



**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

The Standard Bearer

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A Call to Worship

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker.

Psalm 95:6

Let us worship our Maker.

The Lord, great and greatly to be praised. He is the only true and living God, besides whom there is and can be no other. He is a great God and a great King above all gods.

Idol gods are the work of men's hands, set up before the face of the living God. Our God is in the heavens, far beyond all that is creature.

He is our Maker. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and all that they contain. He spoke and it was; He commanded and it stood forth. In six days the Almighty brought forth a perfect creation by the Word of His mouth and the power of His Spirit.

He saw all that He had made and it was very good, exactly according to His eternal plan. The angels worship before Him saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, heaven and earth are filled with thy glory."

You and I, His creatures, are "fearfully and wonderfully made." In God's appointed time we are given our birth and our being from the parents appointed for us from all eternity. The Lord formed and shaped us as individuals. Throughout all the generations of mankind there are no two persons alike in appearance or in character. We receive our own specific place in the midst of our family and all other relationships, each one of us serving his own purpose in carrying out the counsel of God every moment of his existence here on earth. "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches" (Ps. 105:24).

Even more than that, we are recreated, renewed by a second birth with a life from above. We are born again, not of flesh and blood, but by the Spirit of Christ and by the Word that liveth and abideth forever. The life of the resurrected Lord is implanted in us, making us new creatures who belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. Within us is the beginning of the joy and peace of eternal life. Adam and Eve knew God as the Creator of all that exists. We know Him as our Creator, but also as our Re-creator, who makes all things new. How wondrous are His doings and His ways past finding out!

The same God who made the universe also upholds, controls, and governs all that exists. Summer and winter, springtime and harvest are all in His hand. He causes the sun to rise each morning, carries it through the skies, and causes it to set in the evening. Every drop of rain falls where He directs it. He

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prepares food for man and beast, even the common sparrow is under His care. He also sends storms and disasters according to His wise and eternal purpose. He carries out His counsel through the thoughts, words, and deeds of His chosen people, but no less through every act and deed of Satan and wicked men. "For the Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Prov. 16:4).

Yet every one of us remains responsible for every moment of our life here upon earth. In the great Day of days we will stand before the Judge of heaven and earth to carry away the deeds of the body, whether they be good or evil. The righteous in Christ Jesus will shine as the sun, while the wicked are condemned to everlasting desolation. How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out. For of Him, and through Him, and unto Him are all things forever and ever! O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, for all His mighty works!

All creation, and every creature in particular, proclaims the glory of its Maker. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge. Throughout the hours of the night the heavens declare the immensity, the majesty, the wisdom of God, and also much more. Where there is no interference of city lights we can see the canopy of the heavens with all its splendor, each star hanging like a lamp in the sky, seemingly near enough for us to reach out and touch it. We see the countless number of stars, the planets, the constellations as the great wonders of the heavens. In the daytime we see right in our own front and back yard God's mighty works, in the grass, in the trees, in the flowers, and in the birds. All nature joins in singing its Maker's praise. Let us bow down in worship and adoration!

This sovereign Lord is our God and Father in Christ Jesus, whom we acknowledge as the supreme

Ruler of our lives. All that befalls us in this vale of tears comes to us from Him who withholds no good thing from those who fear Him. There are events in life that we regard as sad tragedies, which, as some would say, God did not will and could not prevent. We might even be tempted to cry out with the patriarch Jacob: "All these things are against me!" Yet Paul assures us: "If God be for us, who can be against us? ... Nay, but in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:31, 37). It is exactly the comfort of the saints that their unchangeable God keeps covenant. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Let us bow in worship before the Lord our Maker.

A bit of soul-searching at this point is not out of place.

We are dependent creatures, yet we often fail to realize how dependent we are. Our inclination is to compare the universe to huge machinery that has been set in motion and now runs by its own power. We say: "It rains," "it is cold," "the sun shines," giving little thought to the fact that God upholds and governs all things. We often live and act as if we can take care of and provide for ourselves — except when an emergency arises and God must be called in. The fact is that we can neither see nor hear, nor move a muscle, without the sustaining power of our God. We say, "I need Thee every hour," while the reality is, "I need Thee every second of my existence." Apart from God's omnipresent power we could not even exist.

We are pilgrims and strangers on the earth. Yet we so readily forget. We are so busy striving for the bread that perishes that we hardly find time to care for our spiritual welfare. Especially in these affluent times, with all our modern conveniences, we are busier than ever. Our life becomes one grand rush toward — what? We sorely need to return to the in-

timacy of the family life in the home, the quiet time for meditation, reading, studying the Scriptures, and prayer. Our real home is in heaven and our real life is still to come. This life is but a preparation, a mere foretaste at best. O that we could keep our goals straight and worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

What about our values? Where is our real treasure, here on earth or in heaven? When we stand before the throne of God on the day of judgment we will not be asked whether we were prominent and successful in business, whether we made a name for ourselves among men, whether we gave our children the luxuries of this present time. But we will be asked: "What did you do with the talents that were entrusted to you? Did you strive to use those talents to My glory personally? As parent? As child of God? As member of My church? As part of the communion of saints?" Will Jesus say: "I was an hungered and you gave Me meat; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in, naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came unto Me"? Do we thank and praise Him for the privilege of serving Him?

We are stewards of God in His creation. We cannot lay a finger on one thing that we can call our own — not our body, husband or wife, son or daughter, house or hard-earned money, automobile or stocks. They are all the means that God has entrusted to us to serve Him. We are accountable to Him for what we have done with the talents He gave to us. At very best we are unprofitable stewards who have done nothing more than our duty. We earn no stars in our crown. The glory is all the Lord's, even as in heaven we shall live solely unto Him and worship Him with our whole being forever.

Are you and I happy, thankful children of God? A thankful Christian is a joyful person. Scripture

tells us: "Rejoice in the Lord!" And then for emphasis it adds, "Again I say, Rejoice!" Are we happy with what we have, that is, with what God has given us? I remember seeing a slovenly dressed man in New York who was going from one trash can to another to search for something to eat. He came upon a partially eaten hamburger, took out the meat and ate it, and threw the rest back. The thought keeps recurring to me: Except for the grace of God, that could be I. Why did God determine that I be born of Christian parents, who brought me up in a Christian home, in the church, and in a Christian school? Why should I have been privileged to confess Christ as my Savior and Lord in the midst of the communion of saints, and have a place among them all the days of my life? And really, when we count our blessings one by one, we do have so much, so very much. And we deserve nothing. In fact, we daily forfeit all those blessings by our sins. The God of all grace bestows all these blessings upon us, and much more. For our spiritual life, with all its benefits, comes freely unto

us from above from day to day, even from moment to moment. O that men would thank the Lord for His goodness, and all His mighty works!

One of the most blessed of God's gifts is the gift of prayer. We can approach God at any time and under any circumstance. We need no appointment weeks in advance, no appointment at all. We need no telephone, nor any other instrument, for the line is always open between God and us. When we call upon Him we hear no busy-buzz, no voice directing us to press this or that number, for God's ear is always attentive to all our needs. We never call on Him too often or too long. Although one would think that He would grow weary of all our petty, if not wrong and foolish, requests, He is patient with us. He listens, hears, and understands, as only our heavenly Father can understand. For as an earthly father has compassion upon his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.

The best moments of our lives, in fact the closest we come to heaven in this life, are the times we spend on our knees in humble worship and prayer. As we sing

from the Psalter: "In sweet communion, Lord, with Thee I constantly abide; My hand Thou holdest in Thy own to keep me near Thy side." And also: "Whom have I, Lord, in heaven but Thee, to Whom my thoughts aspire? And, having Thee, on earth is nought that I can yet desire."

But that means humbling ourselves before the Lord our Maker. Jesus says: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). The apostle John calls us his "little children." In comparison with the infinite God we are smaller, more helpless, and more dependent than a wee babe in its mother's arms.

To know and confess that is essential, if our lives are to be lives of prayer, if we are to pray without ceasing, offering unto God the sacrifice of our hearts and lips. As the fathers expressed it: "Man is nothing, God is all in all." He is worthy of all the praise and adoration of our lives. That is the eternal blessedness of heavenly perfection! "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!" □

Editorial

A Defense of the Gospel of Grace Against ECT

(6)

(Conclusion)

The preceding editorials have demonstrated that Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) is evangelical compromise of the biblical and Reformation doctrine of justification. By affirming

together with Roman Catholics that "we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ," deliberately omitting the word "only," the evangelicals compromise with the Roman Catholic doctrine of justifi-

cation by faith *and works*. They compromise for the sake of the culture wars, for the sake of evangelism, and for the sake of church unity. But they compromise the truth of justification.

How serious is this?

A Reformed criticism of ECT would condemn a number of evils.

Where is the Church in ECT?

For one thing, ECT is an effort to realize church unity without the involvement of any church. Where is the church—the *instituted* church—in this ecumenical endeavor? Where is the body of Christ in all this ecumenical wheeling-and-dealing? What authority do the negotiators in ECT have for their activities and decisions? Who supervises their work? What wisdom and power do they draw on for this extraordinarily difficult and significant work? What makes their decisions and documents binding?

The evangelicals are strictly on their own, as mere individuals. No evangelical church sponsors ECT. Neither is the Roman Catholic Church involved, although we may be sure that she watches the goings-on with great interest. Colson is not the church. Packer is not the church. Neuhaus is not the church. Colson, Packer, and Neuhaus in a room together are not the church. They are all free-lancers who have taken it upon themselves to do the church's business and to speak in the name of the church. They are running in the work of church unity, but Christ has not sent them.

The Tactics of Diplomacy

Another evil is that ECT tries to achieve church unity by the tactic of playing with words, crafting misleading phrases, and adopting deceptive documents that paper over real, substantial, and abiding divisions. The ecumenical method of the men of ECT is not that of frankly facing up to doctrinal differences and then honestly debating these issues, in order to arrive at oneness that consists of real agreement in the truth of the Word of God.

In this respect, ECT resembles the notable ecumenical conference

between Protestants and Roman Catholics at Regensburg in 1541. Prominent men from both churches participated. Bucer, Melancthon, and Pistorius represented the Protestant churches. Calvin was there as a friend of Bucer. Gropper, Eck, and Cardinal Contarini were Rome's delegates. Cultural pressure was exerted on the conference in the personal presence of the emperor, who needed church unity for his own, earthly, political ends.

Bucer and Melancthon, the evangelical heavyweights at the conference, would have sold out the Reformation by their compromise with Roman heresies. They agreed to a statement on justification that failed to affirm justification by faith alone; approved a declaration stating that the church is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture; produced a draft article that taught transubstantiation; and acknowledged that the adoration of Christ in the bread of the Lord's Supper need not be rejected as a matter of principle. Only the pope's insistence on still more Protestant concessions and the adamant opposition of Luther wrecked the enterprise and saved the Reformation.

Regensburg is a warning to the true church in all ages that false, if well-meaning, ecumenicity is as great a danger to the gospel, and, therefore, to the church, as is heresy. The truth which has been won by dint of struggle, sacrifice, suffering, and blood on the battlefield can be lost at the conference table by nice, smiling, ecclesiastical diplomats. In one day!

No genuine church unity will ever be realized in the way of ignoring or manipulating doctrine. This is not the way of the Spirit of truth.

The Real Oneness of Rome and Modern Evangelicalism

In addition, ECT virtually begs true evangelicals to investigate what it is that opens up contemporary evangelicalism to compromis-

ing with Rome on justification. Is it not that contemporary evangelicalism embraces the doctrine of the free-will of man? Agreeing with Rome in this basic teaching, is not contemporary evangelicalism, in fact, essentially one with Rome in their gospel? Affirmation together of the doctrine of justification merely acknowledges and spells out this essential oneness.

Richard John Neuhaus, the Lutheran-become-Roman Catholic and a main player in ECT, points out this very thing. Neuhaus is defending ECT's affirmation of justification to various evangelicals who are loud in their criticism that the affirmation does not confess "justification by faith *alone*." He reminds these evangelicals that "the great majority of evangelicals in America and the world do not believe" what the Reformation taught about sovereign grace and expressed in the phrase, "justification by faith *alone*." On the contrary, "Wesleyan, Arminian, Holiness, Pentecostal, and other evangelical traditions are much closer to the Catholic understanding ..." ("The Catholic Difference," in *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: Toward A Common Mission*, ed. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, Word, 1995, p. 199).

The same point was made in a recent issue of the Roman Catholic magazine, *New Oxford Review*, although the subject was not a defense of ECT but a defense of Rome against the shrill attacks upon her by certain American fundamentalists. With reference to one of these critics of the Roman Catholic Church, the author correctly observes that he—the critic—is "zealous in defending the Protestant Reformation but does not realize that his own emphasis on 'deciding for Christ' inescapably implies the possibility of co-operating with the grace of justification—a possibility the Reformers constantly condemned but upon which the Catholic Church insists" (*New Oxford Review*, Jan. 1999, p. 33).

Rome has made it her official confession that the doctrine of free-will is basic to her teaching on justification. Canon IX of "The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent" on justification reads:

If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified, in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, *and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will:* let him be anathema (emphasis added).

Calvin saw clearly that the heart of the Roman heresy of justification by faith and works is the lie of free-will:

The Papists ... can by no means allow that the righteousness of faith is gratuitous, for from the beginning this figment about free-will has been resorted to—"if men of themselves come to God, then they are not freely justified." They, then, as I have said, imagine a partial righteousness, they suppose the deficiency to be made up by satisfactions, they have also, as they say, their devotions, that is, their own contrived modes of worship. Thus it comes, that they ever persuade themselves that the righteousness of man, at least in part, is made up by himself or by works (commentary on Hab. 2:4).

Every church that maintains free-will, though its evangelical credentials be never so impressive, is one with Rome in the doctrine of justification. It comes as no surprise that this church in one way or another expresses approval of ECT. Such an evangelical church can indeed cooperate with Rome in evangelism: both offer to sinners a salvation dependent upon the sinner's own will, choice, or acceptance, and both thus grant to sinners a righteousness made up, in part, of the sinner's own fine efforts.

Betrayal of the Gospel of Grace

Although ECT can, and should, be criticized in several respects, it is the purpose of this series of editorials to expose ECT as a betrayal of the gospel of grace simply by virtue of its compromise of the truth of justification by faith alone.

How serious ECT's compromise of justification by faith alone is, the book of Galatians shows. It condemns the corruption of the truth of justification. But, as has been demonstrated in a previous editorial, the Galatian heresy was the very same as the Roman doctrine of justification with which ECT compromises.

The condemnation is devastating.

Galatians 1:6-9 calls the Roman doctrine approved by ECT "another gospel," and curses those who teach it.

Galatians 5:2-4 declares that to add any work to the work of Christ for a sinner's righteousness, as the Roman doctrine approved by ECT does, is to forfeit the profit of Jesus Christ altogether; is to become debtor to do the whole law; and is to fall completely from grace.

Galatians 2:21 charges that the Roman Catholic denial of justification by faith alone, which denial ECT approves and affirms, makes the death of Christ vain.

Standing Up Against Peter and an Angel from Heaven

The gravity of compromising the gospel-truth of justification, as is done by ECT, indicates the importance of our maintaining the doctrine of justification by faith alone, without compromise. Maintaining this doctrine is of essential importance for the penitent sinner, for the true church, and for God.

For every penitent sinner, the importance of justification by faith alone is that confessed in Article 23 of the Belgic Confession of Faith: "(it) gives us confidence in approaching to God, freeing the conscience of fear, terror, and dread." On the other hand, every human

who enters the judgment trusting even in part for his righteousness in his own work, or in the work of any other than Jesus alone, will be condemned.

Salvation is at stake here! Have the evangelicals in ECT forgotten Luther's verdict upon every one who *practices* Rome's doctrine of justification? The 32nd of the 95 theses was, "Those who believe that they can be certain of their salvation because they have indulgence letters will be eternally damned, together with their teachers."

All Roman Catholics are properly, and necessarily, the objects of evangelism.

For the true church, the importance of maintaining justification by faith alone is, as Luther put it, that this is "the article of a standing or a falling church." To teach it is to teach the gospel of grace, and this is the mark of a true church, the infallible sign of the presence of Jesus Christ Himself. Denial or corruption of justification by faith alone is to teach salvation by the will and work of man, and this is the infallible mark of the false church, which has abandoned Christ.

For God, the importance of maintaining justification by faith alone is that by the preaching, belief, and confession of this doctrine God is glorified in His marvelous grace. In this doctrine, with its related truths, particularly the truth of the bondage of the will, God is God. The gracious God justifies the ungodly—*only* the ungodly—on the basis of His own work of mercy and justice in the cross of Jesus Christ—*only* the cross of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, to teach justification by man's own works, even in part, is blasphemy. This is the worst blasphemy, for it denies God His Godhead *in salvation* and makes man his own god *in salvation*. Luther was right: "It is . . . as blasphemous to say that a man is his own god, creator, or producer

as it is blasphemous to say that he is justified by his own works."

Elect, penitent sinners *must* be comforted; the true church *must* stand; God *must* be glorified.

Therefore, we take our stand with Luther: "Of this article (that is, justification by faith alone—DJE) nothing may be yielded or conceded, though heaven and earth

and whatever will not abide, fall to ruin."

Although North American culture develops into the kingdom of the beast, although the evangelizing of the lost seemingly suffers, and although the church of Christ gives the appearance of hopeless division—matters which deeply trouble us also—nothing of the gospel-truth of justification by faith

alone may be yielded.

On the contrary, as Luther also exhorted, since justification by faith alone is "the principal doctrine of Christianity ... if you see this threatened or endangered, do not be afraid to stand up against Peter or an angel from heaven."

Here, we stand up. □

— DJE

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Pelagius and Celestius: Enemies of the Doctrines of Grace (1)

Introduction

With the adoption of the Creed of Chalcedon the Trinitarian and Christological controversies were, to all intents and purposes, brought to an end. Many different controversies continued to perplex the church, especially in the East; but they were vain and useless, mostly due to philosophical speculations of men who were out to promote their own private agendas more than to learn the truth of Christ. Chalcedon established for the church of the new dispensation the doctrine of the person and natures of Christ.

The controversies which next plagued the church were over entirely different doctrines: the doctrines of man and of salvation (anthropology and soteriology). The two overlapped a bit, in fact. The council of Ephesus in 431, for example, made decisions about

Nestorianism (which we discussed in our last article) and decisions about Pelagianism, the heresy against which Augustine fought — and which is the subject on which we now write.

This relation between the controversies over the doctrine of Christ and the doctrines of man and his salvation is important. In fact, the church could not very well deal properly with the doctrine of salvation without settling the doctrine of Christ. The truth of salvation is based on the truth of Christ. To get soteriology straight, one must understand correctly Christology. We cannot save ourselves. Only God can save us. But salvation comes through Christ. Hence, Christ must be God — in the ringing words of Nicea: "very God of very God."

The doctrine of Christ was settled. The church could now turn to the doctrine of salvation in Christ.

A couple of other matters must be treated by way of introduction. The first is that the doctrine of man and the doctrines of grace are also related to each other. The Pelagian

heresies really were errors in the doctrine of man. Pelagius denied original sin and the corruption of the human nature. But, quite obviously, this denial affected also the doctrine of salvation. If man is not a sinner, totally depraved, he does not need Christ to save him. He can save himself. These two doctrines had to be treated together.

The second point is that the church, prior to the time of Pelagius and Augustine, had really not understood very well either the doctrine of man or the doctrine of salvation. In a way this is understandable, because the church had had no opportunity to examine these questions, for the defense of the truth concerning Christ occupied all their time. But serious errors were present, although they were primarily to be found in the East.

In general, the church as a whole surely understood that man is a sinner and needs salvation. The church also understood that Christ had come into the world to save His people from their sins. These truths were too clear and too

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frequently mentioned in Scripture to doubt them. But when it came down to specifics, errors kept cropping up. The chief of these errors was the doctrine of the freedom of the human will to choose between good and evil.

The question of human freedom was the pivotal point on which the whole Pelagian controversy turned. How striking that people will never learn the lessons of history. Still today most of the church world clings tenaciously to the doctrine of human freedom. It is the downfall of salvation by grace.

From a certain point of view it is not surprising that the church held to the doctrine of the freedom of the will. The theologians who considered the matter at all thought this doctrine was quite important to defend Scripture against other errors. The church had to do battle with paganism, and paganism held strongly to the idea that Fate irresistibly controlled the lives of men, so that they were helpless pawns in Fate's hands. The paganism of Augustine's time even held to the idea that Fate controlled the lives of the gods.

In addition to such pagan thought, heresies had appeared in the church which taught that sin was inevitable. I refer to Gnosticism and Manichaeism. Both heresies taught that matter itself is sinful. And, because man is composed, at least in part, of matter, man is sinful by virtue of his creation. The body is inherently wicked. Over against this awful doctrine the church thought it necessary to teach that man has a free will, and that sin is not inevitable but the result of human choice.

Besides, the church pointed to the fact that the Bible itself speaks of choice. And, in connection with choices we have to make, the Bible speaks of rewards and punishments — rewards for good choices and punishments for bad choices. So, obviously, man could resist temptation when it came. He could

exercise himself to do the good. He could make choices that would bring the rewards promised or the punishment justly given. As one church father put it: "All men are of the same nature, able both to hold fast and to do what is good, and, on the other hand, having also the power to cast it from them and not to do it."

I suppose that I can plead the importance of the subject we are discussing to justify the length of this introduction, but one more point needs to be made in connection with what I have just said. Although what I have now to say was especially true in the Western church (Italy, Spain, France, North Africa, where Latin was the main language — in distinction from the Eastern church of Greece, Asia Minor, Palestine, Egypt, where Greek was mainly spoken), many did believe in the doctrine of original sin, although it was not clearly understood.

Two other doctrines of the Christian faith seemed to many theologians in the West to make a doctrine of original sin necessary. I doubt whether any of our readers could guess what those two doctrines were, partly because only one of the two is true.

The true doctrine is the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ. The theologians in the West argued correctly that the necessity of Christ being born of a virgin must lie in the fact that only in this way could He who was sinless be preserved from sin.

The wrong doctrine to which appeal was made was the doctrine of baptism. I have mentioned before in these articles that the church taught that baptism washed away sin committed prior to baptism. If the Bible commanded infants to be baptized, and baptism washed away sin, infants were sinful. How could infants be sinful? Only by original sin. That is, all infants shared in the sin of Adam.

So advanced was the conception of some of the Western theo-

logians that they already struggled with the difference between original guilt and original pollution. Augustine taught both. The church, which in large measure repudiated Augustine's teaching, lost the doctrine of original guilt. It was not recovered for 1000 years, that is, until the time of the Reformation.

But considering all these things, we can understand how the Pelagian controversy took place. And, understanding that, we can appreciate the towering contribution of Augustine, whom I consider to be the greatest of all the church fathers.

Pelagius and Celestius

We shall have to discuss Pelagius and Celestius together, for their lives were intertwined, especially in the controversies which they stirred up.

Little is known about the early life of either of them — as little is known of their end. Most likely Pelagius was born in England (or Ireland) around 350. He became a monk and spent most of his early years in a monastery. Celestius was probably born in Scotland, but nothing other is known of him until he appeared in Rome.

The two became the closest of friends, although Celestius was a disciple of Pelagius and had learned his heresies at Pelagius' feet. Celestius was, theologically, the superior one. He was the theologian of Pelagianism. He set forth and developed the doctrines which became known as Pelagianism. I doubt whether Pelagius was capable of doing that. One writer dismisses Pelagius with the off-hand remark: "To a great degree, he lacked an interest in doctrine."

Pelagius was a very learned man if one considers the breadth of his education. But he was shallow and superficial in thought and in feeling. As a monk, he gave himself over to ascetic practices (although one of his contemporaries spoke of him as somewhat chubby),

but he lived a moral life. He never married and, while not disapproving of marriage, considered it to be a concession of sorts to the flesh. No moral fault was ever charged against him. But he seemed to have had no understanding of the difference — how shall I put it? — the difference between morality and holiness. He was blameless in conduct, but coldly and dispassionately so. He had no sense of the

struggles with sin which characterize the life of a saint. He fought no inner battles, struggled with no temptations, knew not a holiness which comes from denying oneself, taking up one's cross, and following Christ. Outward morality was all. A morally upright life was a breeze. But to gain the holiness of Christ through the deep way of sin — of that he had no conception.

Pelagius wrote a one-volume work on the epistles of Paul, and in this book he set down his views, such as they were. But he depended on Celestius to be his spokesman. This Celestius could do. He was the theologian of the two. He could set down the views which Pelagius himself never understood sufficiently well to explain.

... to be continued □

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

The Covenant of Marriage

2. Courtship Within the Covenant (cont.)

Dating in the Church — 2

The safest place for young people to date is within the confines of their own church or denomination. Who can deny that? When looking for a book, we search in a bookstore. When searching for a loaf of bread, we look in a store that sells groceries. When looking for a life's mate, we look in the sphere of our own denomination. That is where we will find believers, and that is where we will find people of like faith with us.

We have already concluded in the last article that it is not a sin to date someone outside the sphere of one's own denomination. God's covenant and church are not limited to one denomination of churches. God has His people in

churches that may differ from us doctrinally. We did find, however, that there are some serious concerns which must be resolved before we marry someone of a different religious background. The safest place to search for a life's mate, therefore, is within the same church or denomination of churches of which we are members.

I can anticipate the objection that will be leveled against such a statement. "This guy is living with his head in the clouds! He must have lived in Grand Rapids, Michigan his whole life and never gotten out into the real world! There may be a large nucleus of people with the same faith (PRC) as he in that area, but it is not like that everywhere. My children and I come from a small, isolated church in which there are very few young men and women, and most of these are relatives. To limit dating to the sphere of our own church is simply not realistic." This is a serious and legitimate concern. Neither may it be ignored. We certainly

understand the difficulty that this presents to covenant parents and children alike.

Remember, however, we made the statement that the *safest* place to look is in one's own denomination of churches. We did not say it is the *only* place to look. That has already been established. But there is something more that should be considered by parents who are called by God to live and raise children in a place where the church is small and isolated. Parents ought, whenever it is feasible, to encourage their sons and daughters to attend functions of their denomination which promote fellowship with others of like faith. I realize that this is not always possible to do. Neither do I wish to oversimplify a difficult dilemma. But parents themselves, with their children, ought to exert themselves to maintain contact with as many others of like faith as possible.

The objection that there are few or no people of like faith available for dating where we live does not

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change the fact that the safest place to find a life's mate is in the sphere of one's own denomination of churches. This is true no matter what denomination it is to which we belong. If I am convinced that my church teaches the truth and that I want a wife or husband who agrees with me in that truth, then I look in my own church. It is simple wisdom. It is a matter of common sense. Those who do otherwise in the long run only hurt themselves.

But that is not the end of the matter. There is another principle of Scripture that enters in at this point. We read in Romans 9:6-8, "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.... They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." Not every member of a church institute, even if that institute is pure in doctrine, is a believing child of God. There are those who are born in the church, or who join it from the outside, who are not elect. The decree of election and reprobation cuts through the heart of the church. There are tares in the wheat field. Sometimes there can be many tares, depending on the spiritual condition of the denomination. Just as it is rash to assume that every child born into the church is an elect, so also is it rash to assume when looking for a husband or wife in the church that everyone in it is an elect.

There are those who will testify that this was the simple assumption they made when they courted. After they married, however, they found out that such an assumption was a mistake! When looking for a wife or a husband, the believer must be careful even in his own churches — no matter how doctrinally faithful those churches may be! I do not disparage dating within the sphere of the church and covenant when I say this. That is certainly where it belongs! But we must realize the seriousness of finding the proper mate. Our husband or wife is

someone with whom we are going to spend a lifetime, for better or for worse. Do not we desire a husband on whom we can rely entirely from a spiritual point of view? Do not we want a wife whom we can trust in the home with our children when we are away at work? Well, that means we must always be selective, even when looking for a husband or wife in the church!

That raises some practical, concrete questions. How do I know, how can I be sure, that the one I marry is a child of God who will share with me a lifetime of joy and happiness? I have had young people come and ask me that question because they see the trend of the church world today toward divorce. It frightens them! How can they be sure? The answer is found in this: only by determining that the one we marry is a believer! We may not simply assume this. We have to probe the heart of that person to find what is in him or her.

This may begin already before one decides to date a particular person. Jesus gives some practical advice in this regard in Matthew 7:15-20. In these verses He warns us specifically against false prophets. But certainly we can apply this Word of God to include also all those in the church who make the claim of being believers but are not. Jesus warns us: "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit: but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.... Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

Before you ask a young woman out or give consent to a young man, look first at the way he or she lives. You can know them by their works. Do they live a godly life — or a sinful, rebellious life? Surely, if we live with them in the confines of the same church and covenant we know what kind of persons they are! Everyone has a reputation. Is that young man who has asked me out one who boasts to his peers of

his exploits with women? Does he enjoy the sinful pleasures of this world? Does he like his drinking and enjoy the theater? Does the horrendous, godless music of this wicked world blast from the windows of his car? Does he use foul language, even going so far as to use God's name in vain? Is that the kind of guy we want to marry and settle down with for our entire life? If so, we are fools. Okay, so maybe he is guilty of only a couple of the things mentioned. Still, is that the one we want to marry? Obviously, his works show that he is not serious about a sanctified, godly walk. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Likewise, we are able to discern the heart of a young woman whose works are sinful. She dresses in a wanton manner and flirts with every guy that will cast his eye her way. She too enjoys her drinking and party life. She is seldom home, but always on the fly with her friends. She also uses the language of this world and enjoys its sinful music along with its dance and theater. Is that the type of young woman that a godly young man will look for to spend a lifetime in marriage? Is that the kind of woman who will keep house for me and teach my children spiritually? I would be a fool to date someone like that! Unless, of course, I am just as sinful as she is! Like seeks like, I guess! But those who seek this kind of young person for a date do so only because they enjoy recreational dating. They most often do not take dating seriously!

But the objection may again be raised by some parents: "The church does not have members who do these things. What horrible accusations you raise against young people of the church!" Those parents who raise such accusations had better open their eyes! Surely not all the young men and women of the church are this way. I am not even saying that the majority of the young people

are this way. I certainly pray not! But every denomination has young men and women of this nature. And these are *not* the kind that one who is seriously looking for a husband or wife wants. Young people who live carnally may indeed repent of such sin and turn from it. But so long as they live in this manner we ought not even desire to date them. They are not the type of person with whom the believer wishes to be united for a lifetime.

The matter of proper discernment in dating, however, gets even more complicated than this. There are also young men and women of the church who do lead good outward lives, whose moral life seems exemplary — but who are not necessarily truly believers. They simply are not of a rebellious nature at that point in their life. Yet, they are not motivated by any real conviction. How do we know that we are not dating a person of this sort? Again, do you see how serious a matter dating is? Courtship in the sphere of the covenant is not rec-

reational! It is serious work!

It is important for covenant young men and women to be able to talk with one another about their spiritual life. Again, this ought to begin before they start dating each other. But certainly it is a requirement immediately after they begin dating. When spiritual struggles and goals in life are discussed it will soon become evident to one who is himself a believer whether that person whom they date is also truly a believer. That does not mean they must talk only about the doctrines and practices of the church, but they must share with each other their conviction that they are sinners saved by grace and that solely in the blood of Jesus Christ. This is in the heart of the true believer. This faith will soon enough be detected in their conversation.

Again, I am not saying that every date must involve a discussion of some heavy spiritual subject. A young couple may go out and have

a good time. But even when a guy and his girl are having a nice time with each other, they can talk about their spiritual lives. They should. They must. This may not be ignored. Even in the midst of the good times a person's faith should be evident.

When we discover such faith in a person, then we can be certain that if we are led by God to marry that person, God will indeed bless that union. When we date following the principles of Scripture, God will lead us to a mate who will give us a lifetime of happiness and joy. God does not give us His Word in order to restrict us or to keep us from having a good time. On the contrary, God gives us the guidelines of His Word in order that by following that Word we discover the true joy that can be found in marriage.

May God give us hearts to follow His Word, that we might search for a life's mate in the way God chooses for us. This will lead to a solid, lasting relationship. □

That They May Teach Them to Their Children

Herman Hoeksema

The Duty of the Christian Mother in the Training of Adolescent Youth (1)*

The subject that has been assigned to me is not a new one, but I think it is a very important one. The subject concerns the education of our children, and that is always important. It is recognized by all, that the educa-

tion of children in general is not an easy task. But the subject I am to speak on is much more specific than that, because it speaks of the duty of the *Christian* to educate his children. That makes the task much more difficult already, even if we take Christian in as wide a sense as possible, because that means that one has to accomplish a task in opposition to practically all the influences that are exerted upon his children from without — especially, of course, from the world in which they must move.

But the topic is still more specific and becomes concerned with a still more difficult task. It concerns the education of *adolescent* children, which is perhaps the most difficult age for the training which they must receive. Finally, my subject is still more limited and still more definite, because I am not to speak on the calling of the Christian, or even of the calling or duty of a Christian parent, but more specifically on the calling of the *Christian mother* in the education, in the training, of her adolescent children,

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* This is the transcript of a speech given by Herman Hoeksema at a Ladies' League Meeting in Hudsonville, MI on April 29, 1943.

and therefore particularly in the home.

Now, bearing these limitations in mind, I think I can best make my remarks by trying to answer especially three questions. First: What is characteristic, specifically characteristic, of adolescent children? That there is something peculiar, something specifically distinct, about that age is not only true, but is presupposed in the subject assigned to me. In the second place, and in connection with that first question, I shall try to answer this question: What peculiar problems and difficulties are presented to the Christian mother by the age of adolescence with a view to the training of her children? Also that is presupposed in the subject given me. And finally, there will be the answer to this question: What should be the peculiar, specific attitude that should characterize the efforts of a Christian mother with a view to the training of adolescent children?

When I speak of the age of adolescent children tonight, I will limit myself to what is often called the age of early adolescence. In a general way the age of adolescence is considered to be the period between the beginning of what is called the age of puberty, up to manhood or womanhood. Let us say, generally speaking, from about 13 to 21. That is in a broad sense the age of adolescence. But you can distinguish and divide that age into the period of early adolescence and later adolescence, and I am going to limit myself to that former period in order to adhere as closely as possible to the subject — the training of adolescent children — so that I am thinking now of the period between the ages of, say, 13 and about 17 or 18.

Now, what is characteristic of that period of life? The general characteristic of that period is that it is an age of transition — transition from childhood to manhood and womanhood. That is true from a threefold point of view. It is true

in the first place physically. It is very plain at that age of our boys and girls that they are making a transition. You can tell that by, for instance, the fact that they begin to grow very fast — girls somewhat earlier than boys, but boys keep on a little longer. You will also notice that their growth is somewhat disproportionate; that is, they don't know what to do with their long legs and their long arms, and they, especially the girls, think their noses are a little bit too long. That is simply characteristic of that age, the age when they are between, let us say, a napkin and a tablecloth, as the Dutch expresses it. Belonging to this transition, and much more serious, is the fact that at that age they awaken to sex consciousness. In adolescence, children make a very important change. A certain new, and to them often strange physical life begins to develop, a life with which they were not acquainted before, and ought not to have been. In connection with that physical development of the early adolescent youth, there is also a psychological change.

Adolescence is, in the second place, the age of spring. The springtime of life, and therefore the age of looking forward, the age of idealism, the age of dreams. The burdens and difficulties and problems of life, adolescents do not see. In fact, at that age they often see them less than when they were children. It is, therefore, the age of hope. Unbounded hope, very often, whether it is real or not, it makes no difference to them, but that is characteristic of this age. There is a life within them that is exuberant and abundant, and they don't know what to do with it. In connection with that, it is also the age of reflection. In distinction from the age of childhood, adolescents begin to reflect, to think.

In the period of childhood, they were receptive, and they took for granted what was taught to them. The Lord has so arranged the development of the child that that is

possible. Therefore, in childhood we should store away into our children's minds as much as possible the truths of the Word of God, whether or not they understand it. Children do not have to understand immediately what they commit to memory, for when they are 13 and 14 they begin to reflect. They no longer take for granted, as they did in childhood, that all that they hear and are taught is true. Not only that, but they do not simply absorb it, they want to understand it. They ask "why?" They begin to seek an explanation at that age. That is characteristic of that age.

In the third place, there is at that age an opportunity to declare one's independence, more or less, depending somewhat on the nature of the training in childhood. Nevertheless, whether it is when they go to high school, or whether it is when, somewhat later, they earn a little money, they begin to feel that they should have more independence. They like to shake off the yoke of the governor. They feel that, largely due to that abundant life.

In the fourth place, psychologically that period is characterized by instability. They have not reached the stability of manhood. They have not taken a stand. They can be easily led, though they don't think so. They are subject to many influences, probably without their knowing it. In close connection with that, I may say that in many respects adolescence is the age of choice, the age in which choices must be made, both from a natural point of view and a spiritual point of view. In that age we choose our friends, our life friends. It is especially in that age that we choose, by God's grace, to confess His name and to take a stand with regard to the things of the kingdom of God.

Remember that. An age of hope and idealism. An age of an abundant life. An age in which one begins to reflect, to think. An age

in which one begins to feel that he is ready to declare his independence. An age in which he is nevertheless unstable and easily moved to and fro and is subject to many influences. An age of choice. The age for taking a stand, perhaps, for the stability of manhood both in a natural and a spiritual sense. That is the age of which I am speaking, and that is characteristic of that period of transition.

Now, the second question I will address: What are the peculiar difficulties and problems that present themselves to the teacher and trainer of adolescent youth, particularly, of course, to the Christian parent, and more specifically to the Christian mother? That training requires special methods and special attention. For there are problems in adolescence that require specific solutions, and that do not present themselves in childhood. I will mention a few of them.

In the first place, at this age there is a danger on the part of the adolescent youth to disregard and deny authority. He is apt to shake off the shackles. And you can no longer simply take him or her by the hand or guide him and direct him by the word of your mouth. There is something natural in that. I am not condemning this. I am merely speaking of what is characteristic of the problems in that period. In the development of the adolescent youth, there is something natural about his desire to shake off the shackles of authority that were upon him when he was a child. That is even true in the spiritual sense. The apostle Paul speaks of the childhood of the church in the old dispensation when it was placed under a governor and was guarded by the law. But when the child is grown up and has passed the age of childhood, it becomes characteristic of that child to want to get away from that kind of authority. There is a danger here if the parent does not understand that change. This is one of the dangers from within.

There is in adolescence a change in attitude over against external authority, which the mother particularly, as well as any teacher, ought to understand in dealing with children of that age. One cannot teach John, when he has been Johnny, as if he were still Johnny. That is all. There is something natural in that which requires attention.

In the second place, in close connection with the former and because of the strong development of life, there is a tendency on the part of the adolescent youth to act as if he knows it all, and especially to act as if he knows it much better than his parents. That is often the case when the child goes to high school and begins to read, to solve problems, and to come in contact with all kinds of solutions to all kinds of problems. He is then inclined to think that he knows things much better than the old fogies, he is intolerant over against his parents' old notions, and he is somewhat ashamed of them, for he knows much better. That is another problem.

Now, I say again, there is something natural in that. You must not simply assume that these things are characteristic of an evil child. I am not talking about evil, only about characteristics of that age. And it is not a question of whether you can *explain* it. It cannot be explained. You must know how to *deal* with it. You cannot prevent this any more than you can prevent physical growth. You must understand that.

There is in the third place, still from within, the problem that these adolescent children try to find an outlet for their exuberant life, especially if they go to school and do not have to work hard and long days. When I was an adolescent youth of fifteen years old, I had to work from four in the morning until seven at night in the blacksmith shop, winter and summer. Then the problem of the theater and movies and dancing wasn't very great. One does not feel much like

dancing when he works for fifteen hours a day! I used to sit at the table in the sitting room and try to light my pipe, and before I had it lit I fell asleep.

Not today! The early adolescent youth are in school. They are in school until they are seventeen, and in school they don't find sufficient outlet for their physical life. The result is that, especially in our day and in our country, there is a tendency in our youth in the age of early adolescence to seek pleasure as the outlet of their life. They want fun; they want something to do. Take that life in connection with the fact that they are full of joy. I am not talking about wrong amusements that are characteristic of the problems of life. It is not a question of whether you can root it out. The question is how you can deal with it. It is a problem.

These inner problems are aggravated by circumstances without, especially in our day. There is in our land and in our age usually a strong neglect and disregard of and for authority. The world does not know what authority means. And the children at that age, if they get into the world, find all kinds of support for the wrong conception of their relation to parent and teacher and to those whom God has placed over them, so that this tendency that is in them to deny the authority that has been upon them as a child is in danger of becoming an evil tendency. The same is true especially with the tendency to express their life, to seek pleasure. There are in the world all kinds of ways, ready-made for them, in which they can express that life.

I am not thinking merely of the movies and the theater and the dances and all these things, but I am thinking just as well of certain kinds of companionships, friendships, literature, radio, the automobile, and the urge to leave home and go out and not be seen and to go far and not come home until late, to seek pleasure. That is characteristic of our day. Now put that

adolescent youth — one who, remember, is unstable, hasn't made up his mind, likes to shake off the shackles, thinks he knows it all — put him in the middle and next to all these kinds of means and pleasures of the world and you have a real problem. If your child comes home he will ask you — if he

doesn't, he ought to — may I do this or that; may I go here or there? You are then going to have practical problems in your home which are not always easy to solve. You have to distinguish.

So there is, from without especially, the danger of falling into wrong hands. Especially under the influences of worldly and corrupt

companions, adolescents, who are in the nature of the case easily moved and inclined to seek that very life, will find all kinds of opportunity to express themselves in evil ways.

What to do about it. That is my last question....

... to be continued. □

Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

Christian Political Activists Concede Defeat in the Cultural War—Advocate New Strategy of Separation

For several decades, cultural conservatives' strategy has been to elect conservatives to government offices and then rely on their help to retake society's institutions. I was an architect of that strategy....

In terms of the culture war, this strategy has failed. In truth, I think we are caught up in a cultural collapse of historic proportions, a collapse so great it simply overwhelms politics. That's why I am in the process of rethinking what it is that we, who still believe in our traditional, Western, Judeo-Christian culture, can and should do under the circumstances.

The United States is becoming an ideological state. The ideology of Political Correctness, which openly calls for the destruction of our traditional culture, has so gripped the body politic, has so gripped our institutions, that it is even affecting the Church. It has completely taken over the aca-

demic community. It threatens to control literally every aspect of our lives.

I believe that we probably have lost the culture war. That doesn't mean the war is not going to continue, and that it isn't going to be fought on other fronts. But in terms of society in general, we have lost. That is why, even when we win in politics, our victories fail to translate into the kind of politics we believe are important.

Therefore, what seems to me a legitimate strategy for us to follow is to look at ways to separate ourselves from the institutions that have been captured by the ideology of Political Correctness, or by other enemies of our traditional culture.

Paul Weyrich,
President of the Free Congress
Research and Education
Foundation, February 16, 1999.

A Historic Change

A momentous and historic paradigm shift is rapidly occurring within the camp of Christian political activists as we approach the end of the twentieth century. In the past few months, several evangelical political leaders and promi-

nent organizers of the "religious right" in American politics have shocked their followers (and detractors) by admitting that their conservative political activism of the past two decades has resulted in a dismal failure. They are now advising their supporters to abandon the political fray and "separate" themselves, "bypassing the institutions that are controlled by the enemy."

Paul Weyrich, the primary architect of Rev. Gerry Falwell's Moral Majority in the 1980s, recently stunned supporters of his conservative think-tank Free Congress Foundation, by declaring in an open letter, published partially in the Washington Post, that the religious right must now acknowledge defeat in the cultural war, and rethink its strategy in the future (see quote above).

Two other leading figures in Falwell's Moral Majority are likewise now recommending that conservative Christians abandon politics, which they claim is usually a temptation that diverts Christians from a higher calling. Syndicated

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columnist Cal Thomas, a prominent spokesman for the religious right, and Rev. Ed Dobson, a former Falwell aid and now a Michigan pastor, in their newly released book *Blinded By Might*, declare that the political activism of the Moral Majority was a misguided idea. "Religious conservatives," they write, "no matter how well organized, can't save America." Dobson and Thomas also echo Weyrich's dismal conclusion that religious conservatives are an impotent minority. They contend that last November's elections "demonstrated the problematic, even declining power of the religious right."

Weyrich similarly writes in his open letter to supporters: "I no longer believe that there is a moral majority; if there were, Bill Clinton would have been driven out of office months ago." Weyrich attributes the loss of the culture war not only to the "lack of political will on the part of Republicans," but because the "United States is becoming a state totally dominated by an alien ideology, an ideology bitterly hostile to Western culture."

The Demise of the Religious Right

The recent appeal to conservative Christians by Weyrich, Thomas, and Dobson for a complete disengagement from the political arena is astonishing. Although the Moral Majority was dissolved by design several years ago, Christian conservatives, now led by Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, had accomplished some significant political victories in recent years, particularly the ostensible "take-over" of the Republican party in 1994, and the election of many Christians to local government posts, including public school boards. For the last twenty years, these Christian political leaders have encouraged churches and para-church organizations to organize voter registration drives, distribute voter guides, and contrib-

ute money to specific political causes and campaigns.

But if the religious right in recent years enjoyed some remarkable election victories on the national and local levels, why are Weyrich and others conceding defeat? Weyrich writes: "... we got our people elected; but that did not result in the adoption of our agenda." Essentially Weyrich declares that conservatives won some political battles but lost the war — the cultural war raging in all the institutions of society which have fallen to the ideological enemy, whom he identifies as Political Correctness or "Cultural Marxism." For Thomas and Dobson the signal for the demise of the religious right was the dismal results of last November's elections; for Weyrich the telling blow was Congress' failure to impeach Clinton.

The Victorious Ideological Enemy

Weyrich identifies the victorious enemy as the ideology of Political Correctness or "Cultural Marxism," an "alien ideology bitterly hostile to Western culture." The proponents of abortion, radical feminism, homosexuality, and pornography have seemingly gained control of our society's institutions. Even worse, writes Weyrich, if conservatives attempt to talk about the "truth" regarding these subjects, they are branded as " 'sexist,' 'homophobic,' 'insensitive,' or 'judgmental.' " Weyrich opines that what Americans would have found "absolutely intolerable" only a few years ago, a majority now embraces and celebrates. This frightening ideology, contends Weyrich, is now ruling the schools and universities, and is "pumped daily into every living room in America with a television set." It is rapidly becoming the "official ideology of the state."

The New Strategy of Disengagement

But if organized political action by the religious right over the past

two decades has been essentially ineffective in combating the demise of our culture, what should be the new strategy? Weyrich writes:

So what is to be done? Continuing with a strategy that has failed is folly and guarantees defeat. Instead of attempting to use politics to retake existing institutions, my proposal is that we cultural conservatives build new institutions for ourselves: schools, universities, media, entertainment, everything — a complete separate parallel structure. In every respect but politics, we should, in effect, build a new nation among the ruins of the old.

Weyrich implores his followers to "tune out" and "drop out" of America's culture so that "we and our children are not infected." What we need, says Weyrich, is "some sort of quarantine," so that we can live "godly, righteous, and sober lives."

In their book *Blinded By Might*, Cal Thomas and Rev. Ed Dobson also advocate the withdrawal of American churches and people of faith from the fray of politics and the cultural conflict. The book targets Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, the successor to the Moral Majority, and also is critical of Dr. James Dobson — no relation to Ed — of Focus on the Family, for his increasing activism in the right wing of the Republican Party. The authors praise James Dobson for his contributions to strengthening the American family, but fear that his politics will "derail and dilute the good he is doing."

These recent publications by Weyrich, Thomas, and Ed Dobson are causing substantial confusion and diverse reactions in the evangelical church community. Because these developments in the area of church and state are significant, in a following article this writer will continue to review the controversy and offer some comments from our Reformed perspective. □

Poverty

Holy Scripture uses the words poverty and poor in two senses. First, these words refer to those who do not have a sufficient amount of natural, earthly things to exist; they lack food, clothing, and other necessary items so that they cannot fulfill their callings. If we ask the question, Why is this so? the ultimate reason is given in I Samuel 2:7, "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up."

As the Lord exercises His sovereignty in regard to the distribution of earthly things, He has two purposes in mind. The lack of earthly things brings His children very close to Him and works trust in their heavenly Father. And secondly, the presence of the poor with us gives the saints opportunity to give unto them in love.

In the Old Testament the Israelites were to remember the poor at harvest time, "Not wholly reaping the corners of the field, neither gathering up the gleanings ... neither gathering every grape of the vineyard. They shall leave them for the poor and stranger" (Lev. 19:9, 10). The godly Boaz kept this precept faithfully (Ruth 2:15, 16). The virtuous woman "stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy" (Prov. 31:20).

Jesus reminds us of the tender concern God has for the poor by saying, "Ye have the poor with you always..." (Mark 14:7). If we find that not to be true, we are not looking hard enough, or we are looking in the wrong places. Because the poor are always with us, proper Sabbath observance includes the taking of benevolence offerings (I Cor. 16:1, 2; L.D. 38). One of the motives the workman has in his heart as he goes off to his job is "that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28).

No one sets out in life to be poor. No one *ought* to set out to be rich! "They that would be rich fall into temptation and a snare ... for the love of money is the root of all evil" (I Tim. 6:9, 10). Poverty and riches both present us with temptations. "Give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8,

9). "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (I Tim. 6:8).

The Scriptures also use the words poverty and poor in the spiritual sense. All mankind has impoverished itself by its willful sin of disobedience through Adam in the Garden. Although God had created man in His own likeness and image, man was not impressed with his high estate. He willfully cast away the riches of God's image and became wretchedly poor apart from God. We are poor sinners, possessing nothing of any value in ourselves. "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Ps. 34:6). "Bow down thine ear, O Lord, hear me: for I am poor and needy. Preserve my soul" (Ps. 86:1, 2).

We are given a striking picture of our spiritual poverty in the parable of the lost son (Luke 15). Keeping in mind that the three parables of this chapter form Jesus' answer to the Pharisees who thought they were righteous in themselves, we see that the wayward son is not some especially sinful member of the church but is a picture of every child of God. Leaving God, we "waste our substance in riotous living" (Luke 15:13). We did this not only with our original sin in Adam, but we do this repeatedly throughout our lives. Were it not for the love of God that follows us even when we go astray, to bring us to repentance and return us to our Father's house, our squandering of God's good gifts would bring us to the final poverty of hell. If anyone thinks this is too harsh a judgment on the poverty of our sinful natures, hear the warning of Revelation 3:17, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked...." And hear the good counsel of Jesus in Revelation 3:18, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest see." These riches of salvation are of grace, free to them that believe, to be found only in Christ.

Poor, needy, miserable, wretched sinners are made rich beyond calculation by the love of God in Jesus Christ. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Cor. 8:9). □

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Signs of the Times (6)

False Prophets Arise

And many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

Matthew 24:11

God eternally appoints the Son to be the Christ, the great Servant of Jehovah, the great Prophet who reveals the Father through the preaching of the Word. John speaks of Him in Revelation 6:2 as a white horse and its rider who go forth conquering and to conquer. He is given a crown, for He already has attained the victory and is exalted at the right hand of the Father. He has a bow in His right hand whereby He penetrates into the hearts of all who hear the gospel.

In this new dispensation the Word of God is preached throughout the world. The good Shepherd knows His sheep. He calls them by name and they come to Him and become one flock with one Shepherd. And that Word that is preached throughout the world for all to hear never returns void. It is a two-edged sword that cuts and divides asunder. For those who do not believe, it is a savor of death unto death, and for the believer it is a savor of life unto life. That determines all of history. In the

day of judgment the question will be: "What thinkest thou of the Christ?"

Satan opposes God and His Christ, and seeks to wipe out God's name and God's cause from the face of the earth. His name Satan designates him as the enemy of God, and his name Devil tells us that he is the liar, the deceiver even from the dawn of history. As a fallen angel who with his followers rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven, he had the audacity to oppose God by tempting our first parents to eat of the forbidden tree, whereby death came upon them and upon the whole human race. The promised Christ, by His death on the cross, crushed Satan's head and condemned him unto everlasting damnation. Therefore, knowing he has but a little while, he works tenaciously during this present dispensation to attempt to destroy God's church.

We should bear in mind that the devil and his host have great power to deceive, but they are not almighty. God alone is almighty in power, and the devil is always subject to and dependent upon the will of God. Not, as it has sometimes been presented, that the devil cowers before God and reluctantly crawls out to perform his evil deeds. Nor, on the other hand, is the battle of the ages a struggle between God and the devil, in which God ultimately wins out by defeating the powers of darkness. God is sovereign Lord over all, also over the devil. This becomes evident es-

pecially in the history of Job. God calls Satan's attention to Job as a man who is upright and eschews evil. God also gives him power to deprive Job of all his property and his children. Later God gives him power to afflict Job with painful, ugly sores, so that even his wife turns against him, but the devil may not take his life from him. The Lord proves thereby that He is sovereign Lord and ultimately turns all Job's affliction into a blessing. The Deceiver is the instrument in God's hand even when he works through false prophets, seeking to destroy God's cause and church. God uses his evil attempts for the welfare and purification of His church.

The apostle Peter warns us that, even as there were false prophets in the old dispensation, so there will also "be false teachers among you, who privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them" (II Pet. 2:1).

These false teachers arise out of the church. As we look back on the history of the last two millenniums we can only be amazed that the church always stood firm in the truth for only a little while. Soon heresies appeared, and the militant church was forced into a reformation. This has continued even unto our present day.

The devil comes as an angel of light. That is what makes heretics so deceptive. Paul speaks of corrupting the Scriptures, which is done so surreptitiously that the er-

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ror comes creeping in almost un-awares. With cunning deceit, false teachers deny the God and the Christ of the Scriptures, making themselves guilty of damnable heresies and leading astray the sheep of God's fold.

Error always creeps in by a questioning of the infallible Word of God. The devil comes with the age-old question: "Yea, hath God said?" Soon the very inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible are under attack, as is evident already from the denial that Genesis 1 actually speaks of six days of twenty-four hours.

Soon God's sovereignty is challenged. False teachers first ignore and then deny outright the doctrine of predestination, attacking first the truth of reprobation, then of sovereignly free election. Soon the truth of God's particular love and grace for His people in Christ is denied. The truth of the promise of the gospel is changed into a well-meant offer of salvation to all mankind. The truth of God's justice is ignored.

From these fundamental errors follows quite readily a denial of the total depravity of all the descendants of Adam and Eve. Readily these false teachers teach that God bestows grace on the reprobate wicked, whereby they are graciously given good gifts from God and their hearts are improved, so that they can do much that is good in the sight of God, whereby great progress and development results in the world. A bridge is built between the church and the world, and the antithesis is denied. God's justice and His wrath upon the house of the wicked are ignored, and thus also blatantly denied.

The next step readily follows. Since God loves all men, there must be a general atonement. They readily conclude that Christ died for all mankind. Reference is made to the first cross-word, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." This is not regarded as the highpriestly prayer of the Ser-

vant of Jehovah, nor as a prayer for pardon (although the word for "forgive" is always used in that sense in Scripture), but rather as a plea for postponement of God's justice. Thus they change the meaning of the passage to a general, well-meant offer of salvation that is proclaimed to all men with the desire to save all.

Thereby the doctrine of particular grace is also denied. A person is saved only on the condition that he himself is willing to accept the proffered salvation. It has been said that salvation is like a huge arch, upon the one side we read: "Whosoever will may come," and on the opposite side is written: "Saved by grace." Although they speak of salvation by grace alone, they actually stress in an increasing measure a salvation by works, as if we can merit our place in heaven.

From this must necessarily follow that the perseverance of the saints depends upon us, so that there is the possibility that even the elect might fall away.

Gradually the Arminian error of free will takes over in the apostatizing church. The emphasis in the preaching is no longer on God, but on *man*. Modernism replaces the truth of Scripture. It is as if God is in heaven for our sakes, ready and willing to come to our aid in time of need — while the truth is that we exist only for God's sake. God is not our servant, but we are called to be stewards in God's house.

It cannot escape us that heresy in the church, and all the evils that follow, come from those who reject the gospel. This is also God's righteous judgment on those who reject and deny the Christ. In Romans 1:18 Paul speaks of the wrath of God revealed from heaven upon all those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. God gives them over to their sin to commit all the evil desires of the sinful heart. The apostle Peter adds to this that those who bring in damnable heresies

"bring upon themselves swift destruction." (Do not fail to read II Peter, chapter 1.)

Jesus warns us that "many shall be deceived."

The consequences of error become evident in the life of the congregation. The church of Ephesus, as mentioned in Revelation 2, lost her first love, her love for sound doctrine. Gradually she weakens and becomes more apostate until she can be compared only to the complacent church of Laodicea, of which the Lord says: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15, 16).

Worldlimindedness results, movies and dances are considered good entertainment, women are allowed to hold office in the church, divorce and remarriage are condoned, and labor unions are defended. Authority and obedience in the home and in many other spheres of life grow lax or are virtually absent.

Especially in our day, because of a total lack of interest in the truth of Scripture and because of a clamor for world conformity, denominational walls are crumbling. An appeal is made to the words of Jesus concerning His disciples: "That they all may be one." Just as the world round about us strives for unity, so also the apostatizing church seeks an outward bond of unity. Completely ignored, if not denied, is the fact that the real unity of the true church is a spiritual unity in Christ Jesus. The church is Christ's body, the elect of all ages, the temple of God which is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, that is, upon the Word of God (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 54).

God's church is one, a universal, holy church consisting of the true believers and their spiritual seed. This church is gathered, defended, and preserved by the Son

of God out of every race, nation, tribe, and people. Christ knows His sheep, He calls them by name through the ministry of the Word and His Spirit, and they come to Him. In Him they are one flock with one Shepherd.

Virtually all churches in our day strive for a universal church that exalts man and brotherly love,

while God and His Christ are cast out. The true church will be more and more hated and despised, even persecuted for righteousness' sake.

The Lord calls us to come out from among them. Even as He has called for reformations in the past, so He requires of the faithful to separate from among them that depart from the truth. This is a pain-

ful, bitter experience. Families are torn apart, friendships are broken, those who formerly worshiped together are now in animosity. Wounds are inflicted that never fully heal. Yet our calling remains: Be thou faithful unto death! Hold that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown! The Lord is coming! □

Comforting the Bereaved

In the previous article we remarked that the elders must not ignore the needs of the loved ones of the dying. They need to be prepared for the reality of the death of their loved one as much as or more than the dying person himself.

If this be true, and it is, certainly the elder must not ignore the bereaved. They need the comfort of the Word of God. They, the ones left behind when the Lord takes a loved one to glory, experience the loss of that loved one. The earthly relationship has been violently and finally and forever broken by "the last enemy" (I Cor. 15:26). A wife loses her husband, a husband loses his wife. The widow or widower now "goes down life's pathway alone"! Parents lose a dear child, or children are left by parents or grandparents. Or one's beloved friend is taken by death.

Let no one be mistaken, certainly not the elders of Christ's church, these losses are not easy to bear. Even those who appear to

cope well with the loss of their dear ones often endure a great struggle. I recall one such widow in the churches who gave every indication of bearing up well with the loss of her husband. This dear saint said to me, and this was at least ten years after the Lord took her husband, "I cry a little every day." Another, this one a widower, gave expression to his loneliness with this statement, "the walls don't talk." God's bereaved people need the comfort of the gospel!

The needs may vary a bit. Some are shocked, benumbed by the sudden death of a loved one. Others are bitter and even angry with the Lord. Still others are withdrawn and depressed. Some are so overcome with grief that it is impossible for them to function normally in their life's calling. Let the elder carefully *listen* to the bereaved so as to determine his/her needs. Let the elder listen *sympathetically* to the bereaved. In a real sense the elder cannot effectively bring God's Word of comfort unless he "feels with" those who are grieving. Elders must not perform the duties of their office perfunctorily. Certainly they must not do this with the bereaved. Just as Jesus, our merciful High Priest, is touched with the feelings of our in-

firmities (Heb. 4:15), so must His servants, the elders, be touched with the feelings of God's sorrowing children.

Still more, let the elders listen to the bereaved with much *patience*. Some of God's people struggle with their loss for a long time. With some it takes months, even years, before a certain measure of recovery is attained. So the elders must be patient. And they must continue to bring the Word of God in the confidence that God's Word will be of comfort to the sorrowing. God Himself says of His Word, "it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Is. 55:11).

Let the elders listen to the bereaved in the *love of Christ*. The motive must be to edify the sorrowing by bringing them the comfort of the gospel. That comfort is grounded in the atoning work of Jesus on the cross, and that comfort is sealed by the victory of Jesus' resurrection from the dead! Our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. In the risen Jesus we have been raised to newness of life. Jesus by His death destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And delivered them

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who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15). Because Jesus did this, "Our death is not a satisfaction for our sins, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life" (Heidelberg Catechism, L. D. 16).

Herein lies the comfort for God's grieving children. When we die, we are forever freed from the bondage of sin. And when Jesus returns at the end of the ages our bodies will be raised and reunited with our souls. In those transformed, resurrected bodies we will enjoy, together with all the saints of God perfect fellowship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the earthly relationships need to be broken in order that they may be restored in a new, heavenly relationship in the glory of the new creation. In this way the elders must bring the comfort of the gospel to the bereaved in the congregation.

Having made this point, however, it is often necessary to stress one great truth of the gospel to the bereaved, *viz.*, that God's way with us is always good. We may not, in fact often we do not, understand God's way with us. Whether we understand it or not, God's way with us is always good. It's a way which prepares us for glory. This is God's Word through the prophet, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Is. 55:9, 10). In his or her grief, often the believer has to be satisfied with this Word. To us, God's way can seem so wrong. A mother or a father is taken from a family of young children. A child or teenager is taken. In these instances we just do not understand why God does this. But we do believe that God's way is good! The fact that God in His infinite love for us in Jesus and in His wonderful wisdom knows what is best for

us is in the last analysis the believer's comfort in his/her sorrows.

One caution is in order at this point. The elders must never neglect the grieving saints after the funeral. A week or so after the funeral is when the reality and the finality of the death of a loved one really hit hard. The busyness of making funeral arrangements, receiving comfort from the visits of loved ones and friends, and the taking care of other details—all this is over! Suddenly the widow or widower feels the full weight of the loss. She or he becomes extremely lonely. This is when the elders are needed most. Call on the bereaved. Continue to call on the bereaved for as long as it is necessary. Pray with them and bring them the gospel of their only comfort in life and in death.

The elders are also called upon to care for the chronically ill, the elderly, and the shut-ins of the congregation. This too requires careful, diligent preparation. In these instances the elder finds himself visiting the same person weekly or, perhaps, bi-monthly. The visits must not be repetitive. So the elder must take care in preparing to bring the Word of God on these visits, lest he repeat the same truths over and over again.

Those chronically ill or suffering from debilitating, lengthy illness can sometimes become very discouraged and even dissatisfied with God's way with them. Let the elders with sympathetic understanding and patience bring encouraging words to them from the Scriptures. Sometimes, too, these folk find it very difficult, and in some instances impossible, to pray. While the elders must always include prayer when they visit the sick and bereaved, it is especially necessary to bring the prayer of faith to the chronically ill (cf. Jam. 5:13-15).

Shut-ins need the care of the elders too. They are cut off from the means of grace and the fellow-

ship of the communion of the saints. This is a huge void in their lives. The regular worship of the Lord is what they so sorely miss. The elders, therefore, ought to visit them often. These ought to be visited once per week if at all possible. Often it's a good practice for the elder to bring a summary of what was preached in one of the previous Sunday's sermons. In this way the shut-ins are given a steady and varied diet of the Word of God. We might add that these visits often prove to be very pleasant, rewarding, and enriching for the elders. They often come away from a call on the shut-ins feeling more blessed than the one they visited!

The same is true when the elders minister to the elderly. Because of the frequency of the visits the elders often develop close friendship with the elderly. Not only so but also, simply because of their many years of experience in the church and in the "good fight of faith," the older members of the church can be good teachers for the elders. The aged saints are often the elders' wisest and best critics as well. This being the case, the elders do well to listen to these older members. By listening the elders not only learn from the aged members, but they also learn the specific needs of these saints. Thus the elders are enabled to bring a passage of Scripture appropriate to the specific need. Some need encouragement, others need comfort. A few become somewhat disillusioned with the church and even embittered. These need the admonition of God's Word. They must learn to be content in their old age.

All in all, most elders will testify to the fact that visiting and caring for the shut-ins and elderly of the church is one of the most enjoyable and blessed aspects of their task as overseers of Jesus' precious flock.

The next article, D. V., will deal with the elders' calling with regard to the widows in God's church. □

Ethical Dilemmas in Church Leadership: Case Studies in Biblical Decision Making, by Michael R. Milco. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1997. 192 pages. \$10.99 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

The weaknesses of the book leap out at the Reformed reader. There is no clear recognition that the sole standard of Christian ethics is the law of God whose end (goal) is Jesus Christ. Whatever does the Christian pastor have to do with Kant's categorical imperative? The main use of Scripture consists of finding an example in some character or event that bears some similarity to the person or incident that is under consideration. The author is guilty of the prevalent error of supposing that a Christian is called to forgive one who has sinned against her, even though the sinner is not repentant (see pp. 100-103, concerning forgiving a rapist). In addition, it may well be questioned whether the method of case studies is the effective way of treating the subject.

Out of (my) experiences I felt the need for the development of case studies in pastoral ethics.... My purpose in writing is not to articulate a particular biblical ethic.... My aim is to assist church leaders in the decision-making process that affects the body of Christ (p. 15).

Nevertheless, the book has its value for the Reformed pastor. The subject is the difficult decisions that pastors must make concerning the right handling of various sins in the congregation: sexual abuse of children; homosexuality, with its consequences of AIDS; theft of church funds; the pregnancy of the unmarried young woman (by the unmar-

ried young man), and more. The cases are true to life. The author is obviously a pastor who has heard the dreaded telephone at 2:00 in the morning and who has struggled with such cases, to do what is right before God, good for the people involved, and best for the church. He brings out the complexity of the cases, as well as the pressures on the pastor. Usually his advice to the pastor is sound. On occasion he even recommends discipline.

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The Rev. Milco could help himself greatly in guiding pastors if he would work with the distinction between private and public sins. This is the distinction taught by Jesus in Matthew 18:15ff. It is the distinction that is basic to that section of the Reformed Church Order of Dordt that deals with the church discipline, Articles 71-80. If a sin is, and can be kept, private, as is the case in the book with the fornication of two teenagers, a pastor will not report the sin to the consistory. ■

A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism, by Caspar Olevianus. Tr. and ed. Lyle D. Bierma. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995. Pp. xlii + 132. \$17.99 (paper). (Reviewed by the editor)

A Firm Foundation is Caspar Olevianus' commentary, in question and answer form, on the Apostles' Creed. Because Olevianus in this catechetical commentary followed closely the Heidelberg Catechism's treatment of the Apostles' Creed, the work is also a

kind of commentary on this important section of the Heidelberg Catechism. In a "general introduction" to *A Firm Foundation*, Lyle D. Bierma, translator and editor of the book, contends that Olevianus had a greater hand in writing the Heidelberg Catechism than recent scholarship supposes. This would make *A Firm Foundation* the first commentary on a large section of the Heidelberg Catechism by one who helped to draw up this Catechism. Olevianus wrote *A Firm Foundation* in 1567.

This is the first publication of Olevianus' book in English. In his foreword, Richard A. Muller notes that this volume is "the first translation and, indeed, the first modern edition (to my knowledge) of any work of Olevianus" (p. x).

Included in the "general introduction" are a brief account of the life and work of Olevianus, a helpful analysis of the relationship of *A Firm Foundation* to the Heidelberg Catechism, and a description of the theological significance of *A Firm Foundation*.

Bierma points to the significance of the work as an early development of covenant theology. The covenant of grace unifies Olevianus' explanation of the Apostles' Creed. Since the Apostles' Creed is the summary of the whole of the Christian faith, it is evident that for Olevianus the truth of the covenant is central to all the doctrines of Scripture.

FF (*A Firm Foundation*—DJE) marks the beginning of the first effort in the history of Reformed theology to employ the covenant idea as a unifying theological principle over a lifetime of theological reflection and writing (p. xxix).

In this connection Bierman calls attention to "the close relationship

between covenant and predestination" in Olevianus. For Olevianus

the covenant of grace "flows out of the fountain" of God's gracious election in Christ. Covenant and election are different links in the same "golden chain" of salvation described in Romans 8.... Olevianus integrates covenant and election in such a way that the former, by its very definition as reconciliation with God through justification and renewal, is viewed as part of the unfolding of God's decree of predestination (p. xxx).

Bierma himself argues that this characteristic of early Reformed theology refutes the theory of some contemporary theologians that "early Reformed covenant theology ... (was) an attempt to mollify a rigid double predestinarianism in Calvinist orthodoxy in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries" (p. xxx). The close relationship between election and covenant in Olevianus, pointed out by Bierma, also refutes those today who mightily exert themselves virtually to sever covenant from election. According to Bierma, Olevianus taught that "God's gracious covenant (is) with the elect" (p. xxix).

The centrality of the covenant for Olevianus did not mean that covenant swallows up all else. The exposition of the twelve articles of faith is a careful, rich explanation of all that is necessary for a Christian to believe. Particularly interesting are Olevianus' emphasis on,

defense of, and grand treatment of providence; his teaching of eternal justification ("their sins have been pardoned from eternity"—p. 9); his assertion that the reigning Christ always keeps His church "under the cross and all sorts of enemy zealotry to curb the remaining sin in them" (p. 81); and his insistence, oft repeated, that salvation is "unconditional."

Ministers who preach the Heidelberg Catechism will want to read this work in preparation for preaching on the Lord's Days explaining the Apostles' Creed. Reformed believers will benefit from the instruction in the faith by this excellent and authoritative teacher.

Especially edifying and of the greatest importance is Olevianus' teaching on the assurance of salvation in the face of the devil's temptations of believers to doubt (pp. 112-124). It is evident that for the Reformers assurance is an integral, essential element of faith itself. Further, it is evident that it is Reformed to comfort even the weakest believer with the certainty that he possesses genuine, saving faith. To work at instilling doubt concerning the reality of faith with pernicious questions, "Is your 'feeling' genuine? Have you had a remarkable experience? When you scrutinize your faith, are you sure that it is real?" is for a church or a minister to ally itself or himself with the Evil One; indeed, it is to give itself or himself to the Evil One as his willing agent. No less destructive to assurance is the false doctrine that one can have a desire for

Christ without being a true believer.

176 Q. But what if the Evil One were to say, "This all applies only to believers, but your faith is much too weak"?

A. I would respond to that by saying that whoever desires from the heart to believe is in fact a believer. Christ says in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Ultimately the assurance of the believer is certainty of his own personal election:

Whoever, then, is a believer is also elect, for the Scriptures testify that each and every true believer has been elected from eternity unto eternal life (I Pet. 1:2; Rom. 8:28, 30; Eph. 1:11, 13). Therefore, when you are in the throes of despair about whether you are elect, you must not let your thoughts try to scale the heights of God's decree. You must rather hold on to the Word, which promises that all believers have been elected by grace unto eternal life, and that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are believers.... And if we have faith, then we are also elect, for faith is given to none but God's elect (Rom. 8) (p. 122).

The book is the first in an important series of works on Reformation and post-Reformation orthodoxy published by Baker. The series is entitled, "Texts and Studies in Reformation & Post-Reformation Protestant Thought." The general editor is Richard A. Muller. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Minister Activities

Rev. Carl Haak, pastor of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL, has declined the call he had been considering to serve as the next undershepherd of the Hull, IA PRC.

Congregational Activities

The council of the South Holland, IL PRC has scheduled the organizational meeting of the Northwest Indiana congregation for the evening of May 5, D.V.

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

The congregation of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI met recently and approved proposals from their council to remodel their church basement, and to provide some new furnishings for it as well. It is anticipated that the work will begin in May and should be completed by the end of the summer.

Unless we have gone through it, we can only imagine the work that has to be done when a congregation moves into a new church home. It has to be an exciting time for those involved in the move. Our Bethel PRC, now in Roselle, IL, has been doing just that these past months. Church buildings don't just finish themselves. Many details have to be worked out. Much care has to be put into cleaning and furnishing the church. The church has to be decorated, pulpit furniture set up, organ and piano installed, and countless items moved from the old place of worship.

But I don't think we have to feel sorry for Bethel. We can probably assume that, after waiting as long as they have, they are enjoying every minute of it. After all, what better motivation for doing all this than the love of the Lord which they share.

Their new address is 115 Pratt Blvd, Roselle, IL 60172. Phone number is (630) 307-9402.

The Georgetown PRC in

Hudsonville, MI also continues to work towards completion of their new church home. Latest updates on their building progress indicate that construction continues to move forward. Drywall work continues to be done. Electricians have finished hanging lights in the auditorium and narthex, and exterior brick work has begun.

The Hull, IA PRC met recently and decided to approve the offer that had been made to buy their parsonage. This sale was possible because this spring Hull began construction on a new parsonage. Latest reports indicate that the project is proceeding in good order, with construction running ahead of schedule.

School Activities

The Midwest PR Secondary Education Society in Iowa met in March and passed a proposal to have their board investigate the possibility of starting a high school utilizing the two existing school properties.

The Hope Foundation of the Hope PR Christian School in Walker, MI sponsored their third annual ice skating party on March 20 at the Walker Ice and Fitness Arena. Plans called for a junior hockey game for grades 9-12 first, followed by two hours of open skating, and concluding with a men's hockey game. If large

crowds indicate success, then Hope enjoyed a successful evening. I know some who skated in the hockey game and who certainly did enjoy themselves—though not the score.

Mission Activities

In case you missed the March 14th letter from Rev. Ron Hanko, our missionary to Northern Ireland, he writes in part that the bid of the Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland on the property in Ballymena was accepted, subject to planning permission. They are now in the process of scheduling a congregational meeting to approve the bid and the borrowing of the money to pay for it. The property is about 1/2 of an acre in size, large enough for a building and parking. The difficulty, however, is that Covenant will have to put a building on the property, and that may take quite some time, even if planning permission is obtained.

Our churches' missionary to Pittsburgh, Rev. Jaikishin Mahtani, continues to improve from his depression and is preaching once each Lord's Day.

Food For Thought

"If you have to tell your children that you love them, then you certainly do not."

— Anonymous □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of First PRC, Grand Rapids, express Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Bill Booth in the passing away of Bill's sister,

FLORENCE.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

Rev. J. Slopsema, Pres.

Ron DeVries, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC wish to express their sympathy to John and Elaine Flikkema, with their children, in the passing away of Elaine's brother,

JOHN VAN SOLKEMA.

"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, Pres.

Ed Hekstra, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church extend their heartfelt Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Dick Kuiper and family in the death of her father,

MR. HENRY (BUD) ZWAK.

May the grieving family find strength in the promise of God that "... all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Rev. Ron Cammenga, Pres.

Darrel Huisken, Clerk

CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 1998 appointed First Protestant Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan the calling church for the 1999 synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 1999 synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 8, 1999 at 9:00 a.m. in the First Protestant Reformed Church, Holland, MI.

The pre-synodical service will be held on Monday evening, June 7, at 7:30 p.m. Rev. G. VanBaren, president of the 1998 synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. John VanUffelen, 860 PawPaw Dr., Holland, MI. Phone: (616) 396-8498.

Consistory of
First PRC, Holland, MI
John VanUffelen, Clerk.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary Martha Society of Hope PRC in Redlands express their sincere Christian sympathy to Audrey VanVoorthuysen and family in the loss of her sister, and to Beverly Feenstra, Janice Feenstra, and Shirley Feenstra and families in the loss of their sister-in-law,

MRS. MARGE ARMSTRONG.

May they find comfort in the words of Psalm 23:6, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Rev. Arie denHartog, President
Cindy Grothman, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hope PRC in Redlands express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to Bill Feenstra, Donald Feenstra, and John Feenstra and their families in the death of their sister, and to Everett VanVoorthuysen and his family in the death of his sister-in-law,

MRS. MARGE ARMSTRONG.

We pray that they may find comfort in God's precious Word, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

Rev. Arie denHartog, President
Earl L. Grothman, Jr., Secretary

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).

Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School is in need of a Protestant Reformed music/band instructor for the 2000-2001 school year. For information, please direct inquiries to Mike Lotterman, 1382 Su-Lew, Walker, Michigan 49544 (616) 453-4106 or the administrator, Ron Koole, (616) 453-9717.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies' Aid of Hudsonville PRC express their sympathy to our sister member, Freda Zwak, in the death of her husband,

HENRY (BUD) ZWAK.

As we have just studied, each of us can with confidence "lift up my soul. O my God I trust in thee" (Psalm 25:1b, 2a). Recalling this, we know we are in God's merciful care and He will be our guide and protector.

Truett Hugg, Pres.
Donna Boven, Sec'y.

NOTICE!!

The Evangelism Committee of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church invites you to their

1999 Summer Seminar

on the theme

"The Biblical Way through the
Millennial Maze"

Session Topics

- Premillennialism
- Postmillennialism
- Dispensationalism
- Amillennialism

Session Leaders

- ◆ Rev. Ron Cammenga
- ◆ Prof. Russ Dykstra

Dates:

July 21 & 28,
August 4 & 11

All sessions to start at 7:00 P.M.
at:

Southwest PRC
4875 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418