



**A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine**

# ***The Standard Bearer***

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**Vol. 76, No. 3  
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# Remember and Obey

*And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years. Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee. Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways and to fear him.*

Deuteronomy 8:3-6

**W**e live in days of tremendous prosperity. While there remain areas of the world where there is still great poverty, those living in North America enjoy the good things of this life like none of their forefathers ever did. Witness the size of the homes in which we live in comparison to those in which our

grandparents were raised. Witness the number of restaurants in every city and town. Witness the amount of time and energy devoted to recreation. Electricity is not a luxury, but a necessity. It is thought that a vehicle is needed for everyone with a driver's license. Almost every house has in its cupboards and freezers not just daily bread, but supplies for a week or more.

When the children of Israel entered the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, their situation and experience was similar. They were able to move into houses already built and furnished. The cupboards in these houses were stocked. These houses were

on plots of land which had on them already mature vineyards. They had everything. They were rich!

With great prosperity comes dangers. The greatest danger is that we forget God and our need of Him. We have everything! We do not really need anything — not even God. We do not say it openly, but we surely can easily act that way. The wise man of Proverbs 30 saw this as the danger of being rich: "Lest I be full and deny thee, and say, 'Who is the LORD?'" Listen to Moses' warning later in this chapter. "Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God.... Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought

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thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deut. 8:11,14).

For Israel the danger of forgetting God was real because their experience of the contrast between having nothing to having everything was so sudden. The prosperity which was theirs in the land of Canaan was in sharp contrast to what they experienced during the previous forty years in the wilderness. During those forty years in the wilderness they lived literally from one day to the next. God "suffered thee to hunger and fed thee with manna." They lived on the brink of starvation. Six out of seven nights they went to bed without food for the next day. There was nothing between them and starvation — except God. Except God's promised faithfulness. Every day God had to provide them with bread miraculously for that day or they would be without.

We also must live in the realization that we have nothing on which to depend, but God's great and wonderful grace.

Deuteronomy 8 is part of Moses' final address to Israel just before he died and just before they entered Canaan. Moses had just given great encouragements to Israel for entering Canaan, namely, God would go with them and fight for them. Now Moses is concerned about how they would conduct themselves toward God once they are settled in Canaan. He does not want them to forget. So he encouraged them to remember how well God cared for them in the wilderness. God's purposeful care in the past encourages us for the present (obey) and future (confident trust).

### God's Past Provision

God purposefully led His people through the wilderness. It was no mistake. He deliberately led them in the most difficult way. It was in this way that the divine Instructor would best teach them concerning His marvelous grace. The best setting for learning God's

amazing grace is in the way of the impossible situation: forty years in the wilderness.

God's purpose was twofold. First, to prove or to test them (Deut. 8:16; 13:3; Gen. 22:1; Ex. 16:4; Judges 2:22), that is, to make manifest what is in their hearts. Second, to teach them where their confidence must be. The same is true for the afflictions God puts us through. He wants to prove us, that is, to show us what is in our hearts. And He desires to teach us where our strength lies. Constantly we must learn that we cannot be sustained only by earthly things, the things below. Rather we need to learn to live "by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD." We constantly need the Word of God's grace and love. "The lovingkindness of my God is more than life to me."

God sustained Israel with something not familiar to them: manna, which "they did not know nor their fathers." Their daily sustenance was not the normal or the usual. It was not something they could work at or make happen. Israel's food came from heaven.

We too live on heavenly food. By nature we do not know what it is to be sustained by the flesh and blood of Christ. To live on the promises of God's Word is to live in a way concerning which we cannot tell "whence it cometh and whither it goeth." The life of every believer is an on-going miracle, that is, being kept alive in the midst of death. Further, to be blest to live on the Word of God is not only to live, but also to live forever. To eat earthly bread is to receive temporary nourishment, but the eater always dies eventually. But to feed on Christ is to eat spiritual food and to become immortal; the food transforms us.

Though the manna had to come every day, it was always sufficient. Concerning earthly food we might need different amounts, but there

was always enough manna. So every believer has always been given sufficient grace. Up to this moment God has given all the grace we have needed or presently need. He provides grace day by day. "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16).

Moses showed Israel how well God had provided for them in the wilderness. God provided continued care for their bodies. "Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these

forty years." Their clothing did not wear out. It was as good when they entered Canaan as when they left Egypt forty years earlier. Our attempts to clothe ourselves always

fail. Physically, our clothing wears out or becomes quickly old-fashioned. Spiritually, every effort we make to cover our nakedness fails, as it did with Adam's fig leaves. God provides the covering of the righteousness of Christ, and it never wears out. Christ's righteousness hides our sinful nakedness from God and from ourselves. We must wrap ourselves in the promises of God's Word, which are the same today as when they were originally given. There is not a stale promise of God or a worn-out doctrine.

A swollen foot is a common ailment in the hot desert. However, walking was never a painful experience for Israel. For forty years they walked without pain. Though they lived in a weary land, their strength did not fail. Many times our feet are almost gone and our steps well nigh slipped (Ps. 73:2). Yet our feet are kept on the way by Him whose preservation fails not. Those who walk with God shall never grow weary (Is. 40:31).

### God's Lessons

Moses wanted Israel, just before they entered Canaan, to "consider in thine heart, that ... the LORD thy God chasteneth thee" in the wilderness.

*There  
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and starvation  
— except  
God.*

There must be time taken to ponder and consider. Unswollen feet, garments which never wore out, and food given daily from heaven are all of little value unless we purposefully stop and consider. We must meditate in our hearts, that is, give our deepest thoughts to it.

Meditation discovers the hand of our heavenly Father accomplishing high purposes and achieving great goals. First, see in troubling events not fate or the weather or other humans, but the hand of the almighty God. See the sovereign control of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will. See a God who is never out of control. Realize that He is always guiding by His determinate counsel and His sovereign providence. See Him who works all things together for good.

Second, realize that the difficult times are the activity of the almighty and wise heavenly Father who is chastening His children. "As a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee." Our chastisement is a sign of divine childhood — an evidence of His love. We must accept it in the spirit of children and not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when we are corrected.

Great benefit is derived from the furnace of affliction, as well as from the pleasures of prosperity. Affliction shows us God in a rich and wonderful way. It does it by making us stop in our rush through this life and forcing us to consider. Presently God is trying us with great prosperity. Prosperity, too, is a testing. But affliction has a way of giving us pause when we would be normally rushing from one earthly thing to the next. It forces us to stop taking everything for granted. A miscarriage makes us realize that we may never think that everything will be all right. A traffic accident can suddenly change our priorities for a day or longer. The discovery of cancer powerfully stops us in our often

mad pursuit of the pleasures of this life.

There are things which God wants to accomplish through the means of our considering at those times when the heavenly Father chastens us.

The chief lesson to be learned is that God is humbling us. "He humbled thee." To be humble is literally to till the ground or to cultivate, and then this word means to afflict or depress. God taught Israel humility in the way of taking from them their normal daily supply. Nothing humbles man so much as when he is in need of food and drink, with no obvious supply. The Israelites were reduced to the most abject condition, broken by the most urgent wants. It was through this struggle that they learned humility. The road to humility is paved with suffering, sacrifice, and self-denial.

Not that all suffering guarantees humility. Outside of a relationship with God, it causes bitterness. But those who see their suffering from an eternal perspective, from within the context of God and His gospel, learn to cast themselves on the Lord. They learn that men are but grass. Such a perspective erodes our pride and keeps us humble. The position of want brought Israel great blessing. A man who is not hungry cannot be fed, and if fed he will not be as grateful as a hungry man. Being hungry puts us in the position of looking for (urgently so) God's help. There is room for mercy where there is misery; for grace where there is ugliness. If Israel had the corn of Egypt, they would have missed getting the manna from heaven — angels' food (Ps. 78:25).

Sometimes we look for comfort and find none, and instead find only fresh cause to despair. This is God's way of driving us from

ourselves, so He can reveal the extent of His care and love. We lose our self-confidence and carnal security, so we can have confidence in Christ instead. Brought low and made to see the depravity of our hearts and weakness of our faith, we learn to look up.

### God's Purposes

First and foremost, we must learn to live by God's Word of grace, not only earthly food. We need every word that proceeds from Jehovah. Jesus quoted this when tempted by Satan (Matt. 4:4).

Second, just keep obeying, loving Him with your all and doing what He commands. The constant danger of prosperity is that we forget the Lord our God and do not keep His commandments; that when we have eaten and are full, dwell in our goodly houses, and our silver and gold is multiplied, our hearts are lifted up and we forget our God (cf. Deut. 8:10-17). Continue to fear Him, that is,

rightly know Him, be ever conscious of His presence, and have a constant awareness of what you owe Him. Delivered out of deep distresses, supported under great burdens, forgiven of heinous sins, saved unto so great salvation, are we not so grateful that we will try to be always obedient to our Savior?

Keep His commandments in the home, in relationships, at work, and at play. Search out His Word to learn what He wants you to do. Keep it as you would a treasure, carefully putting it in your heart.

Dwell constantly on what He has done for you (forget it not, but remember), so that the principle of grateful fear is always present within you. □

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# The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the PRC: A Look Back

**N**ext June, God willing, the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) will celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their existence as a denomination of Reformed churches. This celebration ought to be the occasion for remembering our history. In the coming months, the churches might well give special classes in this history, especially for the young people and for those who have joined the churches from without. There is always the danger that a generation arises that does not know the works that God has done for Israel (Judges 2:10). Besides, knowledge of our history reminds us who we are and what our calling is in time to come.

The *Standard Bearer* wants to do its part in helping the PRC celebrate.

In this editorial, let us together look back over our history.

## A Footnote

In the books of church history, the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) is barely a footnote. Most non-Reformed church histories do not mention it. Reformed church historians may mention it, but as the unfortunate history of the error of "hyper-Calvinism."

Also as regards history, we live by faith, not by sight.

To faith, what is important for the church, as for the individual, is not that it receives honor from men. But the church seeks "the

honor that cometh from God only" (John 5:44).

By faith, we are confident that God regards our history differently. Size, the praise of men, reputation among other churches, impact upon society—none of these things counts with Him. Confession of the truth of the gospel counts with Him. The gospel is the doctrine of inspired Scripture that the salvation of sinners is the work of God alone in Jesus Christ by sovereign grace (Rom. 9:16). And the history of the PRC is the history of churches that proclaim and defend the good news of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. None can deny it.

## Cast Out

In the providence of God (which centers on preserving His truth in the world), the PRC began when the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) cast out of its fellowship three of its ministers, their consistories, and their congregations. This happened in the years 1924 and 1925, in Western Michigan.

The PRC did not leave the CRC. They did not want to leave the CRC. The founders pleaded with the CRC, that they be allowed to remain in the CRC, preaching the gospel of sovereign grace and condemning the lie of universal, resistible grace. To no avail!

From the beginning, the PRC have taken the unity of the church with utmost seriousness. In our day, when members are ready to forsake a true church for the slight-

est personal grievance, whether real or imagined, and groups split off from churches for frivolous reasons, it is beneficial that the members of the PRC recognize in their own history reverence for the oneness of God in the unity of the body of Jesus Christ.

The issue in the formation of the PRC was doctrinal. The doctrinal issue concerned the gospel of salvation by grace alone with its end in a walk of holiness. At its synod in 1924, the CRC adopted a doctrine of "common grace." The doctrine has three distinct "points." The first makes the grace of God universal to every human. Its main thrust is to affirm that the good gifts of providence—rain, sunshine, health, riches, and the like—are grace to the reprobate ungodly. But it also teaches that the grace of God in the preaching of the gospel is universal. In the gospel, God is gracious to all, desiring, or willing, the salvation of every sinner who hears the good news.

The second point declares that God's common grace works within unregenerated and unbelieving people to keep them from becoming totally depraved. By this "restraint of sin" by an operation of the Holy Spirit within them, they are partially good, possessing all kinds of abilities for good.

The third point ascribes good works to the ungodly. Not only does common grace keep them from total depravity, it also operates positively to produce a truly good culture outside of Christ. This work of grace in the world of

the ungodly is proposed as the ground for the church's friendly cooperation with the unbelieving world for the further improvement of culture.

The CRC made this binding dogma in its communion. Those ministers and consistories that could not in good conscience before God subscribe to this doctrine were deposed by CR classes. Their congregations were summarily banished from the CRC. Thus began the PRC as a separate Reformed denomination of churches.

At their origin, the PRC were small and despised. They began with only three churches and ministers. One of the larger churches abandoned them almost at once. In part because of the name and influence of the CRC among Reformed and Presbyterian churches in those days, all Reformed and Presbyterian churches held the PRC in contempt. Sixty years later, older PR ministers would still speak of this as an especially painful and difficult aspect of their ministry. Of the PRC, as of Jerusalem at her birth, it was true: "As for thy nativity ... none eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born" (Ezek. 16:4, 5).

Adding to the struggle for their very existence was the great depression that followed almost at once in the 1930s.

Nevertheless, the churches organized themselves as a denomination of Reformed churches according to the Church Order of Dordt. They exerted themselves mightily to live a full church life: seminary; missions; witness by magazine, radio, pamphlets, and books; and a young people's federation.

In the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, the denomination grew both internally and by the addition of churches throughout the United States.

## Through Fire and Water

The early 1950s brought a sharp doctrinal controversy to the PRC, resulting in the leaving of more than half of the people and ministers. A few years later, those who left returned to the CRC. The issue again was the gospel of salvation by sovereign, particular grace. But the reference this time was to the covenant of God with the children of believers as signified and sealed in the baptism of infants. Under the influence of theologians in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"), ministers in the PRC introduced the doctrine of a gracious, but conditional, promise of salvation to all the children of believers. God on His part is gracious in Christ to all the infants and desires to save them all. By baptism He graciously promises salvation to all. The promise, however, is conditional for its fulfillment, depending upon the child's performance of the condition of faith.

The PRC settled the divisive controversy by synodically adopting an important document called "The Declaration of Principles." This "Declaration" demonstrates that the Reformed confessions teach an unconditional covenant with the elect in Christ, to whom alone is the promise of the covenant. Grace in the covenant is sovereign and particular, just as it is on the mission field. Faith is not a condition upon which salvation depends, but the gift of God to His chosen people (Canons, I, Rejection of Errors/3; III, IV/14).

God preserved the PRC through those troubled times when it seemed that the churches might be destroyed. "For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.... Thou hast caused men to ride over our

heads; we went through fire and through water" (Ps. 66:10-12).

## Modern Reformation

This history relates a genuine reformation of Christ's church. The PRC are not a mere reaction against certain moral evils in the CRC, e.g., unfit officebearers. God's work in the history of the PRC is the defense and development of the gospel of sovereign grace.

The PRC do represent the true continuation of the pre-1924 CRC. Such an astute observer as the CR philosopher and educator William Harry Jellema, who himself lived through the controversy over common grace as a student at Calvin College, admitted as much. Before a room full of his philosophy students and his wife, Dr. Jellema told me that in 1924 Herman Hoeksema represented the theology of 75% of the CRC, whereas only 25% of the membership of the church was actually in agreement with the theology of the decision on common grace. "Today," he added (speaking in 1960), "the percentages are reversed."

Opposition by the founding fathers of the PRC to the doctrine of common grace as adopted by the CRC in 1924 was a defense of creedal Reformed Christianity in the face of radical apostasy. The "Three Points of Common Grace" denied the sovereignty of God's grace in Jesus Christ in the gospel; gutted the doctrine of total depravity; compromised the spiritual separation between the elect church and the reprobate world (the "antithesis"); blessed the ungodly in time, while cursing the righteous; and subverted the grand purpose of God in history. The common

grace decision set the CRC on a new and fatal course. That course led infallibly toward universalism and world-conformity, as the PRC

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warned from the beginning and as subsequent history proved and is proving.

Lending significance to the struggle, and urgency to the calling of the PRC, is the fact that many, if not most, of "conservative" Reformed and Presbyterian churches share the common grace theology of the CRC. In their repudiation of common grace, the PRC stand virtually alone.

We protest!

Their internal struggle in the early 1950s for an unconditional covenant and a particular covenant promise was simply the maintenance by the PRC of the truth of sovereign grace, but now in the sphere of the covenant. On the mission field, God is gracious only to some in the preaching of the gospel. In the sphere of the covenant, God is gracious only to Jacob in the administration of circumcision (baptism). Grace in the gospel and in the sacraments, whether as favorable attitude or as spiritual power, is determined by eternal predestination (Acts 13:48; Rom. 9).

### Development of Doctrine

As a genuine reformation, the history of the PRC is also *development* of the truth of sovereign grace. Ecclesiastical reaction merely rejects an error, usually an error of life or practice, while holding on to the old way of life that was threatened. Church reformation, by contrast, occasioned by heresy, contends for the gospel. It purges the false doctrine, root and branch. It certainly confesses the doctrine of grace that had been corrupted. But reformation does more. It confesses that truth more purely, clearly, and sharply than the church had done before. And it *develops* the truth more fully in connection with the entire system of sovereign grace, indeed, in connection with the whole body of Christian doctrine and life.

The PRC have been concerned with the development of doctrine from the beginning of their history.

Explaining the denomination's name in his *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, Herman Hoeksema wrote in 1936:

By this name the churches meant to express that they stand on the basis of the Reformed Churches of the Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, officially adopt the Reformed Standards as their basis of unity and are devoted to the maintenance *and positive development of the Reformed truth as embodied in those Standards* (emphasis added).

In the PRC, Dordt's teaching of particular (and, therefore, sovereign) grace in the preaching, against the Arminian error of common grace, has been sharpened and clarified.

The Reformed faith's fundamental doctrine of the particularity of grace has been applied to the sphere of the covenant with believers and their children.

In connection with their defense of particular, sovereign grace in the covenant, the PRC have significantly developed the doctrine of the covenant. They have come to see the covenant of grace as God's vibrant bond of loving friendship with Christ as head of the elect church and in Him with the church as a body and with each member personally. In light of the covenant of grace as fellowship, they see the triune life of God as essentially communion. The life of the Christian, accordingly, is friendship with God. This friendship necessarily requires separation from and hostility toward the ungodly world, enemies of God. Thus, both church and members are guarded against the worldliness now engulfing many churches and professing Christians. There is special—and timely!—practical application of the truth of the covenant to Christian marriage and the Reformed family.

The PRC are bound "to teach and faithfully to defend" the doctrine of sovereign grace by virtue

of their commitment to the Reformed creeds. As a truly Reformed denomination, the PRC are confessional. They believe and confess all the doctrines contained in the ecumenical and Reformed creeds. All officebearers swear to this publicly at their ordination and installation. All members are bound to the creeds by baptism. The only way to the Lord's Supper in the PRC is that of public declaration of adherence to the creeds: "confession of the Reformed religion," in the words of Article 61 of the Church Order of Dordt.

### Numbers

As for numbers, in which everyone has an interest, the PRC have always had a healthy fear of David's sin of numbering the people. I can hear Herman Hoeksema growl, "You don't measure the church by the pound." In the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary book of the denomination, he wrote: "We must not expect to become great in number. For therein does not lie our strength. But rather must we insist on the maintenance of the truth which God has entrusted to our care."

The PRC live in the consciousness of the reality of the "remnant" in both Scripture and church history.

There is truth in the gibe of that enemy of Calvinism, G. K. Chesterton: "... the thought of the Calvinist that the host of God should be thinned rather than thronged; that Gideon must reject soldiers rather than recruit them" ("Shaw, the Philosopher").

This having been said, we are still interested in numbers.

At their beginning as a union of combined consistories under the temporary name, *Protesting Christian Reformed Churches*, on March 6, 1925, the PRC consisted of three churches, three ministers, some 675 families, and between 2,000 and 2,500 people. Before the churches could be properly organized, in 1926, one of the ministers had al-

ready jumped ship with his church of some 200 families and 1,000 people.

At the brink of the schism of 1953, the PRC had grown to 24 churches, 28 ministers, almost 1,400 families, and slightly more than 6,000 members.

The schism reduced the denomination to 16 churches, 14 ministers, about 560 families, and slightly fewer than 2,400 members.

The 1999 yearbook shows that in the 46 years since the schism the churches have grown to their largest size ever, with 27 congregations, 34 active ministers (including professors in the seminary and missionaries), more than 1,600 families, and more than 6,500 members. May the Lord add to the church such as should be saved!

Looking back over our history,

let us celebrate!

To the churches cast out with loathing in the day that they were born, God said, "Live!" (Ezek. 16:6).

Through the fire and the water, God "brought us out into a wealthy place" (Ps. 66:12).

In our history, "the LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad" (Ps. 126:3). □

— DJE

## All Around Us

## Rev. Gise VanBaren

### ■ Signs of the Times

Our attention has been called repeatedly to the signs of which Scripture speaks, the signs which precede the return of our Lord. Jesus speaks of them in Matthew 24. The book of Revelation details the increase in signs as the end approaches. The news media report regularly on those things which are very really a fulfillment of the prophecies of Holy Scripture. Some of these articles I have been collecting over the past number of years.

From the *Denver Post*, September 3, 1998, appears an article titled, "Wedding bells lose appeal."

She was dealing blackjack when she got pregnant, and Pam Hesse didn't deal herself a very good hand: Turned out the father was sleeping with the woman who threw her baby shower. But it was hard to let go of the dream she'd had for so long.

"When I was growing up I thought, 'I'm going to get married by the time I'm 25 and have two kids and my life is going to be wonderful and that's that,'" said Hesse, who lives in her native Grand Forks, ND.

Five years later, Hesse is 32 and

has Cody and Alec, a second son by another man she calls "just incredible." They share a home and a future, but not a formal vow — just one couple caught up in the seismic shifts taking place in American attitudes toward marriage and child-bearing.

A soon-to-be-released Census Bureau report shows Hesse is far from an exception; in fact, she's in the majority. The report, the bureau's first compilation of all its 60 years of data on childbearing and marriage, finds that for the first time, the majority of "first births" — someone's first child — were either conceived by or born to an unmarried woman. That is up from 18 percent in the 1930's.

The article continues by giving various explanations for all of this. The facts presented and the explanation of these facts are hardly strange and unexpected. Yet there is no reference to Scripture and the fulfillment of the signs of the end of the ages. Scripture has its explanation: "Lawlessness shall abound." One recalls the days of the Judges, when every man "did what was right in his own eyes." The message is loud and clear: the coming of the Lord must be at hand.

### ■ And: Changes in the Church World

Churches are "repackaging themselves to attract wider memberships," according to a *Grand Rapids Press* article late last

year. The article states in part:

When it comes to churches these days, what's not in a name can be more telling than what is.

Take Kentwood Community Church, for example. From the sign outside, no one would guess this Gaines Township church is Wesleyan.

Fair Haven Ministries is a member of the Reformed Church in America, though it might take a visit or a look at church mailings to know that.

And Sunshine Community Church has gone through several name changes — none, however, including the words "Christian Reformed," its denomination.

At a time when Americans' allegiance to long-standing religious institutions is on the wane, a growing number of denominational churches nationwide are repackaging themselves to appeal to a wider audience.

The trend has caught on across many denominations, from the Pentecostal Assemblies of God to the United Methodist Church. Many nondenominational or unaffiliated churches long have embraced more neutral names. The newer trend, however, is largely tied to mainly white, so-called mainline Protestants.

"Everywhere I've been, the healthy churches play down their denomination affiliations," said the Rev. William M. Easum, a Texas-based church consultant....

We have likely all seen these mega-churches. They are located in virtually every major city and

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in many smaller towns in the country. It is true that normally one cannot detect an affiliation to any denomination in the name. If the mega-church is identified with a denomination, one can find it in the "small print" or perhaps not at all in its promotional literature.

The article makes a valid point when it states, "At a time when Americans' allegiance to long-standing religious institutions is on the wane...." How true! We have become a nation containing increasing numbers of "revolving-door Christians." These go out one door of the church in order to enter another. There is little denominational "loyalty." Nor is it a question of the doctrine taught in a church. Doctrine does not matter much today anymore. The question is: Is it entertaining? Is it stimulating? "What do I get out of it?" It is a question of the number of programs available. One must inquire as to the number and qualifications of the staff. There is often little concern about glorifying God or the maintaining of His Word. The thinking is that whatever is new and big is desirable.

It is strange when churches must "repackage" themselves to appeal to "wider audiences." What of that "little flock" which Christ states He will find when He returns?

The different religions draw ever closer together as well. There are those who insist that each religion is simply another way to heaven. There are the attempts to join together denominations that differ greatly in doctrinal beliefs. One reads even of the attempts to bring closer ties between Roman Catholic and the Jewish religion. In the *Chicago Tribune*, April 2, 1999, Cardinal Edward Cassidy, president of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, commented on the attempts to bring these two groups into closer unity. He had some words of criticism, but especially words of promise of closer contact in the future:

"We have seen a revolution, one of the greatest revolutions in the history of religious relations," Cassidy said. "Now we have to see not only how we can consolidate that but how we can move ahead to form a real partnership."

## ■ And: Growing Corruption on the Media

One would think television, radio, videos, etc. could not get any worse. We are, however, alerted to the fact that the worst has not yet been seen. In reviewing the new television season, Richard Huff, *New York Daily News*, writes:

Today, amid scenes of partial nudity and violence, viewers are hearing words that would have been unthinkable just a decade ago....

"The boundaries have been changing and continuously evolving," said Carol Alteri, vice president of program practices for CBS. "People have been desensitized."

There are several reasons for the increased use of blue language on TV, but the primary one, Alteri and others note, is the increasing competition from other media, especially cable TV....

Also, because so many so-called bad words are now used unblinkingly by many people in everyday conversation, they've lost the impact they once had, Thompson said.

"Bad language is like a fossil fuel," he added. "It takes centuries and centuries to build up impact, but once you start using it, it goes pretty quickly."

It's another sign of the nearness of the end of the age. How "desensitized" are we?

## ■ And: Check Out the Return on the Web!

In the *Wall Street Journal* appeared the following:

Cameras broadcasting video live over the Internet have brought

Web surfers images of people's offices, the beach in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and even a coffee pot.

But the Daystar International Ministry, an evangelical Christian group, hopes to use its Webcam to capture something much less mundane: the Second Coming of the Messiah, which many religious groups expect around the turn of the millennium. In preparation, Daystar says it is setting up what it calls a "messiahcam." It is trained on Jerusalem's Eastern Gate to capture the Messiah's entry into the city....

While thousands of the faithful are expected to visit Jerusalem in 2000, Daystar's Web site....is designed for armchair pilgrims who can't be there for the real thing....

But can the Second Coming be captured on-camera? And what would it look like on a 15-inch PC screen?

Darg predicts a glorious sound-and-light show, the sky filled with lightning and the shouts of archangels, "The coming of the Messiah is going to be so spectacular that the world will see it without a camera," she says, though having it right on the screen would allow people to focus their prayers.

Darg says the messiahcam has been set up "in the vicinity of the Mount of Olives," but she would not disclose the precise location, citing security concerns....

Jesus said that when the end approaches, there will be great deceptions. Strange things are going on now. Many seek to prey upon gullible people. We ought to review again the prophecy of Scripture itself. Jesus reminded His disciples and us that the day and hour of His return no man knoweth. But we are to watch and look up, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. I would dare say that no webcam will capture that return. But every eye shall see Him. That will be the culmination of this age and the ushering in of the heavenly kingdom. □

# The Gospel According to Matthew: His Story

(Matthew 1:1-17)

**T**he writing of a history is a most difficult undertaking. The historian spends a great deal of time ascertaining the events and facts of a certain time. He does research. He examines records. He interviews persons closely involved in the matter. The result is a stunning array of facts and figures, relationships, names, persons, and characters. But he cannot take all this raw material and place it in a book in a random order. He must place all of it in the service of a certain thesis, a point that he wants to make. Then he arranges his material with great care, so that it serves this purpose. If the writer does his job well, the reader can take the finished product and understand the history.

A disciple of Jesus Christ, Matthew, faced such a task. As a disciple of Jesus he lived with his Lord, ate and talked with Him. He was witness to the words spoken and the works performed by Christ. He also did research. He ascertained the facts by looking into the genealogical records and the Scriptures of the Old Testament. He spoke with the persons who witnessed the events of Jesus' life before he came on the scene. He had thousands of bits of information before him. When it came time to present these things, he had a clear purpose before him. It was

his purpose to show that the person with whom he lived and walked, ate and drank, whose teachings and works he witnessed, was indeed the Messiah promised by God, the Savior of the world. Indeed, it is the purpose of this gospel account to show that Jesus was the promised king of the Jews. For this reason he begins with these words, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

Though all of that be true, we are forbidden from putting this work of Matthew on a par with the histories of Josephus, Heroditus, Eusebius, Schaff, Pelikan, or Hoeksema. This book is not ultimately Matthew's history, but God's history. God superintended the whole composition of the book. He superintended the life and character of Matthew, making him a fit penman for this His story. He caused Matthew to see and to hear the things he saw and heard. And when Matthew set pen to papyrus to write this gospel, God worked with His human instrument. The result: The Word of God. Holy Scripture. Wholly divine!

This means, as we take up and read this gospel account, we must not place ourselves over it. It does not become our place to critique its words, form, or content. Because it is a word from God, we submit to it. But it also becomes our desire to hear what God has to say to us concerning Jesus Christ. We learn from God Himself what happened, how, and why. We must

also say that the same purpose that Matthew conveys is first of all God's. God demonstrates that this Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, our Lord and Savior.

## The "Other" History

Within this history we are given another history. The opening verses of this gospel present a history of persons, all catalogued and categorized by Matthew. One by one they appear in a line, from Abraham to Christ. Again, we might expect this in any history of a particular person. In most biographies of great men and women, the biographer will go to the parents and grandparents of that individual. He will reach as far back as he can to establish this person in a history of persons. He will show the noble features of the lineage, implying that great things were to be expected from this heritage all along. With Matthew, things are different. He gives no idealized, romantic portraiture of glorious persons, taking the good, and leaving out the bad and ugly. He gives it all.

This different nature leads us to two conclusions. First, as God's history, its accuracy is of great importance. It is not embellished, edited, and redacted, to leave out the sin and to give us characters unblemished and unflawed. Sin and grace are found together. Second, we have presented the important doctrine that even out of sin, God brings forth the greatest result, the fulfillment of the promise. Out of

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this line, warts and all, comes His Christ.

The greatest profit it is to see this. From a human point of view, we would reckon the matter beyond hope. One patriarch follows another into near oblivion. One king follows another into near oblivion. One man follows another, again, into near oblivion, leaving a man unknown, to be reckoned the husband of Mary, the mother of this Jesus of Nazareth. Give the work of describing this history of Abraham's or David's descendants to a historian. All he could see at the end would be a collection of loose threads. Where is the promise of God given to Abraham and David?

But no obscurity with God. When we ascend to the higher view, seeing this as God's history, we see something amazing. It is not Abraham that matters. Nor is it David that matters. Nor Salathiel. It is the Messiah that matters, Jesus of Nazareth. Abraham and his entire lineage is in the service of Christ — from God's point of view, who determines the end from the beginning.

### **Sin and Grace in the Service of Christ**

Such is what makes this history fascinating. All these persons with their characters stand in the service of Christ. We find here the sinners. Notable among them is Manasseh, who placed altars to idols in the temple, sacrificed his sons, and filled Jerusalem with the blood of the saints. His sins are mentioned as the final cause for the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of Judah (II Kings 23:26, 27). Had he held the Christ-child in his arms, he would certainly have killed him. Yet he is found in the book of the generation of Jesus Christ. Here we find Tamar, who gave birth to Phares by her abominable sin with Judah. These, under the wrath of God, were nevertheless used by God in the service of Christ.

We find also the sinful saints. Among them were those who knew the greatness of their sin, and thus the greatness of Jehovah's salvation. David the king, the man after God's own heart, "begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah." Solomon, king after David, with his many foreign wives who led his heart astray. Hezekiah, who vainly boasted of his treasures to the Babylonian embassy. Josiah, proudly marching against Pharaoh-Necho against the commandment of God. Sinners saved by grace. By grace God gave to these the promise, and also gave them faith in the promise.

The enemies and friends of Christ. The reprobate and the elect. With them all God had his plan, to bring the Messiah into the world. How brightly grace shines against the dark backdrop of man's depravity!

### **God's Covenant Faithfulness**

All these stand in the service of the promise. This is how we are to understand the mention of two particular individuals in the line of Christ, Abraham and David. It is not the point that the covenant line has a certain beginning with Abraham. It is not the point that the royal line has its beginning with David. Neither is it the point that Abraham is the father of the race of the Hebrews. Nor that David is the type of Christ. These things are all true. And we may well admit that Matthew mentions Jesus as the descendent of David to show that He is indeed king of the Jews.

The ultimate point is to show that Jesus as the Christ is the ful-

fillment of the promise made by God to both Abraham and David. Matthew writes, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Abraham and David have this one thing in common: God made the promise that of their seed He would bring forth the Messiah. Consider Genesis 17:7 and 18:22 in the light of Galatians 3:16, and II Samuel 7:12-17 in the light of Acts 2:29-36.

Now we can see how high the ways of God are, unfathomed and unknown. After so many generations, three times fourteen, giving us forty-two, or six sets of seven, one would give up on the promise's fulfillment. And what changes through these fifty-two! The making of one pilgrim into a great nation under a great king. The falling of that great nation into destruction and captivity. The humble return of that captivity and its small renewal. Then, deep apostasy: the Pharisees with their legalism, and the Sadducees with their modernism, and the Essenes with their asceticism. The Herodians with their politicism. Was there any hope for the Messiah to appear? Not by man. But with God. Where man fails utterly, because of his sin, God remains faithful. At exactly the right time (not after one seven, but after six of them), He brings the Messiah into the world. Out of obscurity...light! The Messiah comes from God alone. The history of the Messiah also comes from God alone. The salvation of Messiah is just as sure, for God alone performs it. It is all His story!

## **Questions for Further Meditation and Study**

1. What are some of the limitations placed on profane or church historians as they write their histories? Was Matthew aware of

these limitations when he wrote this gospel, or was he aware of its inspiration as he wrote? In what ways will our knowledge of this

gospel account as inspired affect our reading and study of it? Of what particular comfort is the knowledge that this gospel is inspired?

2. The genealogy of Christ, yes. But is this the physical lineage of Christ through Mary, or is this the physical lineage of Joseph, attributed legally to Christ? Consult past articles on this from the *Standard Bearer*, notably the exchange between Professor David Engelsma and Reverend Herman Veldman. There is a third possibility, which Calvin raises, namely that Matthew gives neither. Calvin believed that this is only a legal lineage of royalty, with several breaks in bloodlines.

3. This passage must define our view of Old Testament history from

Abraham to the return from captivity. How is it helpful to know that all of this history is in the service of Christ? What do we learn about God's providence, and its extent of operation? How is this of help to us, who live in the history of "these last days"?

4. We take notice of the repetition of the word "begat." Taking this word in relation to God's covenant promise made with Abraham, what do we learn here about covenant history? More particularly, what do we learn about the importance of bringing forth covenant seed and raising them in the fear of God? Perhaps our descendants will be numbered among the spiritual giants, having a prominent place in the annals of heaven! What is the

importance of committing our "history" into the hands of God?

5. Speaking of the covenant promise: What is that promise? What is the role of Abraham and David with regard to the promise? Where can you find the cosmic nature of those promises, as made to these two? How does it make this genealogy of Matthew of great significance to us who are not of the physical seed of Abraham?

6. Pick out some of the individuals mentioned in this genealogy. Did they stand for or against God? In their consciousness? In God's eternal plan? Which ones show in a particular way the power and beauty of God's grace? How does this genealogy teach us that reprobation serves election, particularly Christ the Head of the elect? □

**Decency And Order**

**Rev. Ron Cammenga**

## Reformed Marriage Ceremonies

*Since it is proper that the matrimonial state be confirmed in the presence of Christ's church, according to the form for that purpose, the consistories shall attend to it.*

Church Order, Article 70.

### Historical Background

Article 70 concerns the "confirmation" of marriage. The language of the article reflects the Dutch scene in the nineteenth century. Early in the century the Dutch government had assumed the responsibility for per-

forming marriage ceremonies, as the church had urged it to do at the synods of Emden (1586) and Dordrecht (1618-'19). Thus the government solemnized marriages and the church confirmed marriages. Those whose marriages were confirmed by the church had already actually been married by the state. This is usually not the case any longer today. Today the minister functions not only in an ecclesiastical capacity, but also in the civil capacity, being authorized

by the state to perform marriages. In our situation, the solemnization and confirmation of the marriage take place at the same time, during the wedding ceremony.

Because the article in its present form reflects the situation that once prevailed in the Netherlands, it would be good for our churches to revise Article 70. In fact, this is one of the articles mentioned in the overture to revise the Church Order that was considered by the 1999 synod and placed in

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the hands of a special study committee. Very likely a revision of the article will be proposed by the study committee to the synod of 2000.

Other Reformed churches have revised Article 70. The Canadian Reformed Churches have changed the article to read:

The consistory shall ensure that the members of the congregation marry only in the Lord, and that the ministers — as authorized by the consistory — solemnize only such marriages as are in accordance with the Word of God. The solemnization of a marriage may take place either in a private ceremony or in a public worship service. The adopted Form for the Solemnization of Marriage shall be used.

The revision of the Free Reformed Church is:

Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care to marry in the Lord.

70A. Christian marriage should be solemnized with appropriate admonitions, promises and prayers. Marriages may be solemnized either in a worship service or in private gatherings of relatives and friends.

70B. Ministers shall not solemnize marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God.

### Church Weddings?

Article 70 speaks of "... the matrimonial state be(ing) confirmed in the presence of Christ's church...." Strictly speaking, the article is referring to a church wedding, that is, a wedding that is solemnized during an official worship service, not simply a wedding that takes place in a church building or to which the members of the church are invited. The marriage would take place during one of the Sunday worship services. There would be nothing out of the ordinary, except that the Marriage Form would be read and the mar-

riage solemnized. The service would be a special service only in the way in which confession of faith is a special service. There would be no candles, special music, soloists, or other of the trappings that have become so much a part of weddings today. This type of church wedding hardly ever takes place any longer.

Our churches have recognized various types of marriage ceremonies. A uniform practice has not been followed. Included would be the following:

- 1) Marriages performed in a Sunday worship service under the supervision of the consistory. This is what is referred to in Article 70.
- 2) Marriages performed in a special weekday worship service under the supervision of a consistory.
- 3) Marriages performed in private ceremonies, but by a minister. This is the most common type of marriage ceremony among our people today.
- 4) Marriages performed exclusively by a civil magistrate.

It is plain that the Reformed churches have always recognized the mutual role of the civil government and the church in the solemnization of marriage.

Marriage is the foundation of the social life of the nation. The government has a real and rightful interest in the institution of marriage. The presiding minister, therefore, functions as a representative of the state. In some states, the minister must be registered so that he may lawfully perform marriage ceremonies. There is paper work to fill out, a signature to be given, and marriage licenses to be filed with the county clerk's office.

But marriage is also the foundation of the church and the covenant of God, which is continued in the line of the generations of believers. The church has a vital interest in the marriages of her members. This is the reason that the church has always frowned upon

elopement. A couple who elopes and is married by a civil magistrate only is indeed considered lawfully married. Article 70 says that it is "proper" that marriages be confirmed in the church, not that this is absolutely necessary. But elopement is not the ideal. Couples who marry ought to seek the approval and involvement of the church in their wedding. And pastors and consistories ought to encourage this in the young people who are of marrying age.

This is not to say that the official church wedding that Article 70 has in mind ought to be promoted — marriage during a Sunday worship service. I know that there are those who are of this opinion. I am not. I confess that I am personally not in favor of official church weddings.

Let me give my reasons.

First, I believe that a wedding is, strictly speaking, a family and not an ecclesiastical matter. In this respect (hopefully only in this respect) a wedding is like a funeral. Neither of them belongs to the official work of the church. For this reason I am in favor of the prevailing practice among our people today, that weddings are private affairs, although conducted in our church buildings.

Second, I believe that a wedding is a bit of an intrusion into the order and content of a Sunday worship service. Especially is that the case with weddings in our day. This, I think, is one of the reasons why those who do have "church weddings" often have them on a weekday. They themselves sense that a church wedding on Sunday is a distraction from the normal routine of worship.

To couples who might want a church wedding today according to Article 70, I would say, "That's fine, but then the wedding ought to be on a Sunday; there ought to be no candles, flowers, or other decorations that otherwise would not adorn the sanctuary; the usual order of worship ought to fol-

lowed; and the songs should be Psalter numbers." That is adherence to Article 70.

### Who May Be Married?

That a couple is able to produce a bona fide marriage license does not necessarily mean that the Reformed minister may marry them. The fundamental principle that Christian marriage is the marriage of fellow believers is implied in Article 70. When the article states that marriage is to "... be confirmed in the presence of Christ's church..." it is implied that the two being married are themselves members of Christ's church. Ministers and consistories must see to it that they who marry, marry *in the Lord*, as the apostle requires in I Corinthians 7:39. They must never be party to an unequal yoking together of a believer with an unbeliever or of two unbelievers (II Cor. 6:14-16).

Just as no minister may confirm the marriage of unbelievers, neither may he officiate at the wedding of one who has been excommunicated from the church or is under church discipline. The excommunicated member has been put out of the church. He or she is an unbeliever — not necessarily a reprobate, but an unbeliever. One who is under one of the steps of Christian censure is in the process of being excommunicated. That must be rectified before the marriage may take place.

Neither may our ministers ever officiate at a wedding in which one or both of the parties are previously divorced. Scripture forbids all remarriage of divorced persons. Such a union is an unbiblical union. Neither ought our people to attend weddings, even of close relatives, in which one or both of the parties are previously divorced. To attend a wedding is to give one's approval to the union. It is to witness to and to extend your blessing on the marriage. That may never be done in the case of the remarriage of those who are divorced.

Does this mean that our ministers may officiate only at weddings of Protestant Reformed couples, or of those who have expressed their intention to join our churches. Not necessarily. The biblical rule is that they must be believers.

A minister may officiate at the wedding of a couple who are not members of our churches or of our sister churches. In that case, he will have met with them and urged upon them the serious consideration of their calling to be members of a true church of Christ in the world.

A minister may officiate at the wedding of a couple, one or both of whom are members of our churches, but who intend to leave for another church, perhaps another Reformed church. In that case, he will have met with them and admonished them for the sin of leaving a true church of Jesus Christ. It is not necessarily forbidden our ministers to officiate at these weddings.

But in these cases, as well as in others that may arise, it is advisable that a minister seek the counsel, and even the formal approval, of his consistory before he agrees to perform the wedding ceremony. This aspect of the minister's labor too is under the supervision of the elders. And the ministers ought to see the wisdom of the supervision of the elders in this most important matter of Christian marriage.

As far as the degrees of consanguinity which prohibit marriage are concerned, the church follows the standards that are set by the civil authorities. The law of the land forbids the marriage of close relatives. Such laws date back fundamentally to the Lord's commands to Israel in Leviticus 18 and 20. In our country these laws vary from state to state. For example, some states allow, while others prohibit, the marriage of first cousins. The ministers must have some familiarity with these laws so as to avoid unintentionally breaking them.

The synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, ruled that the marriage of an unbaptized person was not to be confirmed. The synod responded to a specific question that had been put to it:

Question: Whether a baptized person may marry one who is unbaptized. Answer: This is not advisable, since the unbaptized person by rejection of baptism cannot be reckoned in God's covenant, and also such a marriage subjects the congregation to great slander.

In addition, in the Post-Acta of the synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, the following decision was taken.

Marriages of those who are not yet incorporated into the Christian church by baptism may not be solemnized in the churches with the customary public and solemn blessing before they have been baptized.

The church approves only of the marriages of believers. A true believer is a member of the church. But membership in the church is by way of baptism. Only such as are baptized, therefore, may also be married.

Should those who marry be confessing members of the church, or may those who are members only by baptism also be married? Those who are members only by baptism may be married. Nevertheless, the ideal is that they who marry have made public confession of their faith. The reason is plain. If one can assume the vows of husband or wife, one can assume the vows of public confession of faith. One who is unable to assume the vows of public confession of faith is in no position to assume the vows of Christian marriage.

### Consent of Parents

Before a minister agrees to perform a marriage ceremony, he must be sure that the parents of the couple approve of their union, or

at least that they have no legitimate objections to the marriage. Consent of the parents is to be obtained. The early Reformed synods stressed the importance of this. The synod of Emden, 1571, ruled:

No one who is still under the authority of his parents, or of those who are in the place of the parents, shall marry without their approval.

The synod of Dordrecht, 1574, expressed the same sentiment:

No one shall be declared eligible for marriage until he first present proof of parental consent, and (in case of previous marriage) proof of the death of the first party.

Our Form for the Confirmation of Marriage refers to parental consent when it says,

For, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and every woman her own husband; insomuch that all, who are come to their years, and have not the gift of continence, are bound by

the command of God, to enter into the marriage state, *with knowledge and consent of parents, or guardians and friends....*

Young couples who marry must secure the consent of their parents. It is altogether proper that a young man ask the approval of the father of the young lady he wishes to marry before they become engaged. At our weddings, it is traditional that the father of the bride walk her down the aisle and give her away. At that time the minister asks, "Who gives this young woman to this man in marriage?" The usual answer is, "Her mother and I." It is entirely appropriate that at this time the question also be asked, "Who permits this young man to take this woman in marriage?" — to which the bridegroom's father would respond, "His mother and I." In this way the approval of both sets of parents can be publicly attested.

One last item — use of the Form. Article 70 requires the use

of the Form for the Confirmation of Marriage. Strictly speaking, the article requires the use of the Form only in the case of official church weddings. Nevertheless, use of the Form is to be encouraged in all our weddings. It is, after all, the time-honored Reformed form for marriage. Our ministers ought routinely to use it, and not substitute other forms. Often the reason given for the substitution of another form is dissatisfaction with the "gloomy" beginning of the Form. But that beginning is a good beginning for so solemn an occasion as a marriage ceremony. And the Form is very explicitly biblical in its setting forth of the institution of marriage by God, the reasons for marriage, the duties of married persons, and the forbidding of divorce. In a day in which many, even in the Reformed church world, hold God's institution of marriage in contempt, the Reformed form for marriage is a good antidote. Let it be the form of choice at Protestant Reformed weddings. □

**Taking Heed to the Doctrine**

**Rev. Steven Key**

## Christ's Ascension

**B**elonging to Christ's exaltation is His ascension into heaven. Forty days after His resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ, in His human nature, ascended into heaven in the presence of His disciples, after having given them the promise that He would come again and take them and all His own unto Himself, that where He is,

there we may be also.

The fact that Christ is no longer on earth may seem to be contrary to that which would be for our spiritual good. Wouldn't it be better if He would have stayed to walk with us, as He did with His disciples?

But Scripture makes clear that Christ's ascension into heaven was and continues to be extremely profitable for us.

### The Historical Event

Christ's ascension was both a historical and a wonderful event.

It was an event that marked very clearly the truth that, with respect to His human nature, Jesus is no more on earth.

A change had already taken place before the ascension. Jesus was no longer with His disciples as He was before the cross.

Several times in the forty days after the resurrection He had appeared unto them and spoken with them and given them instruction concerning the things of His kingdom and their calling in the church on this earth. He commissioned them to go and teach all nations,

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and comforted them with the words, "And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19, 20).

But it also was very clear that He would not be with them in the same sense as He had been before. He no longer walked with them as before. He no longer taught the multitudes. He no longer lived among them as a Man among men. But they would be meeting here, or would be together there, and all of a sudden He would appear in their midst, coming as if out of the air.

And finally there came a time, on the fortieth day after that great day of His resurrection, when something happened which made clear to all the disciples that those appearances that the risen Lord had made would not continue. Another ten days, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, they would understand clearly how Jesus would now dwell *in* them and be with them always. But on this fortieth day, something happened which brought a *physical* separation between Him and them.

We read about the event in the account in Acts 1. After Jesus had given His final instructions to His disciples, we read in verses 9-11: "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

Mark points to the fact of Christ's ascension as attaining a definite end or purpose: "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19).

In Luke 24:50, 51, we read: "And he led them out as far as to

Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." Notice, He was *parted from them*. There was very definitely a physical separation that took place at that event on the mount called Olivet.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, *in His human nature*, departed from the earth and went to heaven. The significance of that event we shall come to presently; but Scripture clearly teaches that the ascension involved a definite change of place.

The Reformed churches have always differed with the Lutherans in this matter, as becomes evident in a study of this truth from the Reformed creeds. After the resurrection and in the ascension Christ did not become ubiquitous, as Luther said. That is, Christ's human nature did not become everywhere present. But, on the contrary, our risen Lord departed from the earth, and entered into the place called heaven.

That ascension was a wonder. We do well to remind ourselves of that. While heaven is a definite place beyond our earthly senses, the ascension cannot be compared to taking a journey from one earthly place to another. We easily think of Jesus stretching out His arms like an airplane and suddenly "taking off," to land in another place. But we must not forget that even this last manifestation of the Lord to His disciples on Mount Olivet was an *appearance* of Him who had already passed on into the resurrection-sphere, and who lived in His glorified, incorruptible spiritual body.

What the disciples saw with their eyes was that Jesus was taken up from them, as a sign to them that He had departed from them, not to walk in their midst again in the same way as He had to that point.

Don't misunderstand. He is not absent from us. In His

Godhead, and according to His divine nature, He is always present. But we speak now about Christ in His human nature, as the Son of man.

We may say indeed that it was the person of the Son of God that ascended into heaven. But that ascension was realized only in His human nature.

The Godhead is unchangeable. In His divine nature the ascension of the Son of God did not effect a change. In fact, to speak of a change of place with respect to the divine nature would be absurd. For God is immanent in all things, yet He is also the Transcendent One. He fills all things, while at the same time being far above all things. In His Godhead, Christ is everywhere present.

But according to His human nature, He is now in heaven. Once His disciples could meet Him and have earthly fellowship with Him. They could sit at the table with Him and hear Him preach and teach. They could even touch Him. But now, with our earthly eyes, we don't see Him anymore. All earthly associations are gone. Having been taken up from earth into heaven, "He continues there for our interest until He comes again to judge the living and the dead" (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 18).

### Christ's Continued Presence

But even though Jesus has ascended into heaven, no more to dwell on earth in His human nature, the fact remains that with respect to His Godhead, majesty, grace, and spirit, He is at no time absent from us.

Jesus is still with us. Luther was not wrong in *that*. Our Lord Christ *is* still with us, to be sure. But He is with us in a far higher and more intimate sense than He was ever with His disciples during His earthly sojourn.

That is how the Heidelberg Catechism explains it in Q. & A. 47: "Is not Christ then with us even to the end of the world, as



He hath promised? Christ is very man and very God; with respect to His human nature, He is no more on earth; but with respect to His Godhead, majesty, grace, and spirit, He is at no time absent from us."

We face here a doctrinal issue.

We have seen the truth of Scripture that our Mediator must be very God *and* very man in *One person*. The two natures of Christ, the human and the divine natures, are *inseparable*. That is also a matter of the church's confession going back many centuries.

But now we speak of Christ being in *heaven* in His *human* nature, and yet being with us in His Godhead. How can we speak that way?

That certainly brings up the question, as our Catechism faces in Question & Answer 48: "But if His human nature is not present wherever His Godhead is, are not then these two natures in Christ separated from one another?" The answer, however, is this: "Not at all, for since the Godhead is illimitable and omnipresent, it must necessarily follow that the same is beyond the limits of the human nature He assumed, and yet is nevertheless in this human nature, and remains personally united to it."

The divine nature of Christ is beyond the limits of the human nature that He assumed, yet remains personally united to it. That is how Scripture explains this wonderful phenomenon of His ascension.

It is important, even from a practical point of view, that we lay hold of this truth by faith. Sometimes we think, "How nice it must have been to be one of the disciples, to live with Jesus, to walk with Him and talk with Him, to be able to ask Him questions and hear Him teach and preach." But when we think that way, we are overlooking the rich blessing that God has given us, far superior to that experienced by Jesus' disciples.

We now have the Lord Jesus not only *with* us, but *in* us by His

Holy Spirit. He is present with us not only as the Creator of all things, but as the God of our salvation, who was delivered for our iniquities and raised again for our justification. He is present with us as the Christ who has accomplished the victory!

Christ is present with us now in all the glory of His sovereignty, in all the authority of His lordship over all. He is present with us now as the One who loved us unto death, even the death of the cross, and who arose that we might live, and that more abundantly.

And this is true, because after His ascension He received the Holy Spirit without measure, according to the promise His Father had given Him. Ephesians 4 explains that, in fulfillment of Psalm 68, He ascended up on high, leading captivity captive, in order that He might give gifts unto men, glorious gifts, gifts of grace and forgiveness, of righteousness and holiness and love, gifts of everlasting life and glory. To that end He received the Spirit, and in that Spirit He returned to His own as He had promised, to dwell in them and to be with them forever.

He is present with us in such a way that we know His love for us. Through the Spirit's work in our hearts, He causes us to know Him and to taste His grace, to hear His Word and to partake of all the blessings of salvation.

That presence is *constant*. He never leaves us nor forsakes us. He never fails to lead us through the deepest trials. He never fails to bring us back in the way of repentance from our deepest wanderings through the mire of sin, that we might once again taste of His fellowship.

And in the measure that we live by faith, and hear His Word, and walk in His way, we also experience this truth, that the ascended Christ our Savior is always present with us by His Spirit and grace.

That knowledge is indeed the fountain of the joy of faith. A tremendous blessing it is that Jesus ascended into heaven, no more to dwell on earth in His human nature, but never absent from us in His Godhead, majesty, grace, and Spirit. □

### Then Shall I Know

(I Corinthians 13:12)

Not till the loom is silent,  
And the shuttles cease to fly,  
Shall God unroll the canvas,  
And explain the reason why  
The dark threads are as needful,  
In the Weaver's skillful hand,  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned.

*Standard Bearer*, 1930

## The History of the Diaconate (4)

# Its Place in the Reformed Churches

In the last article we contended that Reformed churches have done more than the Romish, Anglican, Lutheran, and Baptist churches to restore the diaconate to its rightful place in the church. This the Reformed churches could do because they understood that Scripture requires the church to have the office of deacon in her midst, and requires that the work of the office be that of caring for the poor and needy.

We will support our contention further by examining more closely the place of the diaconate in the Reformed churches.

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In the restoration of the office in Reformed churches, John Calvin blazed the way.

Calvin considered Acts 6:1-6 to be a record of the institution of the office of deacon: "Luke declareth here upon what occasion, and to what end, and also with what rite, deacons were first made."<sup>1</sup> Believing that this institution demonstrated that the church needed deacons, Calvin made sure that the diaconate existed in the church of Geneva. He also viewed the care of the poor to be the deacons' fundamental work. Commenting on the word "deacon," he said:

The word itself is indeed general, yet is it properly taken for those which are stewards for the poor. Whereby it appeareth how licentiously the Papists do mock God and men, who assign unto their deacons no other office but this, to have the charge of the paten and chalice (referring to the liturgical duties to which the Romish deacons were assigned, DJK). Surely we need no disputation to prove that they agree in no point with the apostles.<sup>2</sup>

Though not trying to introduce a multiplication of offices, as Rome had done with her deacons, archdeacons, and subdeacons, Calvin did think that Scripture warranted two kinds of deacons, and implemented the two kinds in Geneva. He wrote:

The care of the poor was entrusted to the deacons. However, two kinds are mentioned in the letter to the Romans: "He that gives, let him do it with simplicity; ... he that shows mercy, with cheerfulness" [Rom. 12:8, cf. Vulgate]. Since it is certain that Paul is speaking of the public office of the church, there must have been two distinct grades. Unless my judgment deceive me, in the first clause he designates the deacons who distribute the alms. But the second refers to those who had devoted themselves to the care of the poor and sick.... If we accept this (as it must be accepted), there will be two kinds of deacons: one to serve the church in administering the affairs of the poor; the other, in caring for the poor themselves.<sup>3</sup>

The work of the second kind of deacons was not monetary but physical care, and was not limited to the poor but included also the care of the widows and orphans at the local hospital. Accordingly, the first group was called "stewards," the second "hospitallers."<sup>4</sup> Prof. William Heyns notes that the Reformed churches at large did not adopt this practice of having two kinds of deacons:

This example of Calvin, however, found little favor with the Reformed Churches. Even those in France, although organized very closely in accordance with Calvin's model, have from the beginning prescribed the appointment of Deacons, but not of two kinds of Deacons. And in the Netherlands it was only the Convention of Wesel, 1568, that declared itself in favor of the idea, but the General Synods that followed this Convention ignored it.<sup>5</sup>

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The French Reformed Churches confessed the need for the office of

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1. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Acts 6:1.

2. *Ibid.*, Acts 6:3.

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, transl. Ford Lewis Battles, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), vol. 2, page 1061.

4. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, ed. and transl., *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), pages 42-43.

5. Prof. William Heyns, *Handbook for Elders and Deacons*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1928), page 288.

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deacon to care for the poor in their congregations. Article 29 of the French Confession of Faith, which confession was approved by the synod of Paris in 1559, reads:

As to the true Church, we believe that it should be governed according to the order established by our Lord Jesus Christ. That there should be pastors, overseers, and deacons, so that true doctrine may have its course, that errors may be corrected and suppressed, and the poor and all who are in affliction may be helped in their necessities; and that assemblies may be held in the name of God, so that great and small may be edified.<sup>6</sup>

The duties of the deacons in the French churches were the same as those in Geneva, namely, to receive the alms and distribute them to the poor, as well as to visit the sick and those with other special needs.

A group of Reformed people from the continent seeking refuge from persecution established a church in London in the 1560s. Their leader, John à Lasco, insisted that deacons must not think that simply gathering and distributing the alms is enough; rather, they must be qualified men, men with a true, heartfelt compassion for those in need, ready always to bring the poor words of comfort and, if they did not live a godly life, words of admonition.

P.Y. DeJong mentions several respects in which the Reformed in London and the French Reformed differed.<sup>7</sup> We note three. First, the French churches considered the deacons to be part of the consistory (ruling body of elders), and even delegated deacons to higher assemblies. The London church so emphasized the distinction of the deacons and consistory that they called the assembly of elders and deacons meeting together a "council." Second, in the French churches the deacons were sometimes allowed to catechize, exhort, and officiate at marriages, while in the London church none of these other duties

was permitted. Third, in the French churches the consistories simply appointed the deacons, while in London the congregation was given opportunity to form a nomination of men from which the consistory elected the deacons.

In formulating their view of the diaconate, the Dutch Reformed Churches borrowed from both the French churches and the London church.

The influence of the French churches is seen in the similarity of Article 30 of the Belgic Confession to the above quoted Article 29 of the French Confession. The Belgic Confession reads:

We believe that this true Church must be governed by the spiritual policy which our Lord has taught us in his Word - namely, that there must be Ministers or Pastors to preach the Word of God, and to administer the Sacraments; also elders and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the Church; that by these means the true religion may be preserved, and the true doctrine every where propagated, likewise transgressors punished and restrained by spiritual means; also that the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted, according to their necessities. By these means every thing will be carried on in the Church with good order and decency, when faithful men are chosen, according to the rule prescribed by St. Paul to Timothy.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the relationship of the deacons to the consistory, the Dutch Reformed combined the views of both churches. Whereas the French churches considered the deacons part of the consistory, and the London church did not, the Dutch Reformed Churches officially consider a consistory to be "composed of the ministers of the Word and the elders," according to Article 37 of the Church Order adopted by the Dutch Reformed Churches at the synod of Dordrecht, 1618-1619. As did the

London church, the Dutch referred to a meeting of the deacons with the elders and pastor(s) as a "council." However, Article 37 makes provision for the deacons to be added in special instances: "Whenever the number of the elders is small, the deacons may be added to the consistory by local regulation; this shall invariably be the rule where the number is less than three." This raises the question: what is the exact relationship of the deacons to the consistory? The reader can consult the articles of Mr. Martin Swart in recent issues of the *Standard Bearer* for a more detailed examination of the question.

The Dutch Reformed also adapted for their own purpose the practices of both groups regarding how deacons are chosen. In the French and London churches the choice was ultimately left up to the consistory. The Dutch Reformed leave the ultimate choice to the congregation. Articles 22 and 24 of the Church Order allow for members of the congregation to direct the council's attention to persons fit for the diaconate, and then allow the council either to appoint the deacons with the congregation's approval, or to prepare a nomination of candidates from which the congregation may choose half.

The particular influence of the London church is evident in Article 25 of the Church Order, which requires the deacons to care for the poor and bring comfort to them, but makes no allowance for the deacons to catechize, exhort, or officiate at marriages. The article reads:

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6. French Confession of Faith, Article 29, as quoted in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990 reprint), volume 3, pages 376-377.

7. Peter Y. DeJong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), pages 67-68.

8. Quoted in Schaff, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pages 421-422.

The office peculiar to the deacons is diligently to collect alms and other contributions of charity, and after mutual counsel, faithfully and diligently to distribute the same to the poor as their needs may require it; to visit and comfort the distressed and to exercise care that the alms are not misused; of which they shall render an account in consistory, and also (if anyone desires to be present) to the congregation, at such a time as the consistory may see fit.

Similarly, the "Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons" approved by the synod of Dordrecht requires the deacons to collect and preserve the alms, to bestow them on objects of charity, to bestow compassion and hearty affection on the poor, and to administer relief not only with external gifts but also with comfortable words from Scripture.

To enforce the care of the poor through this office, the first synod of the Dutch churches, held at Emden in 1571, adopted the rule "that at every classical gathering the delegates of the several churches were to be interrogated whether the poor were properly cared for by the deacons."<sup>9</sup> This procedure was also required of all Dutch Reformed Churches by the synod of Dordrecht, which required in Article 41 of the Church Order that at every classis meeting the following question be asked of the delegates of each church: "Are the poor and the Christian schools cared for?" These questions are still asked today of every delegation to a classis meeting of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Implementing their conviction that the church must care for the poor through her diaconate did not come easy for the Dutch Reformed churches. The civil authorities in the Netherlands wanted to continue doing this work as they had in the past. The state noticed that many estates were being donated to the church and feared that the church would gain too much

power. Therefore, in 1576 the civil authorities in the province of Holland drew up some "Ecclesiastical Laws" in which they asserted their right to govern the church, even appointing men to care for the poor. Remember that in similar circumstances the Lutheran churches in Germany did not develop the office of deacon, but left the care of the poor to the state. The Dutch church, however, fought stubbornly and won the battle: she would have her deacons. An interesting story shows that the Dutch Reformed in the Netherlands, convinced of the importance of the diaconate, fought for her convictions even in this century.

When during World War II the Netherlands were occupied by Germany the deacons of the Dutch Reformed Church assumed the care for the politically persecuted, supplying food and providing secret refuge. Realizing what was happening, the Germans decreed that the elective office of the deacon should be eliminated. The Reformed Synod on 17 July 1941 resolved: "Whoever touches the diaconate interferes with what Christ has ordained as the task of the Church. He touches the cult of the Church." ... The Germans backed down.<sup>10</sup>

God grant that, should the civil government ever command us to relinquish the care of the poor and abolish the diaconate, we might be as tenacious in fighting for this cause.

The diaconate in the Dutch Reformed Churches flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The office declined in the eighteenth century, however, as love for the poor waned and the deacons cared more for the honor of the office than for the work involved. The leaders of the *Afscheiding* (1834) and the *Doleantie* (1886), two reform movements in the Dutch Reformed Churches, worked hard to restore the office in the new denomination. The fruit

of this restoration is seen in the Reformed churches in America, Indonesia, and South Africa, which have their roots in the Dutch Reformed Churches. These churches hold their diaconates in high esteem.<sup>11</sup>

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Two aspects of the history of the diaconate in Reformed churches merit a brief comment. The first regards deaconesses. The London church had no deaconesses, while the French churches used deaconesses as assistants to the deacons. For a brief time the Dutch Reformed Churches followed the practice of the French. In 1568 the Convent of Wesel made provision for female assistants to the deacons. This practice was followed until 1581, when the synod of Middleburg advised against deaconesses. Still, this latter synod said that, should sick women need special care, "the Deacons should render assistance through their wives or through other capable women."<sup>12</sup> The Lord willing, we shall some time look more carefully at the history of women assistants to the deacons, as well as the Scripture passages which some used to defend this practice, to evaluate it ourselves.

The second regards the relationship of the deacons to the state. We have seen that the Reformed churches insisted on having the office of deacon in their midst, and not allowing the state entirely to care for the poor. At the same time, the Reformed churches have

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9. DeJong, *op. cit.*, page 69.

10. F. Herzog, "Diakonia in Modern Times," quoted by Elsie Anne McKee, *Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), page 27.

11. Cf. DeJong, *op. cit.*, pages 72-74, for more information on this recent history of the diaconate.

12. Heyns, *op. cit.*, page 289.

historically allowed their members to receive money from the state. In the French churches, the synod of St. Maixant (1609) permitted invalid soldiers to receive money from a government fund set up for them. The Dutch churches, at the synods of Dordt (1574) and The Hague (1586), instructed the deacons to work with the civil authori-

ties in helping the poor of the community. Furthermore, Article 26 of the Church Order of Dordrecht requires deacons to cooperate with other agencies which are involved in the care of the poor. We also hope someday to treat this subject in more detail.

This concludes our treatment of

the history of the diaconate, which we began by examining the institution of the office as recorded in Acts 6. Acts 6 also constitutes an important scriptural basis for the office. However, the scriptural and theological basis for the office is a subject which merits our further attention, and to it we will turn next. □

## Book Reviews

**Blame It on the Brain: Distinguishing Chemical Imbalances, Brain Disorders, and Disobedience**, by Edward T. Welch. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1998. 204 pp. \$12.99, (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

This is a good book on a difficult subject, a subject which continues to occupy the attention of practical theologians, pastors, Christian psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and educators. The difficult subject is this: Is what we call mental illness sin or sickness, or does it partake of both? Our ministers and Christian school teachers ought to read the book carefully. They will find help in dealing with God's people, adults, children, and youth, who experience depression, anxiety, and other like problems.

Welch, a counselor at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation in Glenside, Pennsylvania and a Lecturer in Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, states his goal with the book in these terms, "As Christians today, we want to avoid the ecclesiastical mistakes of the 1880s. This time, we want to listen to what people are saying about the brain, develop clear and powerful biblical categories, and bless both the sciences and the church in the process" (p. 26). While not agreeing with ev-

ery detail of Welch's conclusions, this reviewer is convinced that Welch successfully achieved his goal.

The author offers two key definitions when he writes, "Any behavior that does not conform to biblical commands or any behavior that transgresses biblical prohibitions proceeds from the heart and is sin," and, "Any behavior that is more accurately called a weakness proceeds from the body and is sickness or suffering. Sickness or suffering can also be caused by specific sin, but we must be very careful to have ample justification before we make such a link" (pp. 43, 44). The list of symptoms which can be categorized as physical or spiritual on the basis of the above two definitions is helpful (p. 45). Among the physical symptoms Welch lists: mental retardation, feelings of depression, feelings of panic, hallucinations, problems with attention and concentration, and mental confusion. Among the symptoms proceeding from the heart and which are, therefore, sinful Welch lists: sexual immorality, lust, evil desires, filthy language, malice, greed, anger, rage, murder, strife, arrogance, boasting, disobedience to parents, unbelief, *et. al.*

In the third chapter, "Mind - Body: Practical Applications," (pp. 49-61), Welch considers, "... four practical principles that emerge from the mind-body discussion." These are:

- 1) The brain cannot make a per-

son sin or keep a person from following Jesus in faith and obedience.

2) Each person's abilities—brain strengths and weaknesses—are unique and worthy of careful study.

3) Brain problems can expose heart (spiritual, RDD) problems.

4) Sinful hearts can lead to physical illness, and upright hearts can lead to health.

The reader will find very helpful the chapters on Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia and Head Injury in Part Two, chapters 4 and 5, of the book (pp. 63-102). In these chapters we're told how to recognize the symptoms of these illnesses and injuries. The author offers as well a number of helpful suggestions on how to deal with the affected person and his/her family members.

Chapter 6 is a good, brief introduction to psychiatric problems. In this chapter Welch offers three important propositions:

- 1) "Psychiatric problems are always spiritual problems and sometimes physical problems." Surely no Reformed, Christian pastor or counselor would disagree with this.
- 2) "Psychiatric disorders sometimes respond to medication." In this helpful section the author points out that medications help some people and not others. He reminds us that these medications have side effects, some of which are long-term. In this connection Welch makes these points, "First, since we don't fully know the

depth of someone else's suffering, we should be careful when offering our opinion about medication. It is easy to underestimate the extent of a person's pain. Second, we should remember that, in general, the alleviation of suffering is a good thing. And third, since the Bible does not clearly prohibit these medications, the issue is not whether medication is biblically lawful or unlawful; rather, the issue is how to make wise, informed decisions.... Whether a person takes psychiatric medication or not is *not* the most important issue. Scripture is especially interested in *why* someone is taking medication. And it is clear that medication is never the source of our hope. With these guidelines in mind, there is biblical freedom to try, or not to try, psychiatric medication" (pp. 111, 112).

3) "Psychiatric labels are descriptions, not explanation."

Chapter 7 is an excellent discussion of depression. In this chapter the author argues convincingly that "the basic steps of a biblical approach to helping them (depressed people, RDD) are similar to those you would follow to help people with physical problems.... First, you understand the experience of depression. Second, you make tentative distinctions between physical and spiritual symptoms. Third, this distinction will allow you to focus on heart issues" (p. 115). Welch, while stressing the spiritual dimensions involved with depression, recognizes that "depression *does* have physical symptoms." And medical treatments of these physical symptoms can be helpful in easing or erasing these symptoms (p. 125).

A sane approach to this terrible problem, thinks this reviewer.

In chapter 8 the author deals with Attention Deficit Disorder

(ADD). He offers many helpful suggestions for parents and educators who must deal with ADD children. Welch's comments on the "need for structure" are well taken (pp. 141, 142). The section on "Applying These Steps to Other Psychiatric Problems" (pp. 147, 148) is too brief to be of value and really begs the question, i.e., assumes what needs to be demonstrated.

In chapters 9 and 10 the author discusses biblically the sins of homosexuality and alcoholism.

There are a couple of weaknesses apparent in this book. One is that the author relies too much on secondary sources, and another is that these sources are often not the latest works. Some, in fact, date back to the forties, fifties, and sixties. A good index and bibliography would have added to the value of an otherwise very good book. □

## Report of Classis East

September 8, 1999  
Hudsonville PRC

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, September 8, 1999 at the Hudsonville PRC. Each church was represented by two delegates. Rev. Dale Kuiper was the chairman for this session.

The classis was pleased to hear and approve the examination of Pastor-Elect Nathan Brummel. After preaching a sermon on Philippians 4:6 and responding to questions put by ministers on the six loci of dogmatics, the knowledge of scripture and the confessions, controversy, and *practica*, Pastor-Elect Brummel was given the good news that the classis, with the concurrence of the delegates *ad examina* from Classis West (Revs. A. Brummel, C. Haak, and S. Houck), had approved his exam. Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, Indiana was authorized to proceed with his

ordination and installation set for Friday, September 10<sup>th</sup>.

Classis appointed a study committee to deal with synod's response to the appeals of two brothers regarding decisions taken by the classis at its September 9, 1998 meeting. The contents of these appeals can be read in the *Acts of Synod 1999*. Synod decided not to enter into these appeals because synod believed the classis had departed from the concrete case (regarding divorce and legal separation) dealt with in its May 13, 1998 session. Synod's instruction to the classis was to reexamine its decision of September 9, 1998 in light of synod's decision given above.

Expenses for this session amounted to \$861.70. Classis will meet next on January 12, 2000 in Southeast PRC.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk

### Radio Stations on which the Reformed Witness Hour is aired:

WFUR  
AM(1570) 4:00 P.M. Sunday  
FM(102.9) 8:00 A.M. Sunday  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

KDCR  
FM (88.5) 6:06 P.M. Sunday  
Sioux Center, Iowa

WMRH  
AM (1170) 8:30 A.M. Sunday  
Waupun, Wisconsin

KLOH  
AM (1050) 8:00 A.M. Sunday  
Pipstone, Minnesota

KCCF  
Ferndale, Washington

WORD FM  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

WYCA  
Hammond, Indiana

WFNC  
AM (640) 9:30 A.M. Sunday

### Minister Activities

In late September, the council of the Hull, IA PRC placed a trio of pastors before their congregation from which they were to call an undershepherd. This trio consisted of the Revs. W. Bruinsma, K. Koole, and Dale Kuiper. Hull has since extended a call to Rev. Dale Kuiper, presently pastor of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI.

### Mission Activities

Rev. J. Mahtani, our churches' home missionary to the Eastern U.S., met with the members of the Fayetteville Reformed Fellowship in Fayetteville, North Carolina, October 1-4. Pastor Mahtani was scheduled to hold Bible Studies on the Canons of Dordt on October 1 and preach two times on the Lord's Day. The theme for those worship services was Reformed Evangelism. Both sermons dealt with the difficulty of giving a good witness, and at the same time they gave biblical encouragements to remain faithful. Sermon titles were "Holding Forth the Word of Life," based on Philippians 2:16, and "Ready Always to Give an Answer," I Peter 3:15.

In three newsletters from Rev. R. Moore, our churches' missionary to Ghana, we find him and his wife busy with preaching and teaching God's Word, with continued good turnouts at the different meetings. It also appears that the Moores' request for missionary quota and their residency continues to work its way through the red-tape of government. Since

sending their request to the offices of the Ministry of Interior and the Headquarters of Immigration, the Moores have met twice with government officials, the second time with their friend and consultant Rev. Gabriel Anyigba accompanying them.

This was followed in early October with the Assistant Superintendent of Ghana Immigration visiting their home to look at the premises, to enable her to evaluate the Moores' application. It is our prayer that the Lord will lead this servant of the government, and all others involved, to look favorably upon the Moores' request.

Revs. D. Kleyn and R. Miersma planned to leave October 5 for another investigatory trip to the Philippines. This trip was on behalf of our churches' Foreign Mission Committee and was to follow up on contacts our churches have in Manila, Daet, Cagayan de Oro, and Bacolod.

The consistory of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, along with our churches' Domestic Mission Committee, are planning their annual visit to the Northern Ireland mission field. Rev. A. Spriensma, from the Mission Committee, and Elder Ben Wigger, from Hudsonville's consistory, plan to travel to Wales and Northern Ireland from November 3 - 19.

### Denominational Activities

Members of West Michigan Mr. & Mrs. and Adult Bible Societies were invited to their annual Mass Meeting, held this fall at the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI on September 21. Rev. C. Terpstra, pastor of the First PRC in Holland, MI, spoke to those in attendance on the subject "Cheerful Giving." A collection was taken for the Covenant ERC of Singapore's Building Fund.

That same evening, members of

the Eastern Men's and Ladies' League in West Michigan were invited to our First PRC in Holland to hear Rev. A. Spriensma, pastor of the Grandville, MI PRC, speak on the topic, "The Zeal for Bible Study."

### Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the South Holland, IL PRC has entered into a one-year contract with WYCA Radio (92.3 FM) for Sunday afternoon broadcasts of the Reformed Witness Hour program, with radio speaker Rev. C. Haak. So if you live in the Chicago area, we encourage you to listen to, and even promote, this broadcast to your neighbors and acquaintances.

The Church Extension Committee of the Loveland, CO PRC just placed a new pamphlet in their church, written by Rev. R. Smit, entitled "The Evil of Drama" — a subject we would all do well to read up on.

### Congregational Activities

Saturday, September 11, the congregation of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI met at Lawrence Park in Zeeland for their annual church picnic. Hardly news, right? But what made this picnic just a little different was that they met together for breakfast.

By decision of their consistory, the elders of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA led their worship services on September 5. What made this somewhat unusual was the fact that their pastor, Rev. A. denHartog, was in the audience. The reason for this was that their pastor was gone from early Monday morning until early Saturday evening, first conducting church visiting with Rev. C. Haak, and then attending the September meeting of Classis West. This classis proved to be a very difficult and lengthy one, with the last session

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

# *The* **Standard Bearer**

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ending Saturday morning at 10:30 A.M.

We also noticed that Sunday, September 26, Rev. M. VanderWal, pastor of the Covenant PRC in

Wyckoff, NJ, and Rev. J. Mahtani, missionary pastor in Pittsburgh, PA, exchanged pulpits. Something that would have been impossible a year or so ago.

## *Food For Thought*

"Study the Bible to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy." □

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express sympathy to Mr. John Bylsma in the death of his brother,

#### **SEYMOUR J. BYLSMA.**

"As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:15-17).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, President  
Mr. Ed Hekstra, Clerk

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Don Houck and family, and Mr. and Mrs. Gerald VanBaren, in the passing of their mother and grandmother,

#### **MRS. GRACE VAN BAREN.**

"Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed" (Acts 3:25).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, President  
Mr. Ed Hekstra, Clerk

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of the Grace PRC Adult Bible Society extend their sincere Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Roger King in the recent death of his father,

#### **MR. JOHANNES (JOE) KING.**

"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25, 26).

Rev. Mitchell Dick, Pres.  
Theresa Dykstra, Secretary

### NEW PAMPHLET

The Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church has published a new pamphlet entitled:

#### **Judging: The Christian's Duty.**

This pamphlet is the compilation of three articles which were published in the *Standard Bearer* during the last volume year. In it the reader finds a critique of the current view that the Christian should tolerate, rather than judge, the practices and beliefs of other people and groups. Scriptural guidelines are presented to help the Christian know what, how, and why he must judge. This pamphlet can be used for personal study, discussion groups, or to defend yourself when others criticize proper judging of wicked actions. Request your free copy today, by calling (616) 878-1811 and leaving your message on the voicemail, or by writing:

Byron Center  
Protestant Reformed Church  
P.O. Box 71  
Byron Center, MI 49315.

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

#### **MR. and MRS. MARTIN DE VRIES**

celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on October 30, 1999.

We are grateful to God for the many years He has given them together. We are thankful for the Christian home and godly instruction they have given to us. We pray that God may continue to bless them in their marriage in the years to come.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- ❖ Marty and Karen DeVries  
Marty, Tyler, Trevor, Thomas
- ❖ Leroy and Sandy DeVries  
Abigail, Bradley, Nicholas
- ❖ Dan and Angie DeVries  
Alyssa, Zachary, Jacob
- ❖ Rick and Mari DeVries  
Derrick, Caitlyn
- ❖ Jon and Cori Hop  
Emily, Rebecca

Grand Rapids, Michigan

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ruth Society of Hope PRC wishes to express its sincere sympathy to fellow member Ruth Oosterhouse and family in the death of her mother,

#### **MRS. GRACE VAN BAREN.**

May God comfort them with His precious promises: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory" (Psalm 73:24).

Harry Langerak, Pres.  
Eileen Terpstra, Sec'y.