



**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

The Standard Bearer

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**Vol. 75, No. 17
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Reconciled to God

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

II Corinthians 5:19, 20.

Reconciliation. What a rich and blessed word.

Reconciliation implies that there had existed an original friendship of covenant fellowship between two parties. The text speaks of a relationship of friendship between God and us who are believers. It also implies that this relationship has been completely severed, even possibly turned into animosity. And finally it implies that blessed reality that this friendship and fellowship between God and us has been completely restored.

Wonder of wonders! We are reconciled to God!

Reconciled to God. Our thoughts go back to our first par-

ents in Paradise. How amazed they must have been as they walked hand in hand, united in the love of God, beholding the wonders of God's creation in the garden of Eden. They must have remarked about the soft carpet of green grass under their feet, the great variety of trees, plants, and flowers everywhere. They must have marveled as they saw animals of all sorts — lions with their beautiful manes, tender sheep calmly grazing, the stalwart horse with its colt, the camel with its hump, the beetle, and so much more. They also must have paused to listen to the babbling stream, the roaring rivers, those many voices of the birds rejoicing in the light of day. And they no doubt touched and smelled the beautiful bushes and flowers all around them. By day they must have watched the sun as it traveled through the heavens,

and at night they lay watching the moon, the stars, the planets, and the constellations in their courses throughout the broad expanse of the universe.

But even more, they must have wondered about themselves, their senses of sight, hearing, feeling, and smelling; their speaking; their intimacy as husband and wife. They were given dominion over the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea. Adam was king of the earthly creation, and Eve was his perfect helper.

Yet far more wonderful than all that was the fact that they saw the might, the wisdom, the sovereign majesty of their Creator. They knew Him, loved Him in deep devotion, and took delight in serving Him in humble adoration. Their souls cried out together, "Our God, how great Thou art." And just think, He came, walked through the

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Garden in the cool of day, and talked with them at the tree of life. There was a relationship of covenant fellowship and friendship between our first parents, who were creatures of the dust, and the Lord of hosts, who was the eternal, sovereign, living God!

We need not pause long in considering what broke this wonderful covenant relationship. Ever since we were children we were taught that God made man good and after His own image as His friend servant in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness to love and to serve Him. "But man, by the instigation of the devil, and his own willful disobedience, deprived himself and all his posterity of those divine gifts" (Heid. Cat., L.D. 4).

Yes, our fall was through the instigation of the devil. Satan, who stood at the head of a mighty host of fallen angels, had taken upon himself personally to attack God by attacking His earthly creation. Carefully, even cunningly, he had prepared his attack. He would use the serpent, which was able to communicate with Adam and Eve. He would approach Eve first. She had not directly received the command concerning the forbidden tree. Besides, if he could cause her to fall, she could be his instrument in approaching Adam. We know from Scripture how the devil aroused in the heart of Eve the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. She would decide for herself whether she would or would not eat of that tree. In fact, the more she thought about it the more she desired it, and then it seemed as if her arm and hand spontaneously reached out for the fruit and she ate of it.

At that very moment she broke the covenant of friendship with her God. And doing so she died a spiritual death of separation from God under His divine wrath. There was also a breach between her and her husband. She did not love him as she now was, but

turned against him. Satan was now ready to carry on through Eve. What transpired we do not know, but this we know, the friend-servant of God, the head of the human race, our first father, also ate of the forbidden tree. He fell into sin and death, and we sinned and died in him.

When the king of the earthly creation fell, his kingdom fell with him under God's curse. We still hear the groaning of all creation and can also see it. The animals suffer under the curse; the trees, plants, and flowers wither and die. Even the sun and the stars of heaven lost some of their brilliance. The whole creation continues to groan and travail together as in pain. Torrents of rain, floods, famines, fires, hurricanes, and tornadoes bring destruction. Sickness, diseases, along with various plagues and death come upon all mankind.

This sin of Adam was also our sin. We are, indeed, guilty of willful disobedience. Knowingly, deliberately, well aware of the consequences, we in Adam sinned against our Creator, the Most High God of heaven and earth, and consequently we are in the bondage of sin and death. Sin is not a mere external act. It is a tyrant that takes dominion over us. Our mind is perverse, so that we rationalize sin as good, proper, and necessary in our lives. Our will is corrupted. We desire that which is sinful, we crave it and yearn for it. It is only natural for us to sin, so that, if not delivered, we fall away into ever deeper sin, only to sink away both with body and soul into everlasting desolation. We are hopelessly lost by our willful disobedience.

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But God!

No, Adam did not, could not, and would not seek to restore that former friendship. Nor did God await his response with eager pleadings. But God, who is rich in

mercy, for the great love where-with He loved us from all eternity, came to Adam to bring reconciliation in Christ Jesus. Satan was assured that the day of his condemnation and the condemnation of all of his followers would surely come; his head would be crushed, his power completely broken, his just torment awaited him.

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself! When Adam fell, he fell into the arms of Jesus, the eternal Son of God, our Savior. Already in Paradise the promise was given of His marvelous birth from the virgin Mary. Already then God spoke of His substitutionary suffering and His atoning death on the cross. God is the Reconciler.

At Christmas time we sing, without giving it much thought, "God and sinners reconciled." The impression is left that Christ is the Mediator between an angry God and a sinful people, and that He brings both into reconciliation. Perish the thought! God is the Reconciler in the person of His Son, who became like unto us, sin excepted. He who knew no sin was made sin for us. Not a sinner, but a sin-bearer, bearing the wrath of God against the sins of those given to Him of the Father; bearing them in our stead even in the bitter agony of utter darkness and separation from God; and bearing them away. He took away our curse and reconciled us guilty sinners into a renewed fellowship with Himself, the Most High God.

Reconciled! God declares us free from sin and guilt and worthy of eternal life. Our first reaction is that we experience a sincere sorrow for and repentance from sin. With the psalmist we cry out: "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul" (Ps. 116:3, 4). The Lord hears our supplication and assures us by His Spirit in our

hearts: "Go in peace, thy sins, though ever so many, are forgiven thee."

Reconciled! We are made new creatures in Christ with the resurrection life of Christ in our hearts. We are saints in Christ Jesus. Yes, by nature we are still incapable of any good and inclined to all evil, but according to the new man in Christ we love, seek, and serve our God. As an assurance to us the Bible speaks of Job as being "perfect and upright," of Abraham as a friend of God, of David as a man who was well pleasing to God.

Reconciled! The relationship of friendship between God and us is restored in Christ. Not that we return to the state of Adam in Paradise. We are restored in Christ, and therefore we are restored in a far richer, more intimate relationship with God than was ever possible in Adam. We now belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. We are in Christ, members of His body, heirs of the salvation that He merited on the cross, partakers of His glory.

This is love, not that we first loved God, but that He first loved us and implants His love in our hearts. We know Him as our heavenly Father, who says to us in loving kindness, as a mother says to her newly born infant, "My very own son," or, "my very own daughter." And we say to Him in intimate fellowship: "O my Father" and "O my God."

Thus we have peace with God and we already experience the beginning of the eternal joy, a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The wonder of our reconciliation includes even more than that, for God in Christ reconciled *the world* unto Himself! Our first father was created as king, having dominion over the whole earthly creation, so that when he fell the whole human race, along with the entire earthly creation, was plunged into condemnation. By the mercies of God the entire creation is restored along with God's

elect. Therefore Paul tells us: "The creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

Not only we as individuals are redeemed and reconciled, but also the entire elect church, and along with her the entire universe. God says: "Behold, I make all things new." The entire organism of the world is saved and renewed — all except the reprobate wicked, who are cut off, even as the dead branches of a tree or of a vine are cut off. We look for the full realization of our salvation in our new, heavenly home, in the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.



That is the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. That is the message of glad tidings that God sends through Christ and by Christ's ambassadors to His church. That is the gospel message that is preached wherever God's Word is proclaimed: God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us.

Therefore the apostle Paul declares to us the word of the living God: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

To us personally comes the admonition: Be thou reconciled to God!

That includes not merely that we need an initial conversion, but that we also need a daily conversion. Sin defiles every thought we think, every desire that arises in our hearts, every word we utter, every act or deed we ever commit. By nature we cannot nor are we willing to keep any of God's commandments, but transgress them all, for we are incapable of any good and inclined to all evil. We must be deeply aware of and confess in all sincerity before the face

of God our daily sins and our misery. We must hunger and thirst after righteousness, in order to experience that we are filled with the righteousness of Christ.

By the grace of God we must realize that the most holy among us has but a small beginning, and we also have but a small beginning, of the true obedience. Therefore we must prayerfully strive to put off the old man and put on the new man in Christ. That requires a constant watchfulness and struggle. The psalmist prays: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer" (Ps. 19:14). Scripture teaches us that whether we eat, or whether we drink, or whatever we do, we must do it all to the glory of God. Our goal must be to be holy, even as God is holy, and perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect.

This means also that we rely upon God as a little child relies on his father. David says, "Truly my soul waiteth upon God (literally, my soul is silent unto God): from him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved" (Ps. 62:1, 2).

But, above all, this means that we live in covenant fellowship with our heavenly Father, even as Enoch and Noah walked with God and Abraham was a friend of God. The sweet singer of Israel could testify: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust."

May we daily learn to confess ever more sincerely: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple" (Ps. 27:4). That is the foretaste of eternal life with God in glory, Amen. □

The Preterism of Christian Reconstruction

(2)

Christian Reconstruction is preterist.

By this is meant a serious error, or false doctrine, concerning Scripture's teaching on the last things. Preterism is false teaching concerning the second coming of Jesus Christ and the events that are connected with this coming as signs. It is error in eschatology.

Preterism explains biblical prophecies of events that are present or future to the church at the end of the twentieth century as having been fulfilled in the past. It explains these prophecies as having been fulfilled *exhaustively* in the past. There is no future fulfillment. The date when these prophecies were fulfilled, according to Christian Reconstruction, is AD 70. That was the time when Rome destroyed Jerusalem.

Preterist Christian Reconstruction explains *most* of Scripture's prophecies of the future events of eschatology as already fulfilled. All that is left after Christian Reconstruction goes through the eschatology of the New Testament are a few passages that promise a bodily return of Christ, a resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment.

At present, leading Christian Reconstruction theologians do acknowledge that these few—*very* few—New Testament prophecies of the end are yet to be fulfilled. This enables them to affect outrage, as Andrew Sandlin and Gary DeMar

did in the previous issue of the *Standard Bearer*, when a Reformed amillennialist charges preterism against them.

But this recognition of a few unfulfilled eschatological prophecies, which is necessary to maintain even a semblance of orthodoxy, is inconsistent. Their preterist theology requires that even these few prophecies be explained as having been fulfilled in the past. This will happen. Inconsistent preterism will become consistent preterism. As DeMar, Gentry, and Chilton have developed J. Marcellus Kik's preterist explanation of Matthew 24, so the disciples of these Christian Reconstructionists will develop their preterism still further. Then, like James Stuart Russell, whose book of full-blown preterism DeMar and Gentry (yes, and R. C. Sproul) have glowingly recommended, Christian Reconstruction will forthrightly teach that Christ came in AD 70 and that no other coming is to be expected on the basis of Scripture.

Dutch Reformed theology, which Christian Reconstruction holds in contempt, has a proverb: "Principles work through."

Since Gary DeMar objected to my charge of preterism, it is only right that I demonstrate the preterism of Christian Reconstruction from his book, *Last Days Madness* (American Vision, 1994; the page references that follow are to this volume). I could as well use the writings of Kenneth Gentry or

David Chilton. All of these men, with Andrew Sandlin, are disciples of R. J. Rushdoony. They are colleagues of Sandlin. With him, they are representatives of Christian Reconstruction. When I demonstrate preterism from DeMar's book, I will also have quieted Sandlin, who was ready to cry, "twisted . . . depiction"; "misinformed"; "egregiously misrepresent."

Here are some of the passages in the New Testament that DeMar himself explicitly declares to have been exhaustively fulfilled in the past, in AD 70. (I am tempted to list the passages one under the other to bring home to the reader what preterist Christian Reconstruction does with almost the whole body of New Testament eschatology. But I forbear in the interests of precious space.)

Matt. 10:22, 23; Matt. 16:27, 28; Matt. 26:64; Jn. 21:21, 22; Rom. 13:11; Rom. 13:12; Rom. 16:20; I Cor. 7:31; I Cor. 10:11; Phil. 4:5; Heb. 10:25; James 5:7, 8; James 5:9; I Pet. 4:7; I Jn. 2:18; Rev. 1:1; Rev. 1:3; Rev. 3:10; Rev. 3:11; Rev. 11:14; Rev. 17:8; Rev. 22:6; Rev. 22:7; Rev. 22:10; Rev. 22:12; Rev. 22:20 (pp. 29-31); II Tim. 3 (p. 26); Titus 2:13 (! p. 189); Rom. 8:18 (p. 191).

Let the reader look up these passages, note the context of each, and compare the parallel passages. All were fulfilled in the past.

According to DeMar, all of New Testament prophecy concern-

ing abounding lawlessness was fulfilled by AD 70 (pp. 26; 70, 71; 338ff.). All of New Testament prophecy concerning apostasy, including II Thessalonians 2:3, was fulfilled in the days terminating in AD 70 (pp. 68, 69; 334ff.). All of New Testament prophecy concerning antichrist, the "son of perdition" of II Thessalonians 2, and the beast of Revelation was exhaustively fulfilled in AD 70 (pp. 195-218). The "son of perdition" of II Thessalonians 2 was some Jewish "high priest" or other, who is long dead (p. 344). "The Beast of Revelation 13 is buried somewhere in the world today" (p. 218).

Displaying the vaunted Christian Reconstruction exegesis, DeMar plays the numbers game with the number of the beast in Revelation 13:18. He determines that the Holy Spirit refers to "Nero Caesar," the numerical value of whose name in *Hebrew*, we are assured, is 666 (p. 217).

All of New Testament prophecy concerning tribulation was fulfilled in AD 70. This was a foregone conclusion when the beast—antichrist—was safely thrust into the past. But DeMar devotes an entire chapter to this assertion (pp. 99-123). The first sub-heading in the chapter is, "A Past Great Tribulation" (p. 102).

The entire book of Revelation, with the possible exception of only a few, brief passages, was exhaustively fulfilled in AD 70. All of Revelation is past. It is not prophecy for the church throughout the New Testament age. It does not describe the great conflict between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan until Christ returns at the end of the world. It is not warning and encouragement to us believers and our children. It has nothing to do with us.

The Book of Revelation was written before AD 70. Its purpose was to describe events leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem.... The prophecy is de-

scribing events that refer to the first-century church (pp. 182, 183).

Consigning the book of Revelation to the past is, all by itself, the virtual annihilation of biblical eschatology. This alone would warrant the charge, "preterism!"

In order to accomplish the consignment of Revelation to the past, Christian Reconstruction must date Revelation before AD 70. Whereas the Christian church has always rightly dated Revelation about AD 95 and explained it as revealing the second coming of Christ in connection with events that lead up to this coming, Christian Reconstruction now dates it before AD 70. In this way, it can be made to refer exclusively to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

What is left of biblical eschatology?

What is left of biblical eschatology on the explicit teaching of Christian Reconstruction, as represented by Gary DeMar?

Almost nothing.

Only a stray passage here and there that manages for the present to escape DeMar's preterist razor.

Christian Reconstruction's book on eschatology is exceedingly slim, except for the chapter on the millennium.

Huge chunks of New Testament Scripture are cut out as inapplicable to the church after AD 70. These are all the passages that urgently warn the saints of abounding lawlessness, of widespread apostasy, of the kingdom of antichrist, and of persecution.

Yes, and most of the passages that comfort the people of God with the promise of the coming of Jesus Christ.

Preterism!

With deadly spiritual consequences for those who are taken in by it! They will be unprepared for the temptations, trials, conflicts, persecution, and spiritual warfare that the godly must always suffer and that must be expected to intensify in the future. They will not

live in the expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ. They will not look for any signs of the nearness of His coming. Indeed, they are instructed by Christian Reconstruction not to see the signs *when they unfold before their very eyes*.

In light of all of the above, can Christians ever assert that Jesus' return is near? To ask it another way: Can we point to *any* signs that would indicate that Jesus' coming is imminent? The answer is no.... There are no observable signs leading up to His bodily return! (pp. 150, 151).

But DeMar does hold that there will be a future, bodily coming of Christ, accompanied by the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment, does he not?

He does, and I acknowledged this of Christian Reconstruction in the editorial of February 15, 1999 to which DeMar and Sandlin object.

This is about all of biblical eschatology that he holds. But he holds this.

However, he holds this inconsistently. His own theology forbids him to hold this. On the fundamental principle of his own interpretation of the promise of the New Testament concerning Christ's coming, DeMar must *deny* a future coming of Christ and, therefore, a future resurrection and a future judgment. At least, he must admit that we can know nothing of such a future coming from Scripture.

The fundamental principle of DeMar and the other Christian Reconstructionists is that "near," "at hand," and "quickly" as descriptions of the coming of Christ, as in Philippians 4:5, I Peter 4:7, Revelation 1:1, and Revelation 22:12, 20, demand fulfillment—*exclusive, exhaustive* fulfillment—in a return of Christ in the lifetime of the apostles. Of all these passages, DeMar says: "These passages and others like them tell us that a significant eschatological event was to

occur in the lifetime of those who heard and read the prophecies" (p. 31). Again: "There is no way around these texts. 'Soon,' 'near,' and 'at hand' are explicit time indicators that are meant to describe a period of time in the near future" (p. 288).

If this is so, Christ came in AD 70 with an exclusive, final coming. There is no reason to look for a future coming on the basis of Scripture. Absurd as it is to think so, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment must have accompanied that one and only coming in AD 70. For the only coming that New Testament Scripture knows is the coming of Christ that is "near," because He comes "quickly."

I give one, conclusive example. According to DeMar, the coming of Jesus announced in Philippians 4:5 ("The Lord is at hand") was His coming in AD 70. But this is the coming that the apostle proclaims and looks for throughout chapter 3, particularly verse 20: "we look for the Savior." And this is the coming that raises our body (v. 21).

DeMar has no eschatology. He has no doctrine of the "last things" aiming at and culminating in the second coming of Christ. Oddly, he admits as much. The "last days" of Scripture were fulfilled in AD 70 (pp. 27, 28; 57; 203). The biblical "end of the ages" was the time prior to AD 70 (p. 57).

The "last days" are past.

Preterism!

In principle, full-blown, consistent preterism!

And this is the necessary implication of Christian Reconstruction's interpretation of Matthew 24, following J. Marcellus Kik (see *An Eschatology of Victory*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971). To explain Matthew 24, especially verses 1-34, as referring only to the destruction of Jerusalem is to fall from orthodox eschatology into heterodox preterism. Matthew 24 is the fundamental passage in the New Testament on the last things. Everything depends upon the right understanding of Matthew 24. For my exegetical refutation of the preterist interpretation of Matthew 24 and my positive interpretation of the passage, I refer DeMar and Sandlin to the April 1, April 15, May 1, and May 15, 1996 issues of the *SB*. Can they not find time in their busy schedule to read these articles?

Why does Christian Reconstruction embrace and advocate preterism?

There is a theological reason, and there is a spiritual reason.

The theological reason is that the doctrine of a millennial "golden age" demands that all of the Bible's prophecy of lawlessness, apostasy, antichrist, and persecution in the last days be got rid of.

Sandlin is wrong when he says in his sharp letter, "Preterism has never been a distinctive of Christian Reconstruction." Preterism is essential to Christian Reconstruction. It is as important to Christian Reconstruction to get rid of

biblical prophecy of lawlessness, apostasy, antichrist, and persecution in the last days, so that the dear "Jewish dream" of dominion by the saints may have a place, as it is important to dispensational premillennialism to get rid of the church in the rapture, so that the precious Jewish nation may finally have its earthly kingdom.

The spiritual reason is closely related. It is that the hearts of the Christian Reconstructionists are not set on the second coming of Christ and the resurrection that accompanies it. As yet, they confess the second coming. Well and good. But the coming of Christ does not have their hearts. Their hearts are set on the millennial, earthly kingdom in which the Christians will have dominion. This is evident on the face of all their writings. Not "Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly," but "Let us get busy once to establish the earthly kingdom" is their real interest.

This is why DeMar and Gentry could enthusiastically recommend Russell's book that *denies* any future coming of Christ, any future resurrection of the body, and any future judgment.

Did they not notice this in the *Parousia*?

Surely they did, these mighty exegetes, logicians, and theologians.

But it did not matter.

Because, at bottom, they do not care. ■

— DJE

Acceptance of the Challenge to Debate

Gary DeMar challenges me to a public debate.

In his letter to the *Standard Bearer* that ran in the previous issue of this magazine, he said, "Let's have a debate at your seminary. Have your students decide who's telling the truth."

This is the second time that DeMar has issued this challenge. The first time was his letter in the March 15, 1995 issue of the *SB*.

My response then was that I was interested.

I expected that Mr. DeMar would get in touch with me, to ar-

range a time for the debate. But I heard nothing more from him.

Now, of course, I know why. That busy man could not take the time to read the *SB* in which I responded to his challenge. I admit that this strikes me as odd. He read the editorial on "Jewish

Dreams" that provoked his response and challenge. He wrote a long letter to the *SB* issuing his challenge. But then he neglected to read my answer. As a result, he was ignorant of my willingness to debate.

Now, the champion of Christian Reconstruction postmillennialism issues a second challenge, which he has also published on the Internet.

I have no choice but to accept his challenge.

I will see to it that, at a time mutually agreed on, there is a suitable auditorium in the Grand Rapids, MI area for our debate. No

doubt the debate will be advertised in Western Michigan, so that interested persons can attend, including the students in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

There are three conditions.

First, the proposition that I will defend, whatever the formal topic, will be, positively, that amillennialism is biblical and Reformed truth concerning the last days and, negatively, that Christian Reconstruction postmillennialism is false doctrine.

Second, the basis of the debate must be Holy Scripture as summarized in the Reformed confessions.

Third, after the debate is held in the Grand Rapids, MI area, there must also be a debate on the same topic between Mr. DeMar and myself in Atlanta, GA for the benefit of Mr. DeMar's supporters. As I will be responsible for arranging the debate in Grand Rapids, Mr. DeMar must be responsible for arranging the debate in Atlanta.

I await Mr. DeMar's response to my acceptance of his challenge.

In case he neglects to read this issue of the *SB* (which will be sent to him), this acceptance of his challenge will also be sent to his address by certified mail. ■

— DJE

Welcome to the New PR Congregation

On behalf of all our readers, the *Standard Bearer* heartily welcomes the new Protestant Reformed congregation. We rejoice in a work of God, who, as Article 28 of our Belgic Confession of Faith instructs us, is the one who "establishes" every true church.

The new congregation is another daughter of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, IL.

The church was instituted in a worship service of the South Holland congregation on May 5. Rev. Allen Brummel preached on I Timothy 3:15b, "The Church: Pillar and Ground of the Truth." Officebearers of the new church

were then chosen by the male confessing members of the new congregation.

At organization, the congregation consisted of 24 families and four individuals.

For the time being, the congregation will hold worship services in the Scheub Community Center, 1515 West Lincoln Highway, Schererville, Indiana. This is in northwest Indiana, a little east of Dyer. Services will be at 9:00 AM and 6:00 PM on the Lord's Day.

By the time this welcome is published, the church will have chosen a name and called a minister.

Those who want to have con-

tact with the church can address the vice-president of the consistory, Mr. George Vroom, 16525 Louis Ave., South Holland, IL 60473 (telephone:[708] 596-1771), or the clerk, Mr. Rick Worries, 399 Greenbriar Lane, Crete, IL 60417.

The formation of the new church enriches the fellowship of the covenantal federation and extends the witness of the gospel of sovereign grace to the world without.

Under the indispensable blessing of the King of the church.

Let us pray for the new congregation, and for all our churches. ■

— DJE

1999 Synod of the PRC

The annual synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet this year in Holland, MI in the fine new building of the First PRC of Holland.

Synod will convene on Tuesday morning, June 8, God willing.

The pre-synodical worship service, conducted by the First PRC of Holland, will be held on Monday evening, June 7 in the auditorium of the Holland church beginning at 7:30. Rev. Gise VanBaren, president of last year's synod, will

preach the sermon.

Synod will hear the oral examination of Mr. Garrett Eriks, graduating senior seminarian at the PR Seminary.

The Contact Committee (CC) will report on meetings with the

Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the United Reformed Churches in North America and with the Committee for Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The CC is proposing to synod that Prof. H. Hanko work in Singapore for six months beginning in the fall of 1999 on behalf of the theological school of the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore. The CC also proposes the establishment of a sister-church relationship with the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland.

The Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) informs synod that the mission in Colorado has been closed and that missionary T. Miersma is now stationed in Spo-

kane, WA. The DMC also reports that Rev. J. Mahtani has accepted the call to be a home missionary and is presently working in Pittsburgh, PA.

A special study committee of synod on financial support of emeriti ministers recommends that

payment from the Emeritus Fund continue to be on a "needs" basis, but with the added provision that some defined or specified amount be made available to all retirees and/or their spouses upon request but with no questions asked ("Agenda," p. 92).

The committee suggests that the specified amount be about \$15,000.

The Foreign Mission Committee reports that Rev. R. Moore has accepted the call to be missionary in Ghana, Africa. Rev. and Mrs.

Moore plan to be in Ghana by June of this year.

Synod must approve details of the 75th anniversary celebration of the PRC scheduled for June 19-23, 2000 on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI.

There are appeals. One is against a decision of Classis West concerning a protestant's use of an "advocate" to plead his case. Others are against decisions of Classis East concerning separate maintenance in a case of marital discord.

Visitors are welcome at most sessions of synod.

May God guide this broadest assembly of the PRC by His Word and Spirit and thus bless the congregations, and indeed all His church, by means of our synod. □

— DJE

Letters

■ Breathtakingly Unfounded Presumption?

It was in 1985 that I first subscribed to the *Standard Bearer*, so now I have accumulated fourteen volumes on my shelves, where they form a highly valued spiritual asset. The *SB* is the most instructive Christian periodical I know, and is a great blessing to me. The clear, incisive writing of the contributors on a wide range of highly relevant topics is a refreshing antidote to the woolly-mindedness so prevalent in evangelical circles. When the *SB* arrives at my door, invariably the first page I turn to is the one with "News From Our Churches." It enables me to enter into the life and fellowship of the churches a little, even though the news is months late by the time I read it! Thank you for the *SB*. I would not be without it.

Of course, even in the best Christian literature one finds points of disagreement, or issues that one finds difficult to understand. For me, one such issue that comes up from time to time in the *SB* cropped up recently in an otherwise fine article on Reformed education by Prof. Dykstra. In reference to the covenantal character of Reformed education he described the children of believers in the following terms: "...these children have been redeemed from sin. They are sanctified by the blood and Spirit of Christ. They have within them the principle of a new and holy life" (15 Jan. 1999; p. 189). Now I think we would both agree that God saves His people principally in the lines of generations, and also that God's covenant is with believers and their *elect* children. Of course, we do not know who are the elect, so I can understand why, from a *subjective* point of view, believing parents may wish to look on their children (all of them) as being born again, until the absence of repen-

tance for sin and a profession of faith indicate otherwise. But what I cannot understand is how Prof. Dykstra can express himself in such unqualified and objective terms. What are his biblical grounds for using such categorical language?

Anyone reading that article without prior knowledge of the PR position could be forgiven for concluding that the PR churches, or at least Prof. Dykstra, believe that *all* the children of believers are elect and born again; that they are all not only to be *viewed* as born again but are as a matter of fact elect, redeemed from sin, sanctified by the blood and Spirit of Christ, and possessors of the principle of a new and holy life. Does Prof. Dykstra realize that this comes across to the reader, especially one reading the *SB* for the first time, as a breathtakingly brazen and unfounded presumption, whether intended or not? Even to someone like myself, who has some familiarity with the PRC's "election theology of the covenant," it appears at best mis-

leading and confusing, and at worst contradictory.

Perhaps the problem is primarily one of language rather than theology, but even so the choice of words turns it into a theological issue and presents a major stumbling block to someone like myself, outside the PRC, who struggles hard to understand his position on this matter. It underscores the need for care in one's use of words.

But there is another possibility: simply that I am dull of understanding and need the matter to be better explained to me. Perhaps Prof. Dykstra could give of his time to show me more clearly from the Scriptures what he means.

Over the years I have grown to love the PR churches, albeit from afar, and have the deepest respect for their ministers. Their firm adherence to the truths of sovereign and particular grace marks them out as the brightest of lights against a church world that is descending rapidly through Arminianism into apostasy. I fear for the state of evangelicalism in this country.

John Hooper
Cornwall, England

RESPONSE:

A hearty thank you for the kind words for the *Standard Bearer* and for the Protestant Reformed Churches. May all the readers of the *Standard Bearer* be so appreciative and careful in their reading!

I also appreciate your taking the time and effort to write about my article, and am happy to respond.

The statement which you question is, as you recognize, part of the very difficult doctrine of the place of children of believers in the covenant. The article in the January 15, 1999 issue was a continuation of an earlier article in which this issue was discussed. Although the statement in question was separated from the earlier installment, the view of children expressed in this statement must be understood

in that context. In the first installment (Dec. 15, 1998, p. 140) we wrote as follows:

The covenant is the relationship of friendship that God sovereignly establishes with His people in Christ. God establishes this covenant with believers and their seed in the line of continued generations (Gen. 17:7). Within the sphere of the covenant, God ordinarily regenerates His elect as children. Thus parents are able to give instruction to their children and that instruction does not fall on dead, stony hearts, but on regenerated hearts changed by the Spirit.

This agrees with what you write, that God's covenant is with believers and their *elect* children, not all children of believers.

In that first article, the next doctrine discussed was the organic nature of the covenant. This is the key for understanding the Protestant Reformed doctrine of the covenant, and I am glad for the opportunity to emphasize it. In that first article, then, the above was followed with this:

How do believing parents deal with their children? Because of the promise of God to establish His covenant with believers and their seed, believing parents deal with their children as covenant children. Though the parents know and believe that the lines of election and reprobation cut through families of believers, they view their children organically. In the same way, Paul addressed the church of Philippi: *To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi*. Again, as he wrote to the church in Ephesus: *To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus* (Ephesians 1:1). Paul knew that not everyone in the churches of Ephesus and Philippi was a believer. Why then address them thus? He did so because he viewed the group organically, as one, as the church of Jesus Christ.

In the same way parents view their children as covenant children, even though it may well be

that God has not established His covenant with every child.

It is on that basis that the statement in question can be made.

Notice also the immediate context of, and the biblical support for the statement.

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

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

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

One thing more must be noted, and that is what the statement does not say. It does not say "all" these children have been redeemed from sin, or that "all" these are sanctified by the blood and Spirit of Christ. Nor is this the intent. I would not make such a statement if it were meant to be a pronouncement that all these children of believers were elect. However, the believing parent and the teacher in the Christian school view these children organically. They do not presume that these children are all regenerated. Nonetheless, they must treat children of believers in harmony with what God calls them – the heritage of Jehovah and God's children, as noted above. □

— Prof. Russ Dykstra

Pelagius and Celestius: Enemies of the Doctrines of Grace (2)

The Beginnings of the Conflict

Pelagius moved to Rome about 400, the year Augustine finished his *Confessions*. It was probably in Rome that Celestius was converted by Pelagius and became his disciple and friend. Although Pelagius, for nearly ten years, openly preached his views in Rome, he never got into any trouble with the church or the theologians there.

In 411 both were in North Africa, where Augustine was already bishop of Hippo. The date they went to North Africa is hard to determine. Probably Celestius went first, around 409. In 410 Rome was sacked by the barbarian Alaric. In 411, it seems, Pelagius moved to North Africa. But he soon moved to Palestine and was warmly received by Jerome in Bethlehem, where Jerome had established a seminary of great repute. Celestius remained in North Africa.

Celestius decided that he wanted to be a presbyter (elder), and so applied for the office. But the church in North Africa was strong. Those who were considered for presbyter were subjected to a rigorous exam and a careful scrutiny of their views. In the course of the exam, Paulinus, a deacon from Milan (a city in Italy north of Rome), came to the conclusion that Celestius ought not to

be ordained and that he was, in fact, a heretic.

The charges which were made against Celestius will give us an idea of the very heart of Pelagian heresy. He was charged with teaching: 1) That Adam was created mortal, and would have died whether he had sinned or not. 2) That Adam's sin injured himself alone and not the human race. 3) That newborn infants are in the same condition in which Adam was before his transgression. 4) That as the human race did not die by the death and the transgression of Adam, so will the human race not rise again on account of Christ's resurrection. 5) That the law guides into the kingdom of heaven as well as the gospel. 6) That there were men who lived without sin before the advent of our Lord.

Although these were the specific charges, we might add to these heresies two more. Then we will have a pretty complete summary of the doctrines of Pelagianism. 1) That the grace of God is not absolutely necessary to lead men to holiness. 2) That grace is given to men in proportion to their merit.

That is the Pelagian system of doctrine.

These charges were brought against Celestius to the synod of Carthage which met in 412. Celestius' defense against these charges was ineffective. He argued mainly that the differences between him and his accusers were minor and of no importance to the faith; that, in fact, they were matters not

settled in the church and thus open for discussion. Hence, he ought not to be condemned for his views. But the synod of Carthage had other ideas. Without hesitation, they condemned as contrary to Scripture every one of these propositions. Celestius was ordered to recant, and when he refused, he was excommunicated from the church.

That did not, however, deter Celestius. He promptly moved to Asia Minor, where, before too long, he was ordained a presbyter in the church of Ephesus.

It was not long before the news of what the synod of Carthage had done came to Bethlehem, where Pelagius was enjoying himself. It was widely known that Celestius was a student of Pelagius, and so the views of Pelagius himself came under attack. It was not long before a council was called in Jerusalem under the direction of Bishop John, bishop of Jerusalem. The council was held in 415, and Pelagius was completely exonerated.

We can find reasons for this vindication of Pelagius' views, and these reasons give us insight into the state of the church.

In the first place, the East, you will recall, was strong on the doctrine of the freedom of the will. Pelagius made it clear that this doctrine was all he was really interested in.

In the second place, Pelagius was not forthright in the explanation of the views which he offered the council. As is so characteristic of heretics everywhere, he equiv-

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

cated, used ambiguous terminology, tried to present his views in the best possible light and in agreement with the accepted doctrines of the church, and never forthrightly stated what his own position was.

This point is worth emphasizing. One man writes concerning Pelagius' evasiveness:

Pelagius escaped condemnation only by a course of most ingenious disingenuousness, and only at the cost both of disowning Celestius and his teachings, of which he had been the real father, and of leading the synod to believe that he was anathematizing the very doctrines which he was himself proclaiming. There is really no possibility of doubting, as any one will see who reads the proceedings of the synod, that Pelagius obtained his acquittal here either by a "lying condemnation or a tricky interpretation" of his own teachings; and Augustine is perfectly justified in asserting that the "heresy was not acquitted, but the man who denied the heresy, and who would himself have been anathematized if he had not anathematized the heresy."

In the third place, already animosity between the East and the West was dividing the church. The East took the attitude: What do we care what the West decides? We are determined to show our independence and we are not about to let the West lead us around by the nose. So true was this that when it was pointed out to the Jerusalem council that Augustine had joined in the condemnation of Pelagius, one delegate scornfully shouted: "And what is Augustine to me?" The East, I suspect, took a great deal of delight in making a decision which flat out contradicted the decision taken at Carthage.

But Pelagius' vindication continued. When two presbyters from Gaul were present in Palestine and warned the church there of the disastrous consequences of Pelagius' views, another council was called and again he was completely ex-

onerated. Almost the entire Eastern church agreed with these decisions, and it appeared as if Pelagianism would win the day.

Although most of the East certainly agreed with Celestius, Jerome did not. It will help our readers at this point to remember that Jerome was a noted scholar in his own right, that he was in almost constant communication with Augustine, and that he was a man deeply devoted to the whole church. He is probably most noted for his translation of the Bible into Latin, a translation that became known as the Vulgate and became the official translation of the Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless, Jerome's condemnation of Pelagius was weakened by his own insistence on the freedom of the human will and on conditional predestination.

The Counter-Attack

The West was not about to take these decisions in Palestine sitting down. The theologians in the West poured out a stream of books and pamphlets showing how the views of Pelagius (and Celestius) were contrary to Scripture and the historic faith of the church. Augustine himself concentrated almost exclusively on the Pelagian heresy in his writings, and spent the last twenty years of his life writing against them.

Two synods were also held in North Africa in 416, one in Carthage and one in Mileve, both of which condemned Pelagius and Celestius *in absentia*. Gradually the course of the struggle began to tip in favor of the West. Among the more serious and biblical theologians in the East, the light began to dawn that Pelagianism could hardly be separated from Nestorianism. We must remember that Nestorianism was still a threat in the East. We are talking about the years 420-430. Chalcedon was not till 451. The battle against Nestorianism was still raging. But as the tide turned against Nestor-

ianism, and as the church came to realize that the two heresies of Nestorianism and Pelagianism were related, so too Pelagianism came more and more into disrepute.

One additional event brought the matter to a certain climax.

The two synods in North Africa appealed to Pope Innocent I for support of their decisions. He approved of what they had decided and commended the African bishops for their diligence in remaining faithful to the truth and for their zeal in combating heresy. But Innocent died and the opportunity to make his decisions stick was lost. Zosimus came to the papal throne in his place.

Pelagius, having heard of his condemnation by North African synods and confident of the backing of the synods in Palestine, wrote a letter to Innocent to defend himself against the excommunication that had been imposed on him. But the letter came instead to Zosimus, the new pope. At about the time that the letter arrived, Celestius himself appeared in Rome in an effort to defend himself before the pope. Zosimus read Pelagius' letter and heard Celestius' plea, and decided that both had been unjustly treated, that their condemnation was wrong, and that the views they taught were in perfect keeping with the teachings of the church. He ordered their excommunication to be lifted and ordered the North African bishops to remove their condemnation of Pelagius and Celestius.

It is interesting to note, though in passing, that Zosimus thus approved of heresy, a bit of church history which the Roman Catholic church has difficulty in defending in the light of their view of papal infallibility.

But the North African bishops were convinced of their position and were not at all inclined to comply with the dictates of Zosimus. They very carefully drew up their

case against Pelagius and Celestius, stated their own position on the doctrines in question as clearly as they could, and politely but emphatically informed Zosimus that he had better change his mind because they were not going to change theirs. This happened in 418.

Zosimus concurred. He changed his mind, so informed the bishops in North Africa, and ordered all the bishops to sign a declaration of condemnation of Pelagius and his cohorts. Thus the fortunes of men are changed in a moment as God executes His counsel.

All the bishops in the West agreed except eighteen from Italy, who were promptly excommunicated. They fled to Constantinople where they were welcomed by Nestorius. Some of them later recanted and returned to Italy, where they were once again accepted into the church. The followers of these eighteen bishops were ordered excommunicated and banished from the empire, and all their goods were ordered confiscated by imperial decree.

One of those who refused to sign the papal condemnation of Pelagius was a man named Julian. We mention him here because he became a bitter opponent of Augustine and wrote extensively against Augustine's views. He became, in fact, the most articulate spokesman of Pelagianism, and Augustine considered his writings so important that he wrote an entire book to answer Julian. The book was entitled *Against Julian*.

To listen to Julian's objections against Augustine's teachings on sovereign and particular grace is something like having an ear to the door of a meeting in which the well-meant offer of the gospel is being defended. Julian objected to sovereign predestination because, he said, it makes God the author of sin, it is deterministic and fatalistic, and it teaches that God respects persons. But, more interest-

ingly, he objected to Augustine's emphasis on sovereign grace because, so he said, God seeks the salvation of all men. And in support of this contention he appealed to I Timothy 2:4 and Romans 2:4, both of which are quoted today by those who teach a well-meant offer. Strange company these people keep.

The End of the Matter

Because Nestorius took under his wing those from the West who refused to repudiate Pelagius and Celestius, the teachings of these heretics were soon associated in the public mind with Nestorius' heresy concerning Christ. And, when Nestorius himself was finally condemned in the East at the council of Ephesus, held in 431, one year after Augustine died, Pelagianism was condemned in the same breath.

That was the end of Pelagius and Celestius. Celestius is not heard of again. Pelagius nearly the same. Some say that he died in exile somewhere in Gaul. Others say that he returned to Jerusalem and lived there until he died at the age of 70. But no one knows.

We have not the space, nor is it our purpose, to discuss in detail the teachings of Augustine. He taught emphatically everything concerning the doctrines of grace which we hold dear today. He believed in sovereign predestination, both election and reprobation. He believed that Adam's fall brought both the guilt of sin and the corruption of sin on the whole human race. The result of the fall was the total depravity of man, so that he is unable to do any good. Christ died on the cross only for the elect, and by His death Christ earned grace for all those and for those only for whom He died. That grace is sovereignly given and is bestowed only on God's elect. It is the power of all the good which the people of God do. These elect are preserved throughout all their life and brought faithfully to glory. In short, Augustine held to the five

points of Calvinism.

The Roman Catholic Church, however, never accepted Augustine's teachings. This is another story. We hope to tell that story in future articles, for there were good reasons why the Romish church found it impossible to accept Augustine's views. The irony is that, while they hail Augustine as their spiritual and theological father, and even though they have canonized him, they repudiate what was the most important aspect of Augustine's theology.

But the issues raised in the Pelagian controversy are the great issues over which countless battles have been fought in the history of the church and which still today are the great issues of our times. Calvin especially reached back beyond Rome to that time a millennium earlier when Augustine had taught the great truths of sovereign grace. Calvin made them his own and gave them as his heritage to the church which followed him.

One author has correctly written:

Up to this time the controversies that had been carried on within the Church had references mainly to the doctrines of the person of Christ and of the Holy Trinity.... But now, for a number of years, the whole energies of the Church were concentrated on the discussion of the doctrines of sin and of grace in connection with the Pelagian controversy. The controversy did not terminate with Pelagius and his immediate associates. Others arose after them. The forms and aspects of the controversy gradually changed. In some respects, indeed, that controversy may be said to be continued to the present day; for it is the old opposition to the doctrine of the sovereignty of divine grace, the old overestimating of the value of human effort, which lies at the root of many of the doctrinal controversies of modern times.

Let the church then be faithful to these truths. □

■ "Littleton and Columbine High"

Two weeks ago (from the time I write this article), few people even in Colorado knew where these were. Today the names are in headlines in every newspaper—perhaps in the whole world and surely in all parts of our country. We have heard an endless reciting of events at Columbine High. We have heard countless analyses of the event. This was not a matter just of local news. This one caught the attention of the national news broadcasts. It was the subject of discussions in homes, schools, and in churches. Two young men slaughter 13 others—and then promptly kill themselves. Why? Why should this happen at Littleton? The question of "why" was repeatedly brought up in many of the reports. The "why" was part of the cover of *Newsweek* magazine, May 3, 1999. And television and newspaper pictures brought close-up views of the individuals who were weeping and embracing in their sorrow.

Many reply: because of the availability of guns in society today. Others point to indifferent parents and inadequate supervision of children.

But the answer is surely more than that. For years now the attempt has been made to remove anything and everything religious from public schools. The ten commandments may not be posted on the walls of those schools. There must be no religious instruction within them. The Bible may not be used there for devotions. Prayer is forbidden. Ought then the question be asked, "Why should this happen?"

Abortion, which years ago was considered a horrible crime, is now legal. Partial birth abortions can be performed. A baby must be completely out of the womb before killing it is considered murder. Life is "cheap." Children and young people soon learn this too. And then could the question be asked, "What makes these young people think murderous thoughts?"

Violence is portrayed on television and in the movie. Many have testified that it incites to violence. Murder is commonplace in these dramatic presentations. Now video games are available as well, so that one can kill in realistic manner on the screen. Ought then we to ask: "Why?"

As many as 50% of homes are "single-parent" homes. Otherwise, often both mother and father are in the work-force. There is little time to care for children within the home. The younger children might be shipped off to day-care centers. The older are often "latch-key" children, who are on their own after school until parents return home. And still the question is asked, "Why?"

And while prayers are not allowed within the public schools, suddenly everyone from the President down to the Governor and news commentators are urging prayers for the families directly affected, for the school, and for the community at large. It seems there is no place for God—until disaster strikes.

Cal Thomas, syndicated writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote an article that appeared also in the *Loveland Reporter-Herald*, April 27, 1999 pinpointing some of these same obvious problems.

After Paducah, Ky., after Jonesboro, Ark., after Springfield, Ore., the pattern is familiar. With chips on their shoulders, griev-

ances in their hearts and weapons in their hands, students who should be planning for life instead plot death. They wound and kill fellow students for reasons known only to demons. Are these cries for help from an abused, neglected and abandoned generation, or is this the price we continue to pay for believing we could live as we wish, laugh at morality and imagine judgment day would never come? Why should young people take life seriously when their overworked, aborting, daycare, euthanasia culture does not? Life is so cheap, relationships are so meaningless—children get the message.

We await the psychiatrists' explanation, but don't we secretly know what it is? When you mix the ingredients for a cake, you get a cake. When you mix the volatile ingredients of a corrupted culture, vulgar entertainment and broken, loveless families, you get child killers. OK, so these are rare, but their rarity is small comfort when you are the victim or the parents of a dead child.

The initial profiles of the young people allegedly responsible for the killing fields that have now come to Littleton are familiar: They were into Satanism, Nazism, hate and violence. What is making so many young souls so sick? There will be the predictable explanations from clinicians. And factual reports. But who can adequately explain this?

✶ The end of the Cold War was supposed to usher in a new age of world peace and security, but we are less secure than ever. Genocide occurs in our "enlightened" age, and mass murder occurs at home. This is progress? This is peace? This is security? Wasn't the Brady bill supposed to protect us from such things? Or maybe it was those 100,000 police officers....

We are being reminded daily that when the morality and law of God are forsaken, the consequences will surely be seen.

In the meantime, any sem-

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

blance of any kind of religion is still being rooted out of the schools. The Associated Press reports on a case in Texas:

A school program that brought local clergy to counsel students about morality and civic virtues was ruled unconstitutional by a federal appeals panel.

A three-judge panel of the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, voting 2-1 on Friday to overturn a 1996 federal district court ruling, sided with seven students and parents who argued the Beaumont Independent School District program violated the Constitutional separation of church and state.

In the "Clergy in the Schools" program, which began in 1996, local religious leaders were invited to counsel elementary and secondary students at the schools during school hours.

The district said the program let students discuss morality and civic virtues, helped increase school safety and gave a local group an interest in the schools. The clergy were not to discuss religion, sex or abortion and were not to pray with students....

First, one wonders what such clergy would talk about. Eliminate religion, prayer, sex, and abortion, and what is left? Without religion, how can one speak of the 10 commands? There would appear to be nothing religious in the program.

But secondly, even that is too much for some groups and parents. Is it any wonder that terrible things are going on in the schools and outside of the schools as well.

■ "What's Going On Here?"

The question was asked a number of times this year by Tom Brokaw, news anchor on NBC. Each time he relates certain natural disasters which appear greater than anything which has been seen in earlier years.

He spoke of the number of tornadoes in January—more than twice as many as any previous January. So: what's going on here?

He presented the forecast of one weather man who claimed there was evidence that the hurricanes this season and in the foreseeable future will be far worse than any we have experienced so

far. The weather man claimed that likely damage from one of these hurricanes along our east coast could well produce as much as 100 billion dollars of devastation. So: what's going on here?

From a different source comes the information that in some African countries the life expectancy has declined drastically to about 38 years. This is primarily the result of AIDS disease. So: what's going on here?

The fear of incurable diseases is growing. There is a strain of TB said to be immune to the medicines of our day. There is the fear that some rogue nation will unleash the smallpox virus. Smallpox was eradicated in the 80s from the face of the earth. But some of the virus was preserved in a frozen state. Hardly anyone is inoculated for it today. There is not sufficient vaccine to protect the population. Should the disease come back, one out of every three with the disease will die. So: what's going on?

One wonders indeed if the trumpets of Revelation are not sounding. Do we hear? □

In His Fear

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

Personal Devotions

The one aspect of our spiritual life which we most frequently neglect in any given day, it seems, is the time we should spend alone reading the Scriptures and praying to God. We skip right over this. At the most we perhaps utter a quick, short prayer — if we remember. And sometimes we be-

gin and end the day without spending a single moment alone with God. This can only mean that we think it is possible for us to survive spiritually without God. The Bible at our bedside falls into disuse and collects dust. And worse still, our souls languish. Our spiritual life suffers. While God never forgets us, we constantly forget Him.

The excuse we usually have is that we are way too busy. Perhaps we find enough time for regular family devotions. (I certainly hope

we do, and especially that fathers see to it that this is done. For even this, it seems, is being lost.) But what about regular private devotions? Do we take the time each day for them? Or do we satisfy ourselves with the idea that the reading of Scripture and prayer as a family will suffice? Do we allow family devotions to be a substitute for daily private devotions?

To say that we are too busy is a sad excuse — and wrong too. For the fact of the matter is that it is exactly because we are so busy that

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

we need, more than ever, to have private devotions.

It is certainly true that our lives in this world are busy, often very busy. And it is also true that much of our busyness is legitimate, such as daily work outside the home as husbands and fathers, and daily work in the home as wives and mothers. In addition to that, there is the extra work done by men who are on consistory, by men who are on school boards, by women involved in ladies' circles, and so on. But from all this busyness we need a rest. For this reason we take a day or two off work, we take a vacation, we participate in recreational activities.

What we forget, however, is the kind of rest that we really need, and that we need every day — spiritual rest. This is the rest that gives us the strength and courage to go on in life. This is the rest that helps us have the proper perspective and obedience to God in all our work. Without that, all our work is in vain. This is the rest, in other words, that enables us to continue in our pilgrimage through this life with our heavenly Father at our side.

When we speak of personal or private devotions we are referring to the time that the child of God takes privately to read and study the Scriptures, and privately to pray. He or she does this in addition to the time that the family, as a family, spends doing it. He or she does this in addition to the time spent preparing for Bible Study. A child or teenager does this in addition to the time spent preparing for Catechism lessons. A minister of the gospel does this in addition to the time he spends studying the Scriptures in preparation for preaching, for visiting, for counseling, for catechism teaching, and for Bible studies.

Personal devotions are worship. Consciously we enter the presence of Jehovah to listen to Him speak to us through His Word. And consciously we speak to Him

through our prayers. Such devotions are therefore covenant fellowship with our God.

The necessity of regular personal devotions can be demonstrated by a comparison to the need of regularly eating food. One who neglects prayer and the study of Scripture is like the person who fails to eat. Such a person does not receive the necessary nourishment for his physical body. Very soon he becomes weak and sickly and loses the ability to live a normal, healthy life. He will not survive very long at all. He will die.

That applies to us spiritually. The Word of God and prayer are food for our souls. The Scriptures themselves indicate this (I Cor. 3, I Pet. 2). To neglect the spiritual food which God provides is to starve our souls. What we need to do is to be just as regular with the reading of Scripture and with prayer as we are with eating food. David was, for he confessed in Psalm 55:17: "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray." Daniel also was, for of him we read that "he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God" (Dan. 6:10). These were not cases of family devotions, but personal. And each of these men did it three times a day!

Perhaps we feel that it isn't so necessary to have private devotions because really we obtain enough spiritual nourishment by hearing two sermons each Sunday. We convince ourselves that that will be sufficient to uphold us spiritually throughout the week. But does that really work? Is it possible for a person to survive physically by eating food on only one day of the week? Is it any different spiritually? It isn't! We need regular spiritual food. Our attitude should even be that we desire this more than we do our daily food. Job did. He said: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12).

Personal devotions are neces-

sary because of the unique life each of us lives in this world. Each of us, on account of his unique character, his unique calling, and his unique circumstances in life, has unique personal needs and struggles. There are the needs that arise because of temptation and sin. Some are tempted to be covetous. Some are tempted by drunkenness. Some are tempted to hate a fellow saint. And then there are other struggles in life. Some struggle against depression. Some struggle because of loneliness or sickness. Some struggle because of troubles in their families. Each of us knows his own needs and struggles.

Some of these unique needs and struggles are known only to God. That is exactly why we need to commune privately with Him. He is our covenant Friend to whom we bring all our burdens.

In private prayer we are able to be very specific about our needs and struggles. We can also be specific about the needs and struggles that we know others in the church and in our families have. And not only are we able to be specific with regard to our needs, we can be specific also with regard to our thanks to our Father for His grace and help. This applies just as well to our reading and study of the Scriptures. We are able to read and meditate on these things privately in a way we cannot do publicly.

The Bible itself demonstrates how important the Word of God is for us. First of all, there is the well-known comparison of the Word of God to a lamp and a light (Ps. 119:105). As those who live in the darkness of sin and of this wicked world, we need this lamp to guide our feet. Without it we will surely stumble and fall.

The beauty of having the Word as our lamp and light is that, as we walk through this darkness, the Word sheds light on a different pathway, a new and a better pathway. Though all around us is darkness, the pathway on which we walk as guided by the Word of God

is the pathway that leads to eternal life and glory.

The Scriptures are also compared to a weapon in warfare, namely a sword (Eph. 6:17). The implication, of course, is that we are soldiers in the battle of faith. We are fighting a spiritual warfare against great spiritual forces. We therefore need armor, both defensive and offensive. We are given one piece of offensive armor to fight that good fight of faith. It is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. But it is not enough for us simply to have in our possession the Bible as our sword. We must use it in battle. That is exactly why we need to study it and meditate upon it, so that we are ready and equipped to use it when the time for combat arises throughout the day.

The proper way of using the Bible in our personal devotions is not simply that we rapidly read a passage and then utter a quick prayer. One who does this is like the man who comes to the meal table and merely looks at the food. Without taking a single bite, he leaves the table imagining that he is full. That simply does not work — not with regard to physical food, nor with regard to spiritual food. After reading a passage of Scripture we need to study it in order to understand what it means. Only in this way does that Word become food for our souls.

Once we understand the meaning of the passage, we must also meditate on it. Such meditation on God's Word includes many things. It is that part of our devotions which is a contemplation on the wonders of God as He reveals Himself to us in His Word. We consider the greatness of God Himself. We think on the marvelous works of God. We contemplate especially the depths of God's work of grace toward us in and through Jesus Christ.

As part of meditation we make application of God's Word to our own lives. We ask ourselves:

"What is it that God teaches me in this passage concerning Himself and the blessed gospel of salvation in Christ? And how shall I, this day, praise my God for this? How shall I express thanks to Jehovah for the works of His grace in me?"

Finally, memorization can also be a very profitable tool in our meditation on the Word of God. Then we are able, throughout the day, to remind ourselves of what God says to us.

In connection with our study of God's Word, we must also pray. Prayer is crucial to our spiritual welfare. Through it we have the privilege of speaking directly to our heavenly Father. We bring before Him all our needs and give thanks to Him for all His blessings. When we do this the Lord is pleased to give us what we need for our spiritual life.

The reading and study of the Word of God gives us, first of all, content for our prayers. However, the Scriptures also instruct us concerning the blessedness and necessity of prayer. Philippians 4:6, 7, for example, tell us that prayer is the solution for worry. Instead of worrying, we should pray. Instead of attempting to bear all our burdens on our own, we are to cast our cares upon Jehovah. If our lives are characterized by worry, the reason is that we have not prayed — or at least that we have not prayed sincerely and as we ought. Through prayer, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Much more could be said about how necessary prayer is for our spiritual welfare. Let us remember, at least, the following. Again and again in the Gospel accounts we read that our Lord Jesus Christ prayed. Sometimes He did so for hours on end. If He the eternal, sinless Son of God in our flesh needed to do so and did so, how much more ought not we?

By God's grace, the child of God does not consider prayer and

the reading of Scripture a mere duty. Amazingly, he desires to do this. He desires to be nourished by the Spirit of God through the Scriptures. He desires to express in prayer his thanks to God and to cast all his burdens on Jehovah. He desires to express through his study of the Scriptures and his prayers to God his dependence upon his heavenly Father. He seeks from God, through His Word, the blessing and leading that he knows he needs in his daily life. He begins every day by seeking that blessing. During the day he stops frequently from the busyness of life and again expresses his thanks and seeks the Lord's guidance. And he ends the day in heartfelt thanksgiving to God for keeping him and guiding him through yet another day on his earthly pilgrimage.

He who regularly does this is one who, like Enoch and like Moses, walks with God. He realizes that he cannot walk alone in this dark world of sin and spiritual death. He needs the lamp of the Scriptures to guide him. He needs his God to lead and uphold him. He is conscious always of his need of Jehovah. And he depends constantly on Him.

As children of God we cannot afford not to set aside time every day for private devotions. It is our life. Regularity is the key. If we do not set aside a certain time each day, more than likely we will not do it. And it is good to remember, parents, that you have a responsibility with regard to your children in this. Not only must you instruct them concerning their personal devotions, but you should also be examples to them.

Is all of this difficult? Yes. It requires much work and effort. But through this means, God graciously and abundantly blesses. So read the Scriptures. Meditate on them. And pray! □

Schilder's "Covenant"

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Acts 2:39.

Having examined the history of the Schilder/Hoeksema controversy at some length, it is perhaps time to focus our attention now on the doctrinal aspects of it. And that leads us, first of all, to the question of what Schilder and the Liberated actually had in mind when they spoke of the "covenant."

For us this is not an easy question. In spite of all that was written, what the Liberated actually believe remains difficult for us to grasp — while to them it appears to be so perfectly obvious and clear that they have no real concept of the problems we see. Clearly, behind both sides there is a mentality which does not easily see the concerns of the other. Each side thinks on a plane all its own, to the point that what is centrally important to the one side, the other passes by without a serious thought. But, if this whole history is to have meaning, it is important for us to try to grasp what the Liberated have in mind.

To begin with, we should note that, to the Liberated mind, of central importance is the act of bap-

tism and what it says to, and means for, the individual being baptized — even when that individual is an infant so young that it can hardly be aware of what is going on, much less of what is being said. But that does not matter, for, as they are quick to remind us, baptism is a forensic act, a legal proclamation which has effect on that individual's life whether he consciously participates in it or not, and will affect that person through the rest of his life, and even beyond it into eternity. Actually, it is much like what happens when a small child is taken to court to be adopted by a new set of parents. There the judge makes a legal, forensic declaration that gives to that child a new family and makes him a legal heir of those new parents who bring him there. He may not be aware of what is going on, but that pronouncement of the judge will change his life in every way as long as he lives. And so is it, the Liberated will insist, with a child that is baptized. It is not the parents, it is not the administering pastor, it is not the individual receiving the sign, but it is God who declares at that moment that the child being baptized is henceforth a member of His church, of the body of Jesus Christ as it is manifest here upon this earth; and with that pronouncement of God the individual's life is changed forevermore. This is what happens at baptism. And connected to this are all of the implications of what the Liberated see to be the covenant of grace. Prof. C. Veenhof said as much in a little pamphlet called

Appeal!, which he published back in the late 1940s, just as our relationship with the Liberated was beginning to develop into a controversy:

When a child is baptized the LORD Himself comes to that child, He Himself sprinkles the water on its head and says very really and personally: *John, Mary, Anna, I, the LORD Himself, baptize you in my Holy Name. You are now of me! ...* That baptism, which has been performed by the LORD, *always remains of power; every day, every hour; until our death, yea to all eternity.* It is essentially so that the Lord continuously baptizes us. After He sprinkled us with water when we were but a few days old, He always keeps, so to speak, that water fresh and living and powerful upon our foreheads. And the Word which He first spoke, He continues to speak through our whole life! Every second Jehovah repeats: *Carl, William, Mary, I baptize you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.* Or, better said, Jehovah does not repeat that Word, He continues to say it. It continuously comes to us, earnestly and graciously out of His heart, in unbroken power ... It should ring in our hearts: *The LORD baptizes us and continues to baptize us from day to day and hour to hour.* He said once and continues to say now from day to day and hour to hour: "I am the LORD your God and you are completely mine."

To us these words come with a strange and disconcerting force; and yet in a very real way they express the heart of what the Liberated Churches had in mind.

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Of primary importance to them in their view of the covenant of grace is the covenant promise, as was indicated by Peter on Pentecost Sunday when he exclaimed, Acts 2:39, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." This is the promise God speaks at baptism as a legal, forensic pronouncement to all believers and to their children, each and every time the sacrament of baptism is administered in the services of the Christian church. And it is the reason why at the moment of baptism the child's parents, after having given expression to their own faith, are required to answer by oath the question, "Whether you promise and intend to see these children, when come to the years of discretion (whereof you are either parent or witness), instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power?" Henceforth that child who is being baptized is to be brought up in the awareness of the Word of God, with all of the rich and wonderful promises which it contains.

This promise begins with that most basic of covenant promises given to Abraham in Genesis 17:7, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee," and extends through all of the rich and beautiful variations on it which are found throughout all of the pages of Scripture, and which are summarized in the baptismal form:

For when we are baptized in the name of the Father, God the Father witnesseth and sealeth unto us, that he doth make an eternal covenant of grace with us, and adopts us for his children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing, and

avert all evil or turn it to our profit. And when we are baptized in the name of the Son, the Son sealeth unto us, that he doth wash us in his blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of his death and resurrection, so that we are freed from all our sins, and accounted righteous before God. In like manner, when we are baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost assures us, by this holy sacrament, that he will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us, that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins, and the daily renewing of our lives, till we shall finally be presented without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

To the Liberated mind, these promises become the lawful possession of every baptized person, and their integrity must never be compromised, as has been so often done.

This they see as having been done, for example, in the very negative and dangerous practice followed by the Netherlands Reformed Congregations, with their concept of a kind of presupposed un-regeneration. In their practice, baptized children are told that the promises of the Baptism Form and of Scripture are not theirs unless and until they have received a clear and demonstrable experience of conversion and are brought into the grace of God. Then only do they become true participants in the covenant of God; and only then would its promises have positive application to them. But even more prominent in the minds of the Liberated people was the Reformed (*Gereformeerde*) Churches from which they had been cast out, with their doctrine of presupposed regeneration. Promoted particularly by Abraham Kuyper, this doctrine held that, although the covenant in the full sense of the word could only be with elect people, it is to be presupposed that this is true of every child born in the church. This presupposition provides the

grounds upon which the baptism of children of believers may be administered. In fact, Kuyper had gone so far as to claim that this presupposition is to be maintained throughout each person's life, even when he shows no signs of spirituality, for regeneration may lie dormant in him to the very end. It was this view, the Liberated maintained (and in large part Hoeksema agreed with them), that was behind the very evident spiritual deadness that was spreading through the Dutch Reformed churches everywhere, and against which Klaas Schilder felt driven to speak out forcefully in all that he did. Salvation was being taken for granted, with little more being suggested than that everyone look within himself for some indication as to whether or not he is elect.

And so it was that very early in his career Schilder came to place a great emphasis on what he considered to be a clear reality throughout the Word of God, the fact that the promises of Scripture are always accompanied by complementary statements of demand and responsibility. The covenant, after all, is a relationship established by God with his rational, moral creatures, and, accordingly, as the Baptism Form says, always consists of two parts:

Whereas in all covenants, there are contained two parts: therefore are we by God through baptism, admonished of, and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that we trust in him, and love him with all our hearts, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life.

God acts; and man is required to respond. This is his side of the covenant, and his legal responsibility before God, just as any child in a family, while holding the rights of an heir, also bears the duties and

responsibilities which belong to that home within which he has his place.

This we find throughout the Scriptures. Even as the wonderful and rich promises of God are often spoken of, they are always accompanied with statements of the responsibilities which come to those who receive them. When God said, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7), He also went on to add, in verse 9, "Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations." This, to the Liberated mind, is not a mere prediction, it is God's demand as to how those who receive the covenant are thereupon required to live. And so it continues as one goes on through God's Word, promises are always joined to statements of responsibility and demand. When Israel was brought into the promised, covenant land, at the very entrance to Canaan they were brought to those two mountains of which Moses already had spoken in Deuteronomy 11:29: "And it shall come to pass, when the LORD thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal." The two stand over against each other as the expression of the covenant of God, even as noted in Exodus 24:7, the record of the commandments of God was called "the book of the covenant." It is within this framework that the covenant is always found.

If, therefore, we would bring this into more immediate focus, as it applies to each child born and baptized within the church of God, we must make it perfectly clear that the promises of the covenant are never to be taken for granted. Election and regeneration are not things to be simply presumed, or

determined by introspection. Christian life is one of response to God in recognition of and obedience to what He demands, as James said, "faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17).

But there is still more. Not only does God command, He accompanies that command with warnings and threats. Life is not just a matter of believing or not believing, obeying or not obeying. There is a great danger in rejecting the word of God; and the Scriptures throughout make this clear. From Genesis to Revelation God thunders against sin, with those same thunderings which drove Israel back in fear from the foot of Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:18). Such warnings go on through all of the prophets, and through Jesus Himself when He cried, "But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you" (Matt. 11:22). It is a terrible thing to reject God's promises and demands given at baptism. To do so is to become a covenant-breaker, against which every person raised in the church is to be warned again and again. It is that terrible sin from which in the end there is no forgiveness (Heb. 6:4-6).

This in brief summary is, as we see it, the Liberated view of the covenant, there are however a few things that should be added.

In the first place, this view of the covenant, as the Liberated see it, is not to be complicated by introducing the idea of election and reprobation into it. And this is meant in a very practical way. That is to say, when children are born and raised in the covenant, they are not to be told to think of that privilege in terms of whether they are themselves elect or not, so as to lead them to believe that some, like themselves, who have been baptized are elect, and some are not, and there is nothing they can do about it. Each baptized child is to be assured that he has been given the promises of God,

and he should focus his attention, not on the question of his personal predestination, but on the need for him to believe and live in the responsibilities God brings to him in the covenant of grace, confident that those who do so will certainly be received of him.

And the second thing is that these responsibilities are not given in the supposition that anyone can meet these of himself. Faith remains a gift of God, and obedience can come only as a gift of grace from him. God gives the power, and in the end He does so according to his own good pleasure to whom He wills. He knows whom He has chosen; and He will give His grace when and how He determines He will. But this, while recognized, is to be left in His hand, with the emphasis in covenant life placed on our responsibility to believe and live as unto Him.

This, as I see it, and as sympathetically put as possible, is what the Liberated have in mind when they speak of the covenant of grace. I have sent a copy of it for review to two friends who are capable theologians, and essentially followers of Schilder's covenant view; and they assure me that it is a fair and accurate presentation. Actually, there is much in it with which we would agree — except for this, that that is not what the Scriptures present as the covenant of grace, and that it leads to some serious errors. But to that we must return later on. □

REMEMBER:
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Love Waxing Cold

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

Matthew 24:12.

It is significant that in the twentieth century remarkable changes have taken place, inventions and discoveries have been made, which stagger the imagination.

Horse and buggy have been replaced by the automobile. When the first auto made its appearance it was commonly thought that this would never be serviceable, because there would not be sufficient gasoline to fill the need. Today, cars have become an indispensable means of transportation for every family. Steam locomotives have been replaced by diesel engines that are capable of hauling a hundred or more cars of freight.

Homes which once received their light from kerosene lamps are now lit by the power of electricity. In fact, the discovery of the power of electricity has opened the way for many modern inventions which serve many purposes in the home and in public buildings. The power need be shut off for only a short time for us to realize what an important part electricity plays in our lives.

When the radio first appeared we listened with amazement to the scratchy voice or music that came to us from a station a few miles away. Today there are innumerable stations sending messages all

over the world. In fact, the radio has been virtually replaced by the television set, which is found in almost every home and keeps us informed with all the news of the day from every part of the world. The telephone, which was in its infancy in the early part of this century, now transmits messages by satellite. A voice that is thousands of miles away can be heard as if the other party were right in the room with us.

Slates and pencils had their day when pen and paper were introduced, soon to be followed by the manual and then the electric typewriter. Now the computer plays an important role in our lives, even to the extent that our daily existence begins to depend upon it. Predictions are made that the micro-disc will accomplish things far beyond our imagination.

Automation has already brought about phenomenal changes in our homes, churches, and business places. Our grandparents never knew the conveniences we now take for granted, such as running water, the refrigerator, gas and electric stoves, and air conditioning. Today we wonder how they managed without them.

We begin only in a small way to understand why the Lord waited until this twentieth century to give man the ability to discover and invent that which we now take for granted.

One thing is certain, all this development, along with our present affluence, has brought about an extremely rapid development of sin. Today there are many more means and opportunities to sin than ever

before. This is evident from the evils that have resulted from the automobile, the radio, the television, and now the computer. Sin has also come far more out in the open. Evils that were committed in secret, because they were still looked upon with disapproval, are now openly committed and condoned by the general public. God is not in all their thoughts. His commandments are transgressed in the slums, but also among those in positions of authority; among adults, but also among young people and teenagers.

The Word of our Lord that "iniquity shall abound" is being fulfilled. Literally we read that *lawlessness* shall abound. Lawlessness certainly characterizes the times in which we live. God's law is deliberately trodden underfoot. That law is no longer the standard of right and wrong, righteousness or unrighteousness. Those in authority, as well as judges, jurors, and lawyers, are swayed by public sentiment, the consensus of the majority of the people. They are men-pleasers, rather than servants of God.

Even the church has fallen victim to the lawlessness of our times. To a great extent Christianity has become idol worship. God is regarded as a servant of mankind, awaiting and granting our requests for anything we might desire. He sends only "good gifts" to mankind. Storms, floods, and all other disasters do not come to us from His hand, but are rather freaks of nature which must be overcome. A good God would not send such evils upon us.

Many regard God as a god of

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love, who is willing and eager to save the whole human race. He stretches out His hand with earnest pleadings, but He cannot save us unless we by our own volition grasp that hand. All the gifts of salvation are available to us, except faith. We, on our part, must show our willingness to be saved.

Some even maintain that salvation is possible outside of Christ, even for those who reject Him. Serious-minded Muslims, Hindus, and Jews are also saved. And there are those who maintain that, while there is a temporary place of punishment, no one remains in hell forever, for ultimately all mankind is saved.

I need but remind you that profanity, once frowned upon, at least in public places, has become so common that it passes almost unnoticed. Sabbath observance is increasingly neglected. Shopping centers and factories carry on as usual. Stores do their largest business on that day.

Maybe one of the root evils in our time is the neglect of the family. The struggle for equality among the sexes, working mothers, all our modern conveniences, ever-increasing busyness — all these have had a profound effect on family life. Rarely is the entire family quietly enjoying each other's fellowship at home, much less at meals. Authority and obedience, instruction and training have gone by the wayside. Parents are not aware of where their children are or what they are doing. The children become defiant and delinquent. There is something radically wrong when teenagers can and do carry guns and knives to school.

The murder of unborn and unwanted babies has run into the millions. Our daily news reports give numerous accounts of murder, committed even by teenagers and occasionally by small children. Who ever heard of school halls being monitored to prevent the sneaking in of murder weapons?

Many formerly peaceful communities have become centers of drug dealings and crime, unsafe to pass through either by day or by night. Because of crowded jails, criminals run loose to endanger the lives of others.

Fornication and adultery are openly committed and condoned. There is an increasingly large number of single-parent homes. Divorce and remarriage have become a common practice, even to the extent that churches allow it. Though Scripture clearly condemns it, homosexuality finds common approval. And sex outside of marriage is virtually encouraged by making contraceptives available to teenagers.

Lotteries, gambling of all sorts, have become an exciting venture. The love of money accounts for all kinds of evil, such as theft, lying, cheating, backbiting, and slander. The evil tongue is a world of iniquity which is growing more powerful as the end approaches.

All this is a clear sign that the Man of Sin (literally, the man of lawlessness) is coming to his full power.

Jesus warns us that the result of this abounding wickedness is that the love of many waxes cold.

Our first reaction might very well be to think that this is not true today. For the fact is that there is more emphasis on *love* today than ever before, not only in the world, but also in the church. Much of the preaching and teaching is centered in love, loving one another in the home and in the church, loving our neighbor, loving all men. It is even emphasized that God loves all mankind with an earnest desire to save all. And all this is stressed at the expense of God's justice, righteousness, and holiness.

The love that Jesus is speaking of here is not a mere outward expression of affection, but the love of God. It is the love that fills the heart of God and is spread abroad into the hearts of His people. Thereby we love God, and we love

the neighbor for God's sake. That is much richer than the mere human affection which is so strongly advocated in our day.

Our Lord speaks of the love of many waxing cold. Literally the text says that the love of many is being blown cold. Breezes of chilling false doctrines sweep into the church. Drafts of worldly-mindedness waft through the congregation. The increasing lawlessness in the environment has its evil effect upon the members of the flock.

These gentle, almost unnoticed breezes grow stronger as Satan and his followers increase their attack upon the church in order to wipe out God's cause from the face of the earth. They appeal strongly to the flesh, and therefore they appeal especially to the carnal element. As these pleasing breezes increase, they become more appealing and more commonly accepted.

Sound doctrinal preaching is sorely lacking. All the emphasis is no longer placed upon God, but upon man, upon public appeal, and upon external growth. The sacraments are offered to all who care to partake. Christian discipline is no longer exercised. All sorts of compromise are made to make the preaching appealing to all who can be drawn into the church.

The love of many waxes cold. Since they lack knowledge, they object to sound doctrine from the pulpit because it does not appeal to them. Sunday services are not worship services to glorify our God, but places of entertainment. People come to enjoy themselves, be aroused to enthusiasm, excited not edified. Therefore many attend church only once on the Sabbath, and complain that they must listen to a long, dry discourse from the minister. Being ignorant of the truth of Scripture they also become lax in their daily life. Scripture no longer has a prominent place in their homes. There is no time for family worship. More time is spent enjoying the sports and other entertainment of the world.

Complacency turns into apathy, apathy becomes hostility. Even though at one time many faithfully attended the public worship, and even made confession of their faith, they now turn against all that is holy. They are cold, lifeless, enemies of God and His Christ.

Paul warns us in his second epistle to Timothy: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady,

highminded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (II Tim. 3:1-5).

No, there will be no hypocrites in the church in those last days in which Antichrist reigns. Everyone will speak of "love" more than ever before. Everyone will "love" one another as together they enjoy the luxuries and bounties offered to them by the Beast, since together they bow in deep devotion and worship before him. The faithful believers will be despised, hated, put in prison, and killed. God and His cause must be wiped out from the face of the earth.

It does not take long for a

church that falls into error to become an apostatizing church, and soon apostate, ready for the final judgment. Jesus warns us: Beware, be alert, be on your guard. Hold that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown!

At the same time He comforts and encourages His church with the assurance that the white horse and its rider are going forth conquering. The gospel is being spread to the ends of the earth, especially now, it seems, in the Orient. God's church is being gathered from the ends of the earth, His kingdom is coming, His name is glorified.

The crown awaits us! The Lord is coming speedily! □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

A recent bulletin from the Randolph, WI PRC reminded me again how our Heavenly Father continues to build His church — how He uses even lectures sponsored by various congregations to spread His truth virtually around the world.

Such appears to be the case with a recent lecture sponsored by Randolph's Evangelism Committee. Prof. D. Engelsma spoke on March 19 on the subject, "The Return of Christ and Y2K." Apparently a tape of this lecture was sent to interested contacts in the Philippines and they wrote back: "Thank you very much for the tape. It was very enlightening to us. I'm sending the tape to my friends who are equally interested in the truth being exposed by your Church." It should make us all extremely thankful and humble that God can and does use our weak sinful efforts to gather His church.

The Evangelism Societies of First and Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI recently sponsored a very worthwhile and informative lecture at First. Rev. Dale Kuiper, pastor of Southeast PRC, spoke on the subject, "The Christian and Entertainment."

That same evening, April 22, the Evangelism Committee of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC hosted a spring lecture at their church. Rev. R. Cammenga, pastor of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, spoke on the topic of "Angels."

Mission Activities

Rev. A. Spriensma, pastor of the Grandville, MI PRC, returned home safely from Wales in late April. He had been in Wales for six weeks doing some work on behalf of our Domestic Mission Committee among contacts there.

Rev. Moore planned to be in our Lynden, WA PRC on Sunday, May 2. After leading the evening worship service, he intended to give the Lynden congregation the opportunity to hear and ask questions about the preparations for the mission work in Ghana. After that

Sunday, Rev. and Mrs. Moore planned to continue to work their way to the Chicago, IL and Grand Rapids, MI areas to preach and give more informational presentations to our other congregations during the month of May.

You may also remember that our synod requested sending volunteers as helpers to our missionary in Ghana. The Foreign Mission Committee has now confirmed sending John and Judy Bouma, members of the Grandville, MI PRC, as assistants in Ghana.

Denomination Activities

The Ladies' Spring League Meeting, made up of ladies from the Doon and Hull, IA and the Edgerton, MN PRCs was held on April 21 in the Doon PRC. Rev. R. Smit, pastor at Doon, spoke on the topic, "Joy in Joppa," based on Acts 10:32-43.

The Adult Bible Society of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL invited members from the Adult Bible Societies of the South Holland, IL PRC and the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL to meet with them on April 27 for a discussion on Peter's sermon

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

after Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2:14-40.

Members of the Senior and Junior Mr. & Mrs. and Adult Bible Societies in the Grand Rapids, MI area were invited to the Grace PRC in Standale, MI on April 20 to hear Candidate N. Brummel speak on "Reformed but Always Reforming."

Congregation Activities

In mid-April, members of the Lynden, WA PRC were invited to spend an evening with the members of the Christian Health Care Center and sing some Psalms, something that is always very spiri-

tually rewarding and comforting.

This past Lenten season, many of our congregations were able to enjoy concerts of sacred music sung or played by different groups from our churches. One such event was the singing of an Easter cantata entitled, "Hallelujah, What a Savior," sung by the choir of the Randolph, WI PRC.

School Activities

June means that school is already over, or soon will be, for some of our younger readers. If you are in one of those select groups who graduate this spring, we certainly want to extend to you our sincere

congratulations.

I was reminded recently of perhaps one benefit of our Christian schools that may often be overlooked. You make good Christian friends at school, and perhaps these friends, made when you are young, will be your friends for life. If that is true for you, as it was for me and my wife, then you will be truly blessed.

Good Christian friends are indeed a fruit of your Christian education.

Food For Thought

"The intellect of the wise is like glass; it admits the light of heaven and reflects it." □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TEACHER NEEDED

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.

NOTICE

Synod of the PRC will convene in First PRC of Holland, Michigan on Tuesday, June 8. The Pre-Synodical Service will be held in the sanctuary of First PRC (Holland) on Monday, June 7, beginning at 7:30 P.M.

NOTICE

The Association for Protestant Reformed Secondary Education, in Lansing, IL, is seeking experienced educators willing to work on a consultancy basis during the summer of 1999. The work involves the further development of curriculum, policies, and other items relating to the establishment of a Protestant Reformed high school in the area, D.V., the fall of 2000. For particulars, contact Education Committee Chairman, Barry Warner at (219) 322-9773 [barry.warner@henkel-americas.com] or Board Chairman, Don Terpstra at (219) 838-3600 [dwterp@juno.com].

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On June 10, 1999, our parents and grandparents,

THEODORE and THERESA LOOYENGA, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We are thankful for the years our faithful Father has given them. We pray that God may continue to bless them in their marriage in the years to come.

- * Joe and Mary Brummel
- * Randy and Pat McCullough
- * Larry and Kathy Looyenga
- * Robert and Kathy Looyenga
- * Randall and Lindy Looyenga
- * Nancy Feenstra
- * Douglas and Melissa Looyenga
- * Mark and Sara Looyenga
- * Pat and Karen Witherell
- 27 grandchildren
- 1 great-grandchild
- 1 granddaughter in glory

Grand Rapids, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With much gratitude to God we express congratulations to our parents and grandparents,

JOE and BEA MEYER,

who celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on June 1, 1999. We thank them for their godly example, instruction, care, and love. What a blessing they have been to us. May He continue to bless and keep them in His care.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments" (Psalm 103:17, 18).

- * John and Mary Meyer
- Janice, Joe, Shirlene, Andy, Glenda, Donald, Karen, John, Robert, Pamela, Curt, Neal
- * Neil and Connie Meyer
- Annette, Chris, Ben, Jennelle, Tabitha
- * Vic and Helen Paladini
- * Al and Alice Kaptein
- Tom, Michelle, Terry, Todd, Melinda, Melissa
- * Randy and Connie Maycroft
- Kelly, Ellen, Susan

Grand Rapids, Michigan