partly it enunciates principles that are modernistic rather than Calvinistic" (SB, Jan. 1, 1932).

Concerning these "Principles" G.M. Ophoff wrote: "The above formulation is, to a degree, very specific, and reflects the doctrinal distinctiveness of certain creeds also. Principle (a) is the embodiment of certain tenets of the Reformed faith. Also principle (b), and to a degree principle (c). Principle (c), (d), (e), and (f) are expressive of the doctrinal distinctiveness and of certain elements present in the creed of Pelagius and the creed of Dr. A. Kuyper. *That is to say, among the elements constituting the above interpretation of religious principles are also found the theory of com-*

mon grace, the doctrine of the free will of man, etc. (underscoring, AL)" (SB, Nov. 1, 1926).

What do you think? Can you begin to see that the Protestant Reformed Christian schools are a necessity?

(Review of the analysis and critique of "Specific Principles" to be continued.) □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

The Trial of Truth, Democrats, & Grand Old Pharisees (I)

(John 18:12-14, 19-40; John 19:1-16)

We enter now into a study of the trial of Jesus of Nazareth, the truth of God.

Note well: we will be studying the trial of the Wonderful Jesus Christ. Not the trial of William Jefferson Clinton.

I hope this relieves you. The trial of the President, concluded now, has tried us all.

But there is much to learn comparing the trial even of a president-scoundrel, and the trial of the King-Savior.

About the trial of the President.

No one in his right mind would or could deny that the trial of President Clinton was a trial concerning truth. Those in their left mind would. But they are mistaken. The trial of the impeached President was not about adultery, nor about Republicans getting back for Bork, Iran-Contra, or even Woodstock. It was about truth, and truthfulness.

But more: it was a trial of truth itself—the existence of it, whether

it can be known, and the worth of it.

For some, even many, wanted the vindication of a President rather than the truth, the justification and protection of a certain life-style rather than the whole truth, and to please the people back home, rather than nothing but the truth.

So they put another person on trial, the person who is usually just witness at these things—Truth.

Brutal trial—did you see it? Especially nasty when Truth himself was being cross-examined. "Truth," accused Attorney Pilate II, Jr.: "What are you? I'll tell you what you are! You are nothing but opinion. You are subject to interpretation. Your is is another man's is not. I charge you with lying." "And," Counselor Good Economy leveled, "Even if you are something, Truth, you are not much, and nothing compared to the economic state of the union." "Further," Prosecutor Pollster shouted, "You are certainly not the will of the American people." "Besides," Lawyer Lustful-Lifestyle-is-Legal lampooned, "You give me and all the rest of us cramps."

Yes, they tore at him! Some came to his defense, and offered republican and constitutional

words about him. But truth himself was silent, except for this. He said once (and that was enough): "I am truth." And they found him guilty. Liar Clinton acquitted. Truth guilty. Truth tried, and found guilty of pretending to be (absolutely) what it cannot be since all is relative; found guilty of threatening the economy; found guilty of sneaking and seeking to fetter the freedom to engage in private things no matter what they are so long as they are legal almost; found guilty of attempting to tyrannize a democratic people. Guilty. On all counts. Of very high crimes and no low ones.

And sentenced to die. No doubt. They will not let Truth get away with being Truth! It must not be allowed even to languish in any cell in any jail, think-tank, or church. "No Truth! It must not be! It has dragged us too long from the back of its car, taken us out of the bar and tied us to a post and beaten us and left us for dead too often, discriminated right and left and for too long against old men, homosexuals, blacks, whites, politicians, lovers, and friends."

Sentenced to die in a white house. Sentenced to die in every house of society. Truth: February, 1999, the year of our Lie. The year

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Lie told liars to be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth. The year of the creation "higher up" of an acceptable, tolerable class of little white house lies so that truth would die and lie would live lower down and all around. Let there be lies in the military. Let there be business lies. Let there be Billy and cookie jar lies. Now there is *this* sacred Precedent. Let nothing else be sacred. Halleliejah. Praise to the god Lie.

What a trial! And we could certainly go on. We might more than mention how this trial and condemnation of truth at the trial of William Jefferson Clinton was a trial also of all those, the politicians and the polled, who pleaded for their Barabbas and cried for truth to be crucified.

But there is another trial we must be going to, and we *want* to ponder. It is the trial of the Lord Jesus. There is the trial of trials. There is the precedent of precedents. There were the kangaroo courts of kangaroo courts. There was a trial some 1970 years ago in Jerusalem which can tell us what just went on in Washington, and just what has gone on to make this mess possible, and just what will go on from now.

For there with Jesus was the trial not of truth, but of *the* Truth. Jesus! He is the Truth! He is the truth of the God of truth. He is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!

What is truth? Truth is *what is*. Truth is a *Who is*. It is the God who is. It is reality—eternal and abiding. And not just a *being*, but a *moral being* is this God-Truth. It is Truth who is Love, Truth who is Trinity-Love, Truth who is Personal, Fellowship Truth, Righteous, Holy, Good Truth. This God who is Truth is pleased to reveal Himself outside of Himself. He will have Truth shine in a creation He makes and next to untruth which He does not. He will have Holi-

ness and Righteousness lit up in His punishment of the lie and liars human and angelic. Truth will have Holiness and Love glorified in the salvation of some and Holy-Truth-Love come down to atone and to forgive and to make liars partakers of Truth and truthful in life.

This is Jesus! This truth, this God-Truth is Jesus! He is who God is. He is what God says. He does what God does. He is the revelation of the God of truth, of the God who is, and who is Good. He is the consummate and embodied revelation of that God, for to see Him is to see the Father, and to believe in Him is to be on the Way to the Father (John 14). He is the God-Word-Truth true to Himself and to His purpose and promise, for Jesus the Christ comes *as God*, exactly according to God's counsel and Word to save and never to forsake. Truth is Jesus—God with us—just as He determined, just as He has said.

Truth, and *truthful*, faithful to God—this is Jesus *as man*, and servant of Jehovah. He comes who is God and Truth to be truthful, and to do the will of the Father. He comes to see all, to do all in the light of God and for the purpose of glorifying the Father. He comes, truthful Son, and will in human heart and with human will and in human soul be faithful to the heart and will and soul of God.

This Truth, God in human flesh, God of truth, Word of truth, Act of truth, Fulfillment of truth and grace, and true truthfulness, *is known*. It is known in the inspired Bible. It is known by the Spirit of truth, Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ.

It is known throughout the Bible, and in the Bible's record of the trial of Jesus itself, written down not by skilled and speedy court stenographers, but by graced, *Spirit-moved*, and *called men*, in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Jesus Himself declares in His trial that He came to bear witness to the truth (John 18:37). Jesus Himself

in this trial declares the Truth, under oath: that He is the Son and Christ of God.

And the trial itself is just this: *Jesus as the Truth of God* is on trial. The Jews say He is a lie. Pilate, in his infamous question "What is truth?", represents the world without religion which wants to doubt the existence, the knowability, and the worth of truth. And the people lied to to lie, shout crucify...the Truth.

Truth. Discerned by no law, religious or civil, and uncovered not by one star or a thousand lawyers, but by the Spirit of truth—*real truth*, was on trial *then*, when Jesus was tried. And man's being true and truthful and therefore true morality was at stake *then*.

What was done recently in the Senate Court, therefore, compared to what was done in Jerusalem, was peanuts. These past weary months constitutional truth has been parleyed about and compromised. Long ago in Jerusalem *theological*, God-Truth was condemned and crucified. These past months morals were mentioned as something which just might be important for a civil leader to have. Long ago true morality among men, though constitutions be written and many laws made, was forfeited and rendered impossible. For then the Absolute was absolutely, completely rejected.

In fact, Jesus' trial was the decisive trial, *the* trial of history, the trial of the Truth. It is *because* of Jesus' trial that there was this trial of truth in the United States Senate. It is *because* men rejected Truth then that men, even in all their laws and concern for decency and good order have cared *all along* (not just now!) far less for truth than for expediency, far less for true virtue than for what the culture of a certain day calls good and acceptable.

One thing we need to remember as we pore over the sacred

documents of the Christ trial. At the trial of Jesus, and when its verdict was in, men more than democrats and turncoat republicans were tried. Men as men were tried. And the whole world was found guilty.

You too. And I. We were there when they crucified our Lord. And not neutral. Guilty. It is that bad. Sin is. Lying is. Has been since sin. We do not want God, nor any revelation of God. We all, obviously foolish and stubborn donkeys, grand old respectably religious Pharisees, or dignified skeptics have cast our vote with Adam. And one thousand to zero a long

time ago we voted "away with Him."

Sometimes tremble. Right now when you think about that really important trial. Right now when the papers have stopped chatting and the lurid details of a certain trial are forgotten. Right now when we shake our heads at those bad men and their political maneuverings. Right now when as always the Bible alone remains to tell the Truth as it is in Jesus...and about ourselves.

Trembling. That is how we must go into learning the Truth of this trial of the Savior.

Tremble. The Truth, the Whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth. Crucified. We were there. We are even inclined to go back there and do it all over again. Crucify. Truth. So...help us God!

Trembling. And...*believing!* And *rejoicing!* Bible study must be that way, too. Or we deny the gospel truth. For truth is: He is denied, that we might never be denied. Truth is: at the trial He is going forward to save liars. And He has saved them. And keeps them. You liar. And me liar. Saved. For Truth's sake.

Hallelujah! All praise to the Lord God of Truth! □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Steven Key

Confessing Our Lord (3)

A Perfect Lordship

Christ's is a perfect lordship.

He owns us completely. He alone is our Lord and we are His property. Is that your confession? When we are partakers of His death and resurrection, we are the property of Christ. He owns you completely. You are His with body and soul, with your husband or wife and children, with brothers and sisters in the Lord, with all your life and possessions. All belongs to Christ! He owns us.

Do you acknowledge that lordship of Christ over you? Your heart is His, your thoughts and desires, intentions and motives. Your

actions in the sanctuary and in the narthex of the church on the Lord's Day, as well as in your home and workplace every day and every hour are His. Do you confess that?

Jesus our Lord rules over us not by force, but by the impelling power of His love. His is a rule of grace. When Christ is our Lord, His mind is our mind, His will is our will, His Word is our delight. And He alone is the One who determines not only what we shall do and say, but also what we shall think and feel and desire and by what motives we shall be governed.

The sight of our eyes, the speech of our mouth, the hearing of our ears, the actions of our bodily members, all belong to the Lord. That is the emphasis of the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 6:20, "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body,

and in your spirit, which are God's."

And when we say, "Jesus is Lord," we imply that with all our heart and mind and soul we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk a new and holy life.

That has several implications for our lives as the people of God.

A Powerful Application

Immediately we recognize that the gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus is at the same time a gospel of obedience. Repeatedly Scripture sets obedience before us as one of the ways in which we may be assured of our eternal life.

"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love

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of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him" (I John 2:3-5).

So the Lord Himself also said in John 14:21, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." It ought to be obvious that Jesus was not teaching a works-salvation. He was setting forth the inevitable consequences of the life of His Spirit in His own. The fruit of regeneration and faith is found in obedience and willing subjection to the lordship of our Savior.

Secondly, in the confession of Christ our Lord there is a recognition of fellowship with His body, the church. Scripture repeatedly refers to our Savior as Jesus Christ *our* Lord.

When we confess Christ our Lord, we seek to manifest the unity of the church and the communion of saints, doing so according to His will and in obedience to His holy Word. We seek that unity, not merely by taking care of those who are sick or in evident need, not merely by comforting the sorrowing, not merely by showing up in church with God's people, but also by laboring to edify one another, and even by seeking out those who are walking in sin. The difficult labors of Christian discipline belong to the confession of Christ's lordship over us!

There is far too much individualism among those who confess "our Lord" when they recite the Apostles' Creed. We dare say that what is often meant is really "*my* Lord." There are many who cherish their own private brand of religion and insist on going their own way. Many such people even avoid contact with the people of God, withdrawing themselves from the fellowship of the saints and living a life of separation from the body of Christ. But when one carefully examines that walk of life, what he really finds is the confession, "*I am Lord!*"

Let us well understand this confession.

The Bible does not tolerate a

private religion. To go your own way, doing your own thing, thinking what you please, doing whatever you please when you please, is not acceptable to Jehovah God. He calls us to confess *our* Lord, comprehending the beautiful unity of the people of God and the glory of His handiwork.

Though we are all different, also in terms of education, job, social status, and even race and nationality, "There is one body, and one spirit," writes the apostle in Ephesians 4:4: "even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

You cannot walk your own way, and confess the Lord Christ. He commands you to submit yourself unto Him and to take your place among His people. To confess the Son of God as Lord is to take your place as an active member of His body.

But there is still more.

That lordship of our Redeemer over us is all-comprehensive! It embraces us in our marriages and in our families, at home and in the workplace, at church and in the school, with all our life and all our possessions. Christ has dominion over all our relationships in this world. He calls us to fellowship only with His people, and not with those who do not confess His lordship over them.

The lordship of Christ is one of the principal reasons for Christian education. That is one reason why the Protestant Reformed Churches emphasize the importance of providing Protestant Reformed Christian schools in which our children can be taught. Our Christian faith is no mere theory. The lordship of Christ is not something reserved for Sunday, or reserved for a Bible class. That lordship of Christ must be recognized in every realm of life, and in every subject that is taught, in the programs that are put on and the dis-

cipline that is exercised in the school.

And our confession that He is our Lord implies that we gladly and willingly acknowledge His lordship, and that it is our earnest desire and endeavor to obey His precepts and to seek out His will in every aspect of our life.

Whenever the truth of Christ's lordship is set aside, we make an abstraction of that which is meant to be inseparable from our lives as Christians.

How does our Christian faith apply during the day? Sometimes I think we and our children fail to recognize the answer to that question. The lordship of Christ is a perfect lordship, all-embracing and applicable to every aspect of our life.

Our Responsible Lord

But there is one more very beautiful element of Christ's lordship over us. That Jesus is Lord also means that He is responsible for us.

That is not to deny our calling, not at all. But what it means is that our Lord keeps us and loves us, defends us and leads us on to the final victory. When we stumble and fall, this Almighty Lord, our Redeemer, stands before God and says, "I am responsible. I have purchased him, I have purchased her, with my precious blood."

For time and eternity Christ is our Lord, responsible for us before God. Having made us His own possession, He assumed responsibility for us before God. And He alone is able to bear that responsibility. Under His lordship there is complete freedom from fear — fear of judgment, fear of death, fear of hell. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1).

That is the lordship of Christ. Do you confess that Jesus is Lord? Do you endeavor to know His will and to obey no other word than His

in every aspect of your life, no matter what may be the cost?

That perfect lordship of Christ was confessed by Thomas as recorded in John 20:28. Thomas confessed Christ as his Lord and his God.

That confession was the result of God's work of grace, no question about it.

But when you read John 20, notice what the Lord said to him immediately after Thomas made his confession. "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." The meaning is not that Thomas was not blessed, because he had seen his Lord and God. But Jesus would emphasize that there is a greater blessedness than the blessedness experienced by Thomas and the other apostles at that particular moment.

That greater blessedness is that which belongs to you, and all believers throughout all the generations which arose after Jesus spoke those words.

That is a wonderful application for us. Perhaps there are Thomases among us. I am sure that at some point or other in everyone's life, there is a Thomas in his heart. That is, we want to see. We sometimes view our Christian faith as missing something. "How do I know that this Christianity isn't just a big joke? How do I know that I indeed have a Friend that is closer than a brother, when I can't even see that Friend?" We want to see.

Wouldn't it have been nice, if we had seen the risen Lord on that resurrection day? Yes.

But Jesus says, what you have now is far more blessed! Why? Because faith based on the senses is necessarily limited to the senses. The disciples saw the risen Lord; but they did not yet see the truth and beauty of the resurrection. They saw the fact that Jesus had risen; but they did not yet understand the significance of that event. And why not? Because the resur-

rection is not merely a matter of the senses, of hearing and seeing, but of *faith* and the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit. Only when the Lord came into their hearts by the power of His Holy Spirit, and made them partakers of the resurrection, did they see the wonder of the resurrection and did they see their Lord, who is Christ.

You who believe, and in whom the risen and exalted Christ now lives by the power of His Holy Spirit, know Him as Lord. And when you know Him as Lord, you know that you are justified.

Thomas, by merely touching Jesus, could not feel that he was justified. That is a matter of faith. It is more blessed to believe.

How blessed are you? Christ's resurrection is our life. But you could never perceive that merely by looking at Him. In fact, elsewhere in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus said of the rich man's unbelieving brothers: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be per-

sueded, though one rose from the dead."

To receive the Word of God, to receive the teachings of the Scriptures, to receive Christ in the preaching of the Word, is more blessed than to see Him as the disciples saw Him that day.

Thomas and the apostles had to become partakers of the resurrection by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in order to experience this greater blessing. Then they could see the blessedness of Christ's lordship. We, too, must receive by faith the blessedness of Christ's lordship over us. Unless that blessedness is ours, the joy of the resurrection cannot be ours.

"No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (I Cor. 12:3). When, therefore, you confess, "My Lord and my God," as did Thomas, you also magnify the name of God. For you bear evidence of the work of the Spirit, the power of God's grace, and the hope of life everlasting. □

Passing Through

Isaiah 43:1-5

When thou passest through the waters
And thy heart is troubled so;
Fear thou not, for I am with thee,
They shall never overflow.

When thou walkest through the fire
Then no flame shall hinder thee;
For I am the Lord, thy Savior,
Thou art precious unto me.

Through the fire and the waters
Step up step and day by day:
Fear thou not, for I am with thee —
I will lead thee all the way.

Annetta Jansen
Dorr, Michigan

The History of the Diaconate (1)

Its Institution

A historical survey of the office of the diaconate will demonstrate that the fundamental work of the deacon is to care for the church's poor and that the proper functioning of the office has been neglected since its institution. Demonstrating this will set the stage for a more thorough discussion of the nature and work of the office. In this article we begin such a survey by examining the institution of the office in the early New Testament church.

The diaconate as we know it today was instituted in the church in Jerusalem, not long after Pentecost, according to Acts 6:1-6. The place and the time of this institution are significant.

As to the place, remember that the true church of the old dispensation, since David's time, had centered its worship in Jerusalem, where the temple was. With Christ's death the Old Testament worship ceremonies were abolished, and the church of the new dispensation was free to worship anywhere, so long as she worshiped in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Nevertheless, though she no longer *needed* to worship in Jerusalem, she did so at first, because there the believers were gathered and were accustomed to worship-

ing. At His ascension, Christ had commanded the disciples "that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). This promise was fulfilled on Pentecost (the birthday of the church in the new dispensation) when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 2).

Scripture does not tell us specifically when the office was instituted. We are simply told, "in those days" (Acts 6:1). These were the days following Pentecost, the days in which the apostles continued to preach the gospel in Jerusalem, the days in which the church grew rapidly and began to live communally, the days in which the Pharisees and Sadducees began to persecute the church and the apostles for their faith. All of this was before Stephen's stoning and Paul's conversion. We know that Christ was crucified, and that the Holy Spirit was poured out, around AD 30. Scholars date the stoning of Stephen, one of the first deacons, at roughly 32 or 33.¹ So the period of time between Pentecost and Stephen's death, during which the office of deacon could have been instituted, is at most three years. We are inclined to date the institution of the diaconate earlier rather than later during these three years, because before Stephen was killed, enough time had to elapse for him to begin doing his miracles and to incur the wrath of the leaders of the Jews. So we will date the institution of the office at roughly 30

or 31. However, our purpose is not so much to find an exact date of the institution, as it is to show that this took place very soon after Pentecost.

This is significant, because it shows us that the office of deacon is as old as the New Testament church, and therefore is an essential office in the church institute. In case anyone argues, on the grounds that the church did not have deacons immediately, that the office is not necessary in the instituted church, our response is that the problems which arose in the church before the office was instituted were God's way of demonstrating to the church that she *needs* deacons. The Lord often works this way — showing us our need of something, then providing us that which we need.²

It is also noteworthy that the office was instituted before the church spread from Jerusalem to Antioch, Asia Minor, and Europe. God gave the pattern for church institutions to the first church institute, so that others might follow her example. That later congregations *did* follow this example is evident from the letter to the Philippians and the first letter to Timothy, written around 61 and 62 respectively: Paul includes the deacons in his address to the

¹Cf. H. Wayne House, *Chronological and Background Charts of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1981), page 127.

²John Calvin emphasizes this point in his commentary on Acts 6:1, which see.

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Philippians (1:1) and tells Timothy what qualifications the deacons must have (I Tim. 3:8-13).

The narrative of Scripture which speaks of the institution of the diaconate also demonstrates why we need deacons: we need deacons to care for the poor of the church.

The problem in the early church was that allegations arose that the Grecian widows were neglected in the daily ministration. These Grecians were Greek-speaking Jews who had been raised in western parts of the Roman Empire, and had since returned to Jerusalem. They are contrasted with the Hebrew-speaking Jews who had been raised in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Although Scripture doesn't specifically say that these allegations were true, and although the allegations were not brought in a brotherly, loving way (they came to light through grumbling and complaining), yet we read that the apostles' response was to see to it that the Grecian widows were cared for.

There are different opinions regarding what this "daily ministering," which occasioned this murmuring, was.

One opinion is that the reference was to the love feasts which were common in the early New Testament church. These love feasts were gatherings of the members of the church for a meal, to which the wealthy would bring the food, sharing with the poor. This was a practical expression of the unity of the church and of the communion of the saints. According to this explanation, the problem was that those who provided the food were causing the Hebrew widows to be cared for better than the Grecian widows.³

Another opinion is that the reference is to the leftovers from the daily administration of the Lord's Supper, which leftovers were distributed to the poor.⁴

A third opinion is that this refers to the practice of distributing to those in need from the common fund of the church. To this common fund Luke refers in Acts 2:44, 45 and Acts 4:32, 34, 35. In the former passage we read: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." The latter passage indicates that the money which was received from the sale of these possessions was brought to the apostles, who distributed the money.⁵

This last opinion is the preferable explanation, I believe. It certainly is a natural explanation, bearing in mind that Luke has spoken already of the communal situation in the early church. This explanation also does justice to the role of the apostles in the ministrations: Acts 4 tells us that they distributed out of this common fund, and Acts 6:2 indicates that it was the apostles who were in charge of this daily ministration. The first opinion is weak, because it does not account for the apostles doing all of the ministering. The wealthy could have served the poor, for the wealthy brought the food. Or, in light of Acts 2:46, which indicates that such feasts were held in private homes, the owner of the house might have served.

Whatever the case may be, the church had poor who were in need of care. For the apostles to supervise all of the care was inadequate for two reasons: first, because of the allegations which arose, and second, because the apostles had better things to do, having been called to the ministry of the Word and to prayer. The remedy which the apostles proposed was that other men be chosen to do the work of caring for the poor. Thus the office of deacon was instituted in the New Testament church.

There are some who argue that Acts 6:1-6 does not, in fact, pro-

vide a record of the institution of the office of deacon. They point out that the word "deacon" is not used in this passage; that the qualifications which the apostles prescribed for these seven men (that they be "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom," v. 3) are quite different from the qualifications which Paul clearly prescribes for deacons in I Timothy 3; that Philip and Stephen performed work other than that which is required of deacons, specifically the work of evangelism and doing miracles (Acts 6:8ff., 8:26ff.); and that Acts 11:30 says that the *elders* (not *deacons*) of the church in Judea received the benevolence money which the church in Antioch sent. Other theories are therefore suggested regarding what position these seven men held. Some say that this was a temporary, extraordinary position, not really an office, which was established simply to deal with this problem, and which soon disappeared in the early church. Others say that this was the institution of the office of elder. Still others say that this was a temporary office which later gave way to the office of deacon.⁶

³This is the opinion of Herman Hoeksema, as he expresses it in his syllabus *New Testament History*, published in 1978 by the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, in Grandville, MI. See page 69.

⁴Cf. William Heyns, *Handbook for Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1928), page 293.

⁵F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), page 120. This volume is part of the series "The New International Commentary on the New Testament."

⁶For more elaboration on these ideas and their support, cf. Hoeksema, *Ibid*, pp. 69-70; Heyns, *Ibid*, p. 294; and Peter Y. DeJong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1952), pp. 29-30.

We believe that Acts 6:1-6 is the record of the institution of the office of deacon.

First, that the position which these men held was actually that of an *office* in the church is evident from the fact that the apostles laid their hands on them (v. 6). Doing this on behalf of the church, the apostles thus indicated that the church consecrated these men to God for His work. Doing this on behalf of God, in the authority of their apostolic office, they indicated that God had chosen these men, and would give them the spiritual blessings which they needed to do the work. The significance of this laying on of hands is the same as that of the Old Testament practice of anointing a priest with oil.

Second, we see no real conflict between the qualifications which the apostles prescribe and those which Paul prescribes. Paul certainly spells out in more detail what the qualifications for deacons are, but if one meets all the qualifications listed in I Timothy 3:8-13, he surely is a man full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.

Third, that the word "deacon" is not used is not a problem, because the passage makes clear what the *work* of these men must be. They must "serve tables." Interestingly, the Greek verb translated "serve" is *diakoneo*, and is related to the Greek noun for deacon, *diakonos*. This latter word indicates that the deacon is one who *serves*. In addition, the work of these men was to serve the *poor*, which work is fundamental to the office of deacon as we know it. Clearly, the work was not that of ruling, which is the work of the elders. Nor was it the work of preaching, which was the work of the apostles (Acts 6:4).

Fourth, we can explain the evangelistic work of Philip and Stephen more naturally by saying that they were called to the office of evangelist as well as deacon. Acts 8:26 shows that Philip was specifically called and sent to

preach.

Lastly, that the elders of Jerusalem received the gift of money from Antioch cannot be used to argue conclusively that these seven were elders; nor does it necessarily mean that by this time the office of deacon had ceased functioning in Jerusalem.⁷ Exactly why the elders received this money instead of the deacons we do not know.

We agree with P.Y. DeJong that, "On the basis of the plain statement that they [the seven, DJK] were specifically charged with caring for the physical needs of the poor we may legitimately conclude that Acts 6 records the beginning of the diaconal ministry."⁸

We conclude by observing some practical points of instruction which Acts 6:1-6 gives us regarding the office of deacon. To some of these we will return later, in more detail.

Note first that the church was given the opportunity to choose these men. So it is fitting today that the members of the church have an opportunity to suggest to the church council the names of men whom they consider eminently qualified for the office of deacon. This is in keeping with Article 22 of our Church Order: "...every church shall be at liberty, according to its circumstances, to give the members an opportunity to direct attention to suitable persons...." And it is fitting that, when possible, the council present to the congregation the names of twice as many men as are needed for the office, so that the congregation can choose its deacons from this list (also in keeping with Article 22).

We are also hereby instructed regarding the installation of deacons. First, such installation must take place by the officebearers. So, although the congregation chose the men for the office, the apostles ordained them into their office. Second, the installation ceremony

was a solemn one, consisting of prayers and the laying on of hands (v. 6). Although the custom of the PRC is not to perform the actual ceremony of the laying on of hands when installing deacons, we do justice to that which the ceremony signified when the minister says to (really prays on behalf of) the newly installed elders and deacons: "The Almighty God and Father replenish you all with His grace, that ye may faithfully and fruitfully discharge your respective offices."⁹

The instruction of this passage regarding the qualification of the deacons is obvious. The Lord willing, we will consider their qualifications in a future article. For now we note that these were "seven men" (v. 3) — males, and plural in number. It is certainly best if there are several men in the office of deacon in any given congregation, although of course the size of the congregation will be a factor in determining how many men should be in the office.

But the one point which Acts 6 makes clear, and which we wish to stress, is the fact that the work of the deacons is that of caring for the poor. Also to this subject we will return in a future article, the Lord willing; but that this is the work of the office explains its necessity in the church. The church needs deacons, because the church has poor for whom she must care. □

⁷Herman Hoeksema is of this latter opinion; *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁸DeJong, *Loc. cit.*, p. 30.

⁹Cf. our "Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons."

Signs of the Times (4)

Signs of Christ's Coming in Nature

And there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Matthew 24:7b

And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

Revelation 6:5, 6

Obviously the message is that there will always be poverty in the world. Especially toward the end, the poor become poorer while the rich grow richer. Besides false Christs in the church and wars in the world, Scripture now mentions signs of Christ's coming in nature: famines, pestilences, and earthquakes.

Jesus speaks of famines. In our affluent times it is hardly possible for us to imagine the plight of those who suffer from famine. We know of crop failures, food shortages, recessions in the economy, and possibly also depressions. We have even heard of concentration camps and the gnawing hunger that was suffered there. But famines are foreign to us today. Yet even now

there are countries where famines rage, where men, women, and children, who do not have the proper food nor enough to survive, starve to death.

We talk of being hungry, but we with our full larders do not know the empty feeling, the nausea and pain that grip the stomach and bowels in excruciating agony. We have not experienced the desperation of parents who are unable to obtain food for themselves and their children, the mournful crying of little ones with pale, hollow faces and emaciated, bony frames. We are not acquainted with times in which bleating sheep cry for pasture, animals with bloated bodies roam about scouring the waste lands for food, with the cry of the dying being heard on every hand and the skeletons of the starved lying in low valleys.

We have some idea of what real famine means when we read of the days of Elijah, when even the king was looking for grass for his animals, and Elijah was fed with the widow and her son with enough meal and oil for one day at a time. We see a clearer picture when we read in Scripture that in the time of the famine in Jerusalem a mother ate her son to satisfy her craving hunger.

Jesus also speaks of pestilences. We are reminded of Psalm 91, which speaks of "the pestilence that walketh in darkness." In the narrowest sense this refers to any widespread and fatal infectious malady, such as the black plague that killed thousands in the past,

or the more recent epidemic of influenza during World War I.

When an epidemic of these sorts strikes there is no prevention or cure to be found. Very few escape it, many are critically ill, and a large number die. During that epidemic in 1918, both churches and schools were closed for weeks, no group larger than seven people might meet together, ministers visited the sick by speaking to them through the window, even when that involved climbing a ladder to reach them on the second floor. Funerals, which were a daily occurrence since sometimes a whole family was wiped out, were held in the front yard of the home, with only the immediate family attending.

In a broader sense, all sicknesses and diseases can be included. It is true that through the means of modern medicine many of the common infectious diseases are brought under control. Some of them which took so many lives, like tuberculosis, small pox, or diphtheria, are hardly heard of anymore. But instead of those, such ailments as cancer prove to be very common in our day. And then there are the social diseases, among which the most common is the widespread epidemic of the HIV infection.

Ever since the fall of man in Paradise, maladies have always been present in the world and in an ever increasing measure. The gospel accounts of the ministry of Jesus refer to many who were sick, lame, blind, or deaf. In fact, we

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are often surprised at the number of people who came to Jesus, and later to the apostles to be healed. But the fact still remains that, in spite of all modern medicines and cures, the number and intensity of diseases continue to increase. Hospitals and rest homes are always full; pain, suffering, the breaking down of this earthly tabernacle continue unceasingly. No man escapes it. We are always aware of death as the grim reaper, for it is appointed unto all men to die and afterward is the judgment.

Jesus also mentions earthquakes. Those of you who have experienced the power of the Almighty that shakes the very foundations of the earth can best understand the helpless feeling of total lack of stability. The psalmist speaks of the mountains trembling and shaking, dancing like a calf, or skipping like a young unicorn. Scripture also speaks of the mountains melting before the power of God. There are those who live in the mountains who have actually witnessed this.

When the earth totters and rocks on its foundation, much destruction of property is wrought, but also many human lives are taken. Only recently we read of an earthquake that brought landslides which engulfed many homes and took hundreds of lives. Untold damage and misery result from an earthquake which can strike at any moment, most unexpectedly, and bring with it many destructive after shocks.

Along with the famines, pestilences, and earthquakes we can well mention such disasters as tornadoes, hurricanes, forest fires, floods, heat, and drought that are reported again and again in the daily papers and in the newscasts. There can be no doubt about it that all these visitations are on the increase as the end approaches. We can certainly expect more, not less, in spite of man's ingenuity to try to prevent them.

Luke not only speaks of "great

earthquakes in divers places, and famines, and pestilences," but adds: "and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven" (Luke 21:11).

All three signs, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, are visitations of God because of sin. In times past they were often referred to as "acts of God," as if the daily events like the rising and the setting of the sun were not in God's providence. Unbelief no longer reckons with God. The unbeliever prefers to speak of natural phenomena, or freaks of nature, and will try to explain all events from natural causes.

Even in Jesus' day, when the voice spoke from heaven saying: "I have both glorified it (God's name), and will glorify it again," some of the people said with a shrug of their shoulders, "It thundered." Unbelief deliberately ignores these signs.

That attitude grows far worse as the end approaches. We read in Revelation 16:11, "And (they) blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pain and their sores, and repented not of their deeds."

Earthquakes are mentioned in the Old Testament. It is quite significant that they occurred also when Jesus died and at the time of His resurrection. When Jesus died, God was pronouncing His condemnation not only on the Jewish nation, but also upon the inhabitants of the whole world, for we all stand guilty in the rejection of the Christ. Yet the earthquake at the time of the resurrection not only assures us of the final destruction of this present world, but also of the fact that God makes all things new. At the resurrection of Christ a new day dawns for the saints in Christ Jesus. This is the beginning of the "fullness of time," the "last days," the "day of the Lord," the "days of the coming of the Lord."

All these are the beginning of sorrows.

"All these" refers back to the false Christs, the wars and rumors

of war, and the famines, pestilences, and earthquakes which the Lord has mentioned. These signs in the church, in the world, and in nature are referred to here as precursory signs, that is, they are the harbingers or warnings of the approaching end of the ages.

The word "sorrows" might better be translated as "travail" or "birth pangs." They are like the experience of a mother who gives birth to her child. They are extremely painful, an agonizing experience, but at the same time God is carrying out His counsel in bringing forth a new creation in which righteousness dwells.

Paul states: "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:19-22).

We can lift up our heads in blessed hope, for our salvation is drawing nigh. We who live by faith and not by sight recognize the fact that in most recent times we have experienced many disasters throughout the country: severe earthquakes and forest fires in California, forest fires in Florida, floods in the southern states and in Kentucky and North Dakota, and heat with drought in Texas that breaks all records. There is virtually no state in the Union that has not experienced some form of disaster, leaving destruction and causing the loss of human lives.

We need not be unduly disturbed, for we look in growing anticipation for the coming of our Lord. His footsteps are daily more clearly heard. His voice sounds through all the works of God's hand: "Behold, I come, even speedily!"

Our prayer should be: Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly. □

The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary, by Herman Ridderbos (translated by John Vriend). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997. Pp. xiii-721. \$42.00. (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

Herman Ridderbos, now retired, taught New Testament for many years at the Theological School of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands in Kampen (GKN). Throughout his long career he wrote many books, among which are the excellent Commentary on Matthew in the *Korte Verklaring Der Heilige Schrift* series and *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*.

As the book's title indicates, Ridderbos purposed to write a theological commentary on the Fourth Gospel. His purpose was to make clear from the exposition of this Gospel what its message is. What particular truth does John contribute to the doctrine of Holy Scripture. Does Ridderbos succeed in this? We think so, but with some reservations.

Because he aimed to focus on the message, and because he wanted to write for as wide an audience as possible, the author does not offer a treatment of all the "preliminary questions that have been raised with regard to the origin of the Fourth Gospel, such as

- * whether it was originally a single composition,

- * the issue of the independence (or otherwise) of the sources and the way they were handled by the Evangelist,

- * this Gospel's relationship to the Synoptic Gospels,

- * whether we have the material in the Gospel in the original form and order (which is doubted by many scholars),

- * the 'phases' in the history of

the Gospel's origination, and the like. Opinions," says Ridderbos, "on all these questions are widely divergent and come to us in a body of literature almost impossible to survey, consisting as it does in a vast multitude of separate studies and monograph" (pp. xiii-xiv).

The question, maintains Ridderbos, on which the Gospel focuses is, "Who is Jesus?" "The Evangelist," writes Ridderbos, "views the real miracle of the coming and work of Jesus, the Christ, as the incarnation of the Word or, as he states in a no less pivotal pronouncement, as the *descent* of the Son of man (3:14)" (p. 13). "Hence," the author continues, "to have 'beheld' the revelation of that glory in the flesh and to witness to him who thus dwelled among us forms the foundation and content of the Fourth Gospel" (p. 13). "Accordingly, this glory is nowhere depicted more visibly and audibly than in John, as is evident particularly from the emphasis placed there on the irrefutability and reality of Jesus' miracles (9:18-34; 11:38-42; 20:27; also 2:9; 4:15ff.)" (pp. 13-14).

The language used by the author in the introduction does not sound as if Ridderbos believes the doctrine of plenary, verbal, infallible inspiration, even though he concludes the introduction with this statement: "The point at issue is always what Jesus said and did in his self-disclosure on earth, but it is transmitted in its lasting validity with the independence of an apostle who was authorized to speak by Jesus and endowed with the promise of the Spirit" (p. 16). The reader will have to decide this question for himself.

There is much to be said for this work. It is scholarly. The author interacts with the scholars and commentators in extensive notes on nearly every page. He obviously knows "what's out there" on the

Gospel of John. The book is enhanced by detailed, extensive name, subject, and Scripture text indices.

At the same time, there are very serious weaknesses in this work. The author denies the doctrine of predestination. Commenting on John 10:25-26 he writes, "here again ... commentators often refer to 'Johannine predestinationism.' Undoubtedly the reference here is to the deepest grounds of faith and unbelief. 'My sheep,' after all, are those whom 'the Father has given me' (cf. vs. 29; 6:37ff., etc.). The text speaks of a predetermined situation, but it is rooted not in a divine decree but in 'belonging to' and living out of a spiritual field of dynamics other than that in which Jesus' sheep are.... It is not the case, however, and here lies the permanent meaning of this confrontation, that the situation is closed from God's side, as if Jesus has been sent by the Father merely to note that fact and to proclaim it as immutable" (p. 369). That the author denies predestination is evident as well from his comments on chapter 12:39-40, "Unbelief is not thereby blamed on God in a predestinarian sense, but is rather described as a punishment from God: he abandons unbelieving people to themselves, thus confirming them in their evil, blinding their eyes and hardening their hearts, as a result of which whatever God gives them to see and hear can no longer lead to salvation, that is, to repentance and healing" (pp. 444, 445).

This reviewer cannot determine from Ridderbos' comments on chapter 20 whether he believes that Jesus arose from the dead.

Finally, in conclusion, my colleague, the Rev. Herman Hanko, who taught New Testament at the Protestant Reformed Seminary for over thirty years and who has read much of Ridderbos' writings and

who has written an extensive review of Ridderbos' book, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, commented to me recently, "Herman Ridderbos has changed. The contemporary Ridderbos is not the Ridderbos of *Korte Verklaring*." *Korte Verklaring Der Heilige Schrift* is a series of commentaries on all the books of the Bible written by Dutch professors and ministers in the 1930s. H.R. Ridderbos contributed a two-volume commentary on Matthew in this fine series. ■

A Sign of Faithfulness: Covenant & Baptism, by H. Westerink. Neerlandia, AB, Canada: Inheritance Publications, 1997. 128 pages. Can. \$9.95/US\$8.90 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

This translation of an earlier Dutch work by a teacher in the

Christian schools says some good things about covenant and baptism, especially infant baptism. It vigorously contends for the unity of the covenant in the Old and New Testaments, as for the related inclusion of children in the covenant in the present dispensation. The author points out that in saving the children of believers God remembers "His own creation ordinances. In them He had given seed, family, generations, and nations their place" (p. 103).

But it comes out clearly that the covenant-conception promoted here holds that the covenant is with all the physical children alike, reprobate as well as elect. God promises salvation to all alike, evidently with the same attitude of love to all. In view of the perishing of some, this doctrine of the covenant is destructive of God's faithfulness

to His covenant, as well as of the power and veracity of the covenant promise.

In connection with his affirmation of a promise to all the children, the author insists that the promise "requires" faith. Never does he acknowledge that the promise also, and first of all, *includes* the benefit of faith, and then *gives* it. That is, to whomever God makes the covenant promise He promises to give faith, and then He keeps His promise.

The spate of books urging the peculiar covenant doctrine set forth here *must* raise the question with Reformed Christians, "Where in this covenant-conception is the sovereignty of God in salvation that is clearly and sharply confessed by the Canons of Dordt?" Or does not the gospel of salvation confessed in the Canons apply to the children of believers? □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

We begin this issue of the "News" with a heartfelt thank-you, first to the Evangelism Committee of the First PRC in Holland, MI for serving as host for a very timely and worthwhile conference on the millennium, entitled "Biblical Sanity Amid Millennial Madness," and second to the three men who so capably presented the biblical aspects of that theme. Prof. D. Engelsma spoke Friday night, February 5, to an overflow crowd on "The Proper Perspective of the New Testament Age and the Return of Jesus Christ." This fine speech was followed the next morning by two more: Prof. H.

Hanko spoke on "The Dominant Signs of Our Times," followed by Rev. C. Terpstra speaking on "Preparing for the New Millennium and the End of the Age." Time was given after each speech for questions, and this too proved to add a very practical touch to the conference. Today there are so many different predictions about what will happen at the end of this millennium. This opportunity to spend time with God's Word, therefore, truly served to strengthen those who attended. Opportunity was also given to order all three speeches on cassette, and at this time there are over 90 orders already in to First's Evangelism Committee.

With the approval of his consistory, Rev. S. Key, pastor of the Randolph, WI PRC, brought the Word of God Sunday evening, February 14, to the members of the Grace United Reformed Church in Waupun, WI. Pastor Key preached

from Psalm 25:4 under the theme, "Jehovah's Covenant Made Known."

The Evangelism Committee of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI was able to spend a night in mid-January manning a booth at Grand Valley State University to promote their evangelism work there. You may remember that part of that work involves sponsorship of the group "Christianity on Campus," which meets throughout the school year to discuss subjects related to young Christians of college age. Part of Grace's work also involves giving guidance and counsel to students at GVSU. The hope is that by God's grace some might be led through this to visit Grace Church and possibly come to a deeper appreciation of the Reformed faith.

The Evangelism Committee of the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL recently informed their congregation that their church's web page continues to draw questions from many dif-

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

ferent contacts. Plans are now underway to up-date this page to include audio Reformed Witness Hour sermons.

Mission Activities

Since his acceptance of our Churches' call to serve as missionary to Ghana, Rev. R. Moore and his wife have been busy making plans for the tremendous undertaking we as churches are about to begin. Rev. Moore estimates that it will take at least three months to make the arrangements necessary to move to Ghana. Rev. Moore planned to preach his farewell sermon as pastor of the Hull, IA PRC on March 7, D.V.

Also with regard to Ghana, we pass along a note from the Foreign Mission Committee that they are once again looking for individuals or couples interested in assisting our missionary in Ghana. The FMC is requesting that these individuals or couples be willing to spend at least six months, but preferably at least a year, on the field assisting our missionary. Much of the work would be to assist in the practical aspects of the work which are not directly ecclesiastical. Such work as attending to the housing, transportation, and physical aspects of the worship and living facilities. Expenses for these volunteers would be paid by way of collections in our churches and personal donations. If you are interested, you are encouraged to contact Rev. R. Smit, secretary of the FMC, with any questions you may have.

As many of our readers know, Rev. J. Mahtani, home missionary in Pittsburgh, PA, has been suffering from depression. Pastor Mahtani has been relieved of his

preaching duties for four to six weeks. The Domestic Mission Committee and the calling church, Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, have made arrangements for the care of the mission group during this time and have prepared a schedule for how Rev. Mahtani, the Lord willing, will resume his labors. Besides remembering the needs of the Mahtanis and the group in Pittsburgh in prayer, you might also consider dropping them a note of encouragement. Pastor Mahtani's address is, 216 Thorn-

berry Dr., Pittsburgh, PA 15235 or jaimahtani@msn.com.

Minister Activities

The congregation of the Hull, IA PRC will have a congregational meeting on March 2, D.V., to call a pastor from a trio of the Revs. B. Gritters (Hudsonville, MI), C. Haak (Itasca, IL), and S. Key (Randolph, WI).

Food For Thought

"As soon as God puts his children into the furnace of affliction, he will be with them in it."

— C.H. Spurgeon □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TEACHERS NEEDED

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).

The Hull Protestant Reformed School of Hull, IA will add to its staff a 6th/7th grade teacher for the 1999-2000 school year. Interested persons are encouraged to contact Mr. Pete Brummel, Principal, 218 Second St., Hull, IA 51239 (712) 439-2490 or (712) 439-1308 or Mr. Brian Kroese, 301 Second St., Hull, IA 51239 (712) 439-1699.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC would like to express their Christian sympathy to Christine Batts in the death of her brother,

NEAL FABER.

"Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!" (Psalm 31:19).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, Pres.
Ed Hekstra, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Society of the Doon PRC expresses its sincere sympathy to its fellow member Gert Burgers, in the sudden death of her grandson,

DANIEL HECKATHRON.

May she and her family be comforted by His Word and Spirit. "The Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee. He will not fail thee nor forsake thee" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

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

NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address synod 1999, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 1. Please send material to:

Mr. Don Doezeema, 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418