



The Standard Bearer

***A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine***

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The House of God

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:20-22

Many years, in fact centuries, before the words of this text were penned, the inspired psalmist wrote in Psalm 87 which in versified form we sing in Psalter #238,

Zion, founded on the mountains,
God, thy maker, loves thee well:
He has chosen thee, most precious,
He delights in thee to dwell;
God's own city, who can all thy glory tell?

Rev. Miersma is pastor of Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church of Lacombe, Alberta, Canada.

This same theme we find running through the entire epistle to the Ephesians. Already in the first verses Paul describes the glory of the church with the well-known "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." The keynote *in Christ* runs through the entire epistle as it shows forth the glory of God as it is reflected by us in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The apostle sees the church as God's elect, holy, catholic church. He sees her being gathered from the beginning of time right up to the present moment. And he sees how we are used by God in the ingathering of the saints unto the completion of God's house in the day of Christ Jesus.

The church is likened unto a house whose foundation is the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. This house, fitly framed together, is the dwelling place of God. Each member of the church is a separate stone, each in its place, all of them together making a perfect unity, the church, the house of God.

With this figure of speech Paul is undoubtedly referring to the temple of the old dispensation which was the center of Israel's shadow worship. Canaan was the promised land which flowed with milk and honey, a picture of heaven. In the center of this land was the city of Jerusalem, which had at its heart the temple where God dwelt behind the veil in the Most Holy Place. There was also the altar of burnt offering in the temple,

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which reminded the people that they were a sinful people. The stench of the burning flesh and blood pointed to how abominable were their sins to God. But that blood at the same time symbolized the blood of atonement that took away their sins. Christ was represented in the priest as well as in the sacrifice. Through Him they had access to God. It was all a picture of the covenant as they experienced fellowship and communion with the living God. There they experienced the bond of faith that united them in the Lord, even as they looked in hope for the better things to come.

With this picture in mind the apostle Paul speaks of a building that is under construction. Gradually it takes shape as each stone is put in its place, each one fitting with the other stones, to reveal the complete and perfect unity in Christ.

Such a building calls for a plan. When we build a house we do so using a blueprint which gives in detail the size and shape, the materials used, and all things in the finest detail. That is a vague picture of God's sovereign and eternal predestination of His church. Eternally He has before Him the glorious house as it will be realized in its perfection in the new creation. Indeed, in Christ He has His church chosen unto everlasting life. Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the eternal cause and purpose of all God's works. Unto that Christ He gave a certain people to show forth the praises of His name.

That people consists of a definite number of elect, no more and no less, each one chosen according to talent and character to have his own place in the church of God. Christ is the Head; we are the body. He is the cornerstone; we are the stones. According to the infinite wisdom of God each one fits into its own place. No one else could fit in that place. Without each place filled, the temple would not

be complete. Its harmony, beauty, and unity would be ruined and God would not attain His glory.

What applies to the building applies equally to the scaffolding, for God also determines the reprobate to perish in their sins. They must serve their purpose toward the construction of God's temple. In this present life it is often hard to distinguish them from the elect, but God knows His own. Soon the scaffolding will be taken away and the building will stand in all its splendor, praising God its maker.

The church of God answers perfectly to these plans. Here we must not regard the things that we see but look with the eye of faith upon the things that we do not see. In faith we confess "an holy, catholic church." Often this idea is ridiculed and scorned. An outward unity is sought so that numerically the church may be strong and influential in the midst of the world. Her antithetical position over against the world is denied and compromise is sought. She busies herself with social and political affairs rather than spiritual. In all of this she becomes the great harlot who rides the red beast, cooperating with the Antichrist. The true church becomes the laughingstock of the world, her members becoming more and more strangers upon the earth, seeking with increasing longing her heavenly perfection.

Fellow saints in Jesus Christ, in spite of what one sees with his physical eyes, that church of Christ is *holy*. She has been redeemed and sanctified in Christ, heir of the life to come. She is the family of God, His sons and daughters, the bride of Christ. Always she is addressed as "saints in Christ Jesus," even when her members are deeply conscious of their daily sins and measureless guilt.

And she is *one*. Her generations extend from paradise to the end of history, being gathered from *all nations*, tongues, and tribes. Outwardly she appears very diverse, but she is one in Christ, with one

faith, one hope, one baptism, and one Lord, united unto one God. Therefore she confesses and experiences the communion of the saints as her members are drawn together through the common bond of faith.

This building of which we have been speaking is a *temple*. It is the house of God, for God dwells there. The light of God radiates throughout, and glory shines in every part. How beautiful is this habitation of God, where there is blessed fellowship and communion.

The foundation of this house of God has as its cornerstone none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we have a figure borrowed from Psalm 118:22, 23. In their building of Solomon's temple, the builders had to deal with one large and cumbersome stone which did not fit in the plans and always seemed in the way — until they learned that it was the cornerstone. This was the prophecy which was realized when Annas, Caiaphas, Judas, Pilate, Herod, the Sanhedrin, and all the people condemned Jesus to the accursed death of the cross. They found no place for Christ in their idea of the church.

Cornerstones today are merely symbolic and are not really important as far as the structure of a building is concerned. However, at the time of the building of the temple a cornerstone had a very important place. The whole building, with all its stones, leaned toward that one stone, so that it gave stability, unity, and even beauty to the entire building. How much more so the Lord Jesus Christ with respect to the church. As the chosen one of God He is the Rock upon which we are founded. As our complete redemption He is the bread of life, the water of life, the way, the truth, and the life.

The rest of the foundation consists of the apostles and the prophets. They were not this foundation as persons, but in their office as bearers of the Word of God. God filled them with the Spirit of Christ

so that Christ spoke through them. Those words are recorded infallibly for us in the Holy Scriptures, the foundation of the church. They reveal to us Christ, the Rock, the Cornerstone, upon which the church rests and from which it has all its existence.

The sad state of affairs today is that many deny the infallibility of these Scriptures. They want no objective Word because they want no objective truth. As a result, God becomes whatever they think He is. So also then is Christ treated. Faith becomes merely a matter of personal feeling. Therefore, the power of the Word is denied. When the power of the Word is denied, then the church does not mean anything either. The preaching of that Word is thought to be dry, meaningless, and dead. No wonder it is replaced by plays, discussions, movies, and the like, all of which are considered far more effective than the preaching.

As the church of Jesus Christ we must maintain that the church

is built upon the apostles and prophets, the sound Word of God. It is the only sound foundation; another foundation there is not. The preaching, no matter how ridiculed, must be maintained as the only divinely given means of grace. Christ refuses to work through any other means.

As to the actual construction of this temple of God we have now, no doubt, come to the conclusion that God, and not man, does the work. Man likes to take things into his own hands, seek his own means to gather the church, or take the credit for what is termed "winning souls for Christ." Our fathers in the Heidelberg Catechism (Q & A 54) had the correct idea when they answered the question, "What believest thou concerning the 'holy catholic church' of Christ? That the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to himself by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and for

ever shall remain, a living member thereof."

Indeed, the Lord our God builds His church through the Lord Jesus Christ, who knows His sheep and calls them by name. They in turn hear His voice and follow Him. Powerfully and efficaciously He gathers by His Word and Spirit. To God be all the honor and the glory, "for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). That is what is happening right now. Each of us is being chipped, ground, and polished for his own place in the temple of God. When we are ready, when God has finished with this work, then heaven cannot wait. We will then be translated out of the church militant into our own places in the church triumphant. What glory that shall be, finally to be in that perfected tabernacle of God where He shall dwell with us in Christ eternally in covenant fellowship and communion. □

Editorial

How Then Will We Live? (3)

Believing the doctrine of the Bible that Jesus is coming and that His coming is near, the people of God will then live in hope of that coming.

For the instituted church, this living hope will take form in a holiness that consists, among other activities, of preaching, defending, contending, and suffering.

There is also the personal call-

ing of the individual believer and of the children of believers. Hoping for the coming of Christ, each is called to a holy life. He is called to keep himself from the filthy, vile, depraved conduct of the world that increases in lawlessness at the end: revelry; drunkenness; drugs; fornication; adultery; homosexuality. This is the urgent call of the apostle in Romans 13:11-14: "The night is far spent, the day is

at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness ... rioting ... drunkenness ... chambering ... wantonness ... strife ... envying."

Note the "therefore"! Because the Day of Christ is near, *therefore* we ought to cast off the works of darkness. Walking "honestly," or decently, in the light (which is holiness) is how we will live, *because of our hope*.

One evil to be as carefully

guarded against as it is enthusiastically and pervasively promoted by the world is fornication. Fornication is any and every sexual relation with someone other than a man's one wife or a woman's one husband. It is sexual relations of the unmarried. It is sexual relations of the married man with a prostitute. It is sexual relations of a married man with another man's wife without recourse to divorce and remarriage. It is sexual relations of a married man with another man's wife even though they have divorced and remarried. It is all sexual relations of men with men and women with women, regardless whether a state that sinks away into the abyss of anti-Christian revolution against God's very law in nature decrees homosexual connections to be marriage.

In a powerful passage addressed to Christians who were living in a culture, like our own, that pursued and accepted fornication as freely as it did the gratifying of the belly by eating, the apostle grounded the call to flee fornication, not in the danger of sexually transmitted disease but in the resurrection of the body. I Corinthians 6:13, 14 flatly rules out fornication, whether for the young Christian or the old Christian, whether for the unmarried or the married member of the church, *on the basis of our hope*. "Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power."

The hope of the resurrection of his body will also then be the motivation, why the child of God flees fornication, for example, by avoiding the pornography readily accessible, we are told, on the Internet.

No warning of the believer who lives in the West at the beginning of the twenty-first century dare ignore the evil of earthlimindedness. This is the madness of an unbounded pursuit, whether by rich or poor, of earthly posses-

sions and pleasures as the very purpose of life. According to Jesus, this is the great danger in the last days: eating, drinking, marrying, buying, selling, planting, building, as the main thing (Luke 17:26-30).

Usually this groveling in the dirt of the earth (by one originally made to know God!) is the source of every immorality. According to Ezekiel, it was the cause of Sodom's homosexuality: "pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness" led to "abomination" (Ezek. 16:49, 50). So is sheer earthlimindedness—the rejection of the Creator for the creature—the cause of homosexuality in Western civilization today. But it is possible that one be earthliminded, while decent in his conduct—and damned.

What keeps us from devoting ourselves to the earth, to earthly life, and to earthly pleasures, even as we live earthly life to the full? Hope for Christ's coming! We have a wife as though we had none, we weep as though we wept not, we rejoice as though we rejoiced not, we buy as though we possessed not, we use this world as not overusing it, *because the time is short and the fashion of this world passes away* (I Cor. 7:29-31).

This is negative.

One who expects the coming of Christ and the final judgment will also be active in a life of good works. My main purpose here is not to mention all kinds of good works that Christians are called to do, but to point out how the Bible grounds our life of good works *in our hope of the coming of Christ*.

Scripture makes our hope of Christ's coming, with the resurrection and the final judgment that accompany Christ's coming, the basis and incentive of a vigorously active life of holiness. Luke 19:11ff., the parable of the pounds, teaches that we must use our gifts, abilities, possessions, and position to get gain for Christ with a view to the judgment that He will conduct at His coming.

The same parable, and other passages of Scripture, motivate us to a life of good works with a view to the reward that we will receive at the judgment. Hebrews 6:10 specifies our labor of love to each other. God will not forget our work and labor of love that we show to His name by serving the saints. *This includes our mutual labor of service in marriage and the family*. Husbands may forget the service of their godly wife. Shame, shame, shame on them. Children may forget the labor of love of their believing parents. Shame, shame, shame on them. God does not forget one such act of service, whether in the congregation or in the home. Comes the day when it will be rewarded, including the least of the acts, about which we will say, racking our brain, "When did I ever do *that*?"

In view of the reward that we will get, we can be patient now as regards the seeming lack of fruit on our work, or recognition, or gratitude even by those whom we serve. There are husbands in the church who take their wife for granted, who never say "thank you," and who even treat her shabbily besides. They should be horse-whipped publicly. It is doubtful whether they have the living hope in them of Christ's coming. But the wife may not walk out, because "my husband did not appreciate me, because my husband abused me in this way." Nor will the Christian woman, though strongly tempted. She serves her husband with the hope of praise and reward from God in the Day of Christ.

The final judgment is also the incentive to us patiently to bear injustice in our life. James 5:7, 8, which calls the workingman to endure injustice from his employer in view of the coming of the Lord which "draweth nigh," applies as well to injustice at the hands of civil government, or an evil neighbor. There may be no retribution, no taking of matters into our own hands, no avenging of ourselves.

There *need* not be. We wait for God to avenge us, as He will in the judgment.

Anticipation of the final judgment motivates us to live godly lives simply because our judgment will be *according to our works*.

The truth of Christ's resurrection and the promise of our own resurrection at His coming cannot but move us to "abound" in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor is not in vain in the Lord (I Cor. 15:58).

Even the reality of eternal hell plays a role in the active life of holiness of the individual child of God. Eschatology works holiness, and eschatology includes the truth about hell. In the struggles and temptations of his life, deeply conscious of eternal hell as he is deeply conscious of eternal heaven, the elect believer, without for one moment supposing that he might perish there, sacrifices whatever of pleasure or of self-fulfillment, indeed, whatever belongs to the *necessities* of earthly life, that would tend to bring him to hell. His motivation in painfully denying himself is the desire to be everlastingly with God in the bliss of heaven, rather than to be everlastingly cast away from God's presence in the torment of hell. "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched" (Mark 9:43).

Let every Reformed Christian, indeed every Protestant, note well: There is no calling to church or Christian to "Christianize the world" before Christ comes. There is no calling to get the upper hand and dominate in society. I challenge anyone to find such a calling in all the New Testament Scriptures. Where among all the many exhortations by Christ and the apostles to the church and the saint is such a thing even hinted at?

Nor is our life of holiness based on the "success" of such a life in history, as though the church evan-

gelizes because she expects the majority of mankind to be converted in some great revival and as though the individual Christian obeys the law because he expects that this obedience will eventually propel him and his cohorts into power.

On the contrary!

Insofar as the basis of our present holy life lies in the future, the basis is the coming of Christ, the resurrection of our body, the final judgment, and our reigning with Christ, first in heaven after death and then in the new world after the judgment.

The calling of the believer that follows from his hope is not only that he *live* a holy life, but also that he *die* a holy death.

There is a distinctively Christian way to die. This is to die at peace, falling asleep in Jesus with no more uproar in soul or behavior than when one falls asleep of an evening after a hard day's work. Abraham Kuyper described this Christian way of death, and called us to it, in his *In the Shadow of Death*.

He who can die bravely and in the power of faith *must* also do it. Also in dying you shall not be merely passive, but in holier sense be active. In dying, too, you have a *task*, a *calling*, a sacred *duty* to fulfill. Your last piece of work on earth. But a task, at your account; for which all your life long you have to prepare yourself; and of which you shall give account to the Judge of your heart and your thoughts. This task touches also *your loved ones*. Your death must leave behind a fruit for them. Presently your love can no more benefit them, but can still do so in your dying. For the impression of an heroic and believing death-bed always leaves behind a glorious preachment. An impression not easily wiped out. And thus likewise you have to die honorably *for God's sake*. For God's honor, over against Satan and his satellites, hangs by it; hangs by it, that also in the dying of His child

the power of faith be *manifest*.

This is the way to die in view of being immediately with Christ as to the soul and in view of the resurrection of the body.

Nor is there any interest on the part of the Christian in the prolonging of his physical existence by the use of extraordinary medical measures. Even when he is in the prime of life, and healthy, he hardly knows what to choose, whether to be with Christ, which to him is far better, or to live for the sake of the service he may render to Christ in the world.

As the hope of the resurrection of the body at the Day of Christ results in a distinctively Christian way of dying, so it also produces a distinctively Christian way of conducting oneself at the death of a loved one who died in the Lord. We give the loved one a decent burial, as the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) requires:

The Scripture directs that the bodies of the faithful, as being temples of the Holy Spirit, which we truly believe shall rise again at the last day, should be honorably, without any superstition, committed to the earth; and, besides, that we should make honorable mention of those who died in the Lord, and perform all duties of love to those they leave behind, as their widows and fatherless children. Other care for the dead we do not enjoin.

We also display the comfort of the gospel by not grieving uncontrollably, as though we had no hope (I Thess. 4:13).

What a wonderful, motivating power is the hope of the gospel by the work of the Spirit of Christ in our lives. We live in holiness. We die in peace.

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus," come quickly. □

— DJE

Letters

■ Deliverance from Millennial Error

Thank you so much for the *Standard Bearer*. I read each article (other articles are read repeatedly) in each issue with joy. I like God-honoring materials. I am learning a lot about amillennialism. In the seminary, we were not taught about it. All emphasis was given on dispensationalism. In fact, I began to have proper understanding

of amillennialism through the *Standard Bearer*.

Your series of articles, "The Preterism of Christian Reconstruction," is very, very interesting. I really enjoy reading it! Through them I got a good understanding about preterism and Reconstruction started by Rushdoony. I have a copy of his book. I was supposed to buy Stuart Russell's book, *The Parousia*, but I decided not to buy one after reading your articles. Your view, in my considered opinion, is much, much clearer and bib-

lical. I agree with your statement: "Consigning the book of Revelation to the past is, all by itself, the virtual annihilation of biblical Eschatology." Your refutation of preterism is very good. Thanks for listing also the passages interpreted by preterists to have been exhaustively fulfilled in AD 70. I read each passage (noting its contexts) and I would say, preterism is wrong.

Percival Tanierla
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Come, Lord Jesus

Rev. Cornelius Hanks

The Signs of the Times 11. The Great Tribulation

As has been pointed out before, the destruction of Jerusalem and the persecution that the Jews experienced at that time are a type of the great tribulation that comes at the end of the ages just before the return of our Lord.

The word "tribulation" means literally "pressure," like a boa constrictor encircling itself around its victim and slowly tightening the pressure to crush him to death. Or we might use the example of a straitjacket with sharp points, used as an instrument of torture in times past to close in on a person until he was crushed to death.

This tribulation will take place, Jesus tells us, at the end of time, when antichrist is fully in power. But just as antichrist comes gradu-

ally, so also this tribulation will increase as the time approaches.

Forty years after Jesus' ascension the Romans took over Palestine and severely persecuted the Jews, groups of whom at times fought to the last man to resist them. The Jewish nation had become the apostate church and was therefore no longer in a typical sense the people of the Lord. They had joined themselves with the world in rejecting and crucifying the Christ. The true church would now become universal, the gathering of the elect believers with their spiritual seed throughout this present dispensation.

Jesus warned His disciples at that time and now warns us that the tribulation will be great. The likes of it have never been known. We read in Hebrews 11:33-38 of the persecution suffered by the church already in the old dispensation. We are also aware of the bitter suffering experienced by the early

Christians at the time of the apostles. Historical accounts tell us that these Christians dared not always openly to reveal themselves but used the sign of the fish to show one another, especially those who were fleeing for their lives, that they believed in the Christ. The letters of the Greek word for fish spell out the words: "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior." The whole new dispensation is red with the blood of martyrs who gave their lives in various ways for the sake of the gospel, even wasting away in prison, or dying at the stake or on the scaffold.

But to come closer to home, the believers who out of conviction left the State Church in the Netherlands to take part in the Secession of 1834 also experienced much suffering for the sake of the truth. The authorities allowed only small groups to meet at any one time, so that they would secretly hold their worship services in the homes or

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sometimes even in the open field. Since the government no longer gave them financial support, as it did to the State Church, they were compelled to support their own churches and pay the school tuition for their children from their meager incomes. It is exactly for that reason that many sought refuge in the new country of America.

Reformation is always a painful experience. It takes conviction, determination, and a willingness to be abused, scorned, and hated for the sake of maintaining that which is most precious to us. It means the loss of close friends, division, and sharp disagreement within the family. In many instances it may mean the loss of a position or a job. The Scriptures encouraged the faithful in those times, saying: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

Yet all this does not begin to compare with the tribulation of those last days when the beasts of Revelation 13, instigated by the devil, will be in power over the whole world. Everyone will willingly bow to the beast and worship him, except those who stand firm in the conviction of their faith like Daniel and his three friends. They will experience tribulation such as has never been known.

Already we see evidences of this round about us. In China tens of millions of Chinese are believed to have joined so-called house churches that operate illegally. More than seventy of these "house church" leaders have recently been placed in detention. This is but part of the persecution the Christians experience in many countries, even in Myanmar, where our sister-churches in Singapore are working. It is said that the persecution of the church is presently at

an all-time high and is on the increase. Every effort will be made to wipe out the true religion.

The idea is not that there will be no public worship at the end of time, but that worship will be complete devotion to the Antichrist. He sets himself up in the place of and in opposition to the Christ. In the early stages of his kingdom he comes through false teachers who cunningly present the lie under pretense of proclaiming the truth of Scripture. He enters the church with cunningly devised fables and deceives many, as Jesus has already warned us. But the Antichrist will ultimately come out boldly, presenting himself as the Christ, the Savior of the world.

Since he comes with many signs and wonders, professing to do great things for humanity, he readily deceives many. Just as Jesus showed that He was indeed the Christ by His many signs and wonders, so also this man of sin will display his power, his ingenuity, his ability to bring peace and prosperity for the whole world. He will be so convincing that the masses will readily bow in worship before him and adore him as sovereign lord. He will sit on the throne in royal majesty as God Himself. Yes, the whole world will worship him as God, except the true believers.

This means that the true believers will no longer be able to gather in public worship. Our churches and our schools will be turned over to the worship of the beast. If any group of people dares to defy the authority by attempting to worship God, they will be duly annihilated, as the Jews were in the days of Hitler. We will not even be able to worship God in our homes. By that time the authorities may be able to detect all that is said and done within the four walls of our houses. It may very well be that we will read our Bibles and pray to God at the very risk of our lives. Every person in every nation upon the face of the earth will be required

to worship the beast.

Scripture tells us that the Antichrist will require that everyone must wear a mark on his forehead or on his hand. The idea is that at all times they will be readily recognized as his followers. At the same time, those who refuse to bear that mark will also immediately be recognized by their lack of bearing the mark. Whatever that mark may be, we see already today how everyone can be distinguished by his mark, for already we are recognized by our social security number. It has even been suggested that babies will receive some sort of mark already at their birth.

This mark will be the number of man: 666. Whether this exact number will be used, we do not know. But it is possible that it will be used in some form or another, just as Nebuchadnezzar's image was sixty cubits high and six cubits wide. In any case, the number 666 designates the week without the Sabbath, man without God. It will clearly reveal to the believer that *man* has become like God, denying and seeking to replace the living God and His Christ.

The result will be that we will not be able to buy or to sell. Unless we bear the mark of the beast upon our foreheads or on our right hand we will not be able to buy as much as a loaf of bread in the grocery store. No neighbor will be willing or dare to share food or clothing with us. But it means far more than that. It means that no school will accept our children, nor will we be allowed to teach them any semblance of the true faith at home. It means that no employer will give us employment. We will lose our homes, our automobiles, and whatever possessions we may treasure. Life will be all but unbearable.

Even as Jesus warned His disciples of that time to flee into the mountains, so also we must go where we can to escape the enemy and to find refuge wherever pos-

sible. Resistance will be impossible and not required. For us it will be a mere matter of survival or imprisonment or death. But the end is not far off.

Meanwhile, we must not allow ourselves to be deceived. Many will pretend to be the Christ. The beast takes on many forms of deception. If it were possible even the elect would be deceived. It is only the grace of God that preserves them even unto the end.

Christ assures us that the time will be shortened. We can rest assured of that. As distressful as the days may be, for to all outward appearance Satan has attained his ambition to be chief ruler of the world, *God and His Christ still reign in the heavens*. He who sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall hold them in derision. For He has set His King Christ Jesus upon the holy hill of Zion.

That also means that this is a necessary part of the carrying out of the counsel of God unto the salvation of His church. God remembers His people in all their trials and tribulations. He loves them with an eternal love and cares for them even in the time of dire distress. In some cases He will mercifully take them unto Himself. In other instances He will give them grace to bear the afflictions that are laid upon them.

There is no doubt about it that the church will be very small in that day. Jesus asks: "When the Son of man returneth shall He find faith on the earth?" There will be no sham Christians, no hypocrites in the church of that day. It may be doubtful whether the few that remain will even be able to contact each other. But the Lord knows and preserves His own even unto the end. In the meantime, He as-

sures them: "The Judge stands at the door. Be thou (individually) faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life."

At God's own time, when from every point of view the world is bankrupt and the church has faithfully endured her tribulation, the sign of the Son of man will appear in the clouds of heaven. Christ Himself will appear in all the glory of His exalted majesty, far more glorious than at the time of His resurrection. Every eye will see Him. The beast and its followers will see their utter failure, their lost cause, their terrible judgment. They will cry to the rocks and the mountains to hide them from the face of the Almighty.

The dead will be raised, and the entire church will join with Christ and His holy angels to be with the Lord. Then follows the final judgment. □

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Doug Kuiper

The Basis for the Diaconate

2. Christ, Our Merciful High Priest

We have begun explaining the scriptural and theological basis for the diaconate by demonstrating that God has a special care for His poor and needy. This special care He manifests by commanding us, His church and saints, to care for the poor in our midst and by blessing us in the way of obedience to this command.

While this command is reason enough for us to care for the poor, it does not in itself justify devoting an *office* of the church to this work. The basis for having an office is found in the fact that Christ is our merciful High Priest, who continues His High-Priestly work through the diaconate.

Fallen, sinful man needs a high priest to atone for his sins and to reconcile him to God. Once his sins are covered by an atoning sacrifice, the saved sinner's need of a high priest is not satisfied. He still needs that high priest to approach God on his behalf, praying that

God would see him as righteous and would bestow upon him all the blessings to which the righteous have a right. Furthermore, the saved sinner needs that high priest to bestow upon him, in God's name, those blessings which God grants in answer to the high priest's intercession.

Such a high priest God has provided for His people in Jesus Christ! (For proof, see Psalm 110:4 and the book of Hebrews.) By His death on the cross, Christ atoned for the sins of all God's elect, reconciling them to God. By virtue of His new resurrection life He has ascended to God's right hand,

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where He intercedes for us. To Christ God has given the gift of the Holy Spirit, whom Christ poured out on the church and shed abroad in the hearts of believers to bestow upon them all spiritual blessings which Christ merited for them.

The salvation which Christ has earned for us is spiritual, not earthly. Christ, our High Priest, does not save us from earthly sickness, earthly injustice, or even earthly poverty, but from spiritual poverty, from the effects of sin, from bearing God's curse! In saving us, He gives spiritual riches, not earthly. He gives the riches of the enjoyment of fellowship with God as His dear children and of the receiving of His inheritance.

That God saves His people spiritually through Christ does not mean, however, that God has no concern for their bodies and their earthly life. For salvation includes our bodies. Our bodies will be raised! Furthermore, Jesus expressly taught that God cares for our earthly, bodily needs, both by teaching His disciples to pray for daily bread (Matt. 6:11) and by reminding them that their heavenly Father knows their earthly needs and is able to supply them (Matt. 6:19-34).

It is the confession of the child of God, therefore, that all good gifts come from God. Salvation and all gifts which comprise salvation come from God. Also the gifts pertaining to our bodily needs come from God. And they come from Him to His people through our High Priest, Jesus Christ.

Let us look to Christ alone for the supply of all our needs! He is our only High Priest!

Lord's Days 5 and 6 of our Heidelberg Catechism remind us that one requirement our Redeemer/High Priest had to meet in order to save us was that He must be very man. This was necessary, not only because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which sinned should make

atonement for that sin (LD 6), but also because that high priest, being a man, would therefore be able to have true compassion on us in our misery (Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:14, 15; 5:1, 2).

Such compassion Jesus manifests as our High Priest.

Is it not evident that to sacrifice one's own life for the salvation of another manifests compassion? Does not the fact that He prays to the Father on our behalf show His great pity for us? Indeed! We have a High Priest who pities us because of the spiritual misery into which we have plunged ourselves, desires that we be delivered from such misery into great blessedness, and effectually works to carry out that desire! Were He to be callously indifferent to our spiritual poverty, He would not work to deliver us from it.

This compassion which Jesus showed by His death on the cross, and continues to show as He sits at the right hand of the Father, He manifested throughout His entire life on earth by many miracles. While He walked on this earth, Christ cast out many devils, healed many sick, caused the lame to walk, enabled the deaf to hear, gave sight to the blind, and loosed the tongues of the dumb. Seeing His compassion in His miracles of healing, many people who desired Him to heal them or their loved ones requested Him to "have mercy" on them (cf. Matt. 9:27, 15:22, 17:15, 20:30, 31; Luke 17:13).

These two manifestations of Jesus' compassion — the one shown to fallen elect mankind by His High Priestly work, and the other to those with bodily afflictions — are not unrelated. His healing of bodily ailments and miraculous caring for bodily needs all pointed to His High Priestly work as the great manifestation of His mercy. So we read that Christ cast out devils and healed the sick, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, himself took our infirmities,

and bare our sicknesses" (Matt. 8:17). Matthew quotes from Isaiah 53, in which chapter we find one of the clearest Old Testament prophecies and descriptions of Christ's substitutionary atonement and death. God's purpose through Isaiah is not primarily to teach the church that the Christ will do miracles of bodily healing, but to show that Christ would take upon Himself the weakened human nature of His people, in order to take away their guilt and corruption and reconcile them to God. In pointing to Christ's miraculous healings as being fulfillment of Isaiah, therefore, Matthew does not mean that Isaiah's prophecy has no further fulfillment in Christ's work on the cross, but that the compassion Christ showed on those with bodily needs pictured His compassion shown to His people in their great spiritual need.

That Christ is our only High Priest means that the church has never had any other. How can this be, when the church has existed since Adam, and Christ came 4000 years later? Of course, the answer must be found in the fact that Christ Himself is eternal. He was manifest in the flesh at the time of His birth, but existed from all eternity. So He was the church's High Priest from the beginning of the world.

Yet it is true that in showing Himself to be High Priest in the old dispensation, He used earthly men to picture Him as High Priest; their work pictured His work. Christ manifested His priesthood in men such as Noah, Abraham, Melchizedek, Job, who offered sacrifices for themselves and their households, according to various Scripture passages. Specific mention is made of Abraham's intercessory prayer for the righteous in Sodom (Gen. 18:23ff.), and Job's for his sons (Job 1:5). Such intercession manifested compassion for those for whom they prayed.

Christ manifested His priest-

hood in the entire nation of Israel, whom God at Mount Sinai designated "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). As priests, they were consecrated to the service of God which the Mosaic law required of them. In particular, this required them to show compassion on all in distress (as we noted last time in speaking of Israel's duty to care for the poor), to bring their offerings and sacrifices to the tabernacle at appointed times, and to set aside their first-born males for the service of Jehovah to represent this kingdom of priests.

To this last mentioned requirement of the law God added another one: the firstborn must be redeemed from that temple service; they would not have to perform it. Instead of the firstborn, God appointed the tribe of Levi as the tribe of priests, with the descendants of Aaron as high priest. Particularly their work in the temple pictured Christ's work, as they offered sacrifices for sin and interceded for the people. The high priest was also instructed to bless the people (Num. 6:22ff.). Such work was not to be done merely formally, but with a heart that desired the salvation of the people — that is, with a heart of compassion.

We must see, then, that Christ continues to work as High Priest in the church today.

He does so through all believers. Just as was true in Old Testament Israel, so in the New Testament church all God's saints are priests (cf. I Pet. 2:9, Rev. 1:6). Romans 12 shows that this has implications for how we live: we must present our bodies living sacrifices (v. 1); we must distribute to the necessity of saints and be given to hospitality (v. 13); we must weep with those who weep (v. 15); we must feed our hungry enemy and give drink to our thirsty enemy (v. 20). In sum, we must be holy and compassionate!

But particularly, Christ func-

tions as our merciful High Priest today through the diaconate.

That Christ does function through the diaconate is evident from the fact that the diaconate is a proper office in the church, instituted by Christ through the apostles. The office of apostle in the New Testament church was a temporary office, a sort of bridge between Christ's ministry while on earth, and His ministry through the office of pastor, elder, and deacon in the New Testament church. When Christ ascended He gave all authority to His apostles. They were prophets, priests, and kings to the New Testament church. But the church soon grew too large for the apostles to be able to do all the work. Furthermore, while the day would come when the temporary office of apostle would cease, the need of the church for men to hold office, to work directly in Christ's behalf, would not cease. So out of the office of apostle, directly instituted by Christ, came those of pastor, elder, and deacon. Because Christ worked through the apostles, and because the office of deacon was instituted by Christ through the apostles, we can say that Christ works through deacons!

That the diaconate is a particular manifestation of Christ's priesthood must also be proven. Doing this is not so easy. Are we merely to assume that the diaconate manifests the priesthood of Christ because the pastorate clearly manifests Christ's prophetic work, and the eldership Christ's kingly work, leaving the priestly work of Christ to be matched up with the office of deacon by default? Were this our sole proof, it would seem perhaps a bit simplistic and rationalistic. So we will not make it our sole proof. Yet, there is something to it! Scripture is clear that Christ is our only and eternal Mediator, and shows Himself as such by being our Prophet, Priest, and King! In the Old Testament church He functioned through the three offices of prophet, priest, and king.

Being our only and eternal Mediator, He must continue to perform each aspect of His Mediatorial work in the New Testament. If He doesn't, the church has lost her Mediator! Furthermore, Christ has instituted three offices in the New Testament church. One of them *must* manifest that priestly work — else the church is lacking a manifestation of an essential aspect of Christ's Mediatorial work! And if it is clear that the pastorate manifests His prophetic work, and the eldership His kingly, to conclude that the diaconate must manifest His priestly is justified on the basis of the fact that Scripture teaches us some things, not by direct statement (such as "The deacons manifest the priestly work of Christ"), but by good and necessary consequence.

But there is more. For the word "deacon" means "servant." (The English word "deacon," incidentally, is of Greek origin; the Greek word is transliterated "*diakonos*.") So, while it is true that pastors and elders also serve Christ and His church, the name "deacon" emphasizes that the diaconate in particular is an office of service or ministration. In the Old Testament a Hebrew word with the same meaning was commonly used to refer to the priests — they were the ministers, the servants, of God. Furthermore, Jesus Christ drew attention to the fact that He had come to minister, in giving His life a ransom for many (performing His High Priestly function, sacrificing His body! Cf. Matt. 20:28). By the use of the word "deacon" to refer to this office of which we speak, therefore, God directs us to see the diaconate as the continuation and manifestation of the priestly work of Christ. Remember that the use of these words in Scripture was inspired!

Certainly more work could be done to show that it is biblical to speak of the diaconate as being a manifestation of Christ's priestly work. This fact is generally as-

sumed, rather than carefully proven, in many books dealing with the diaconate. For now, however, we will leave demonstrating this.

What remains to be done, briefly, is to answer this question: what implications does this fact, that the diaconate is a manifestation of Christ's priestly work, have for the deacons of the church today?

First, it speaks to the qualifications of deacons. They must be men of great compassion and pity for those in need. The church of

Jesus Christ does not need deacons who are indifferent to the plight of the poor and suffering. Were Christ indifferent, He would not have saved us! So must the deacons be ready to "save" those in need. This means, too, that they must be willing to serve, willing to give of themselves for the good of others.

Second, it speaks to the work of deacons. In their work, they must bring Christ; they must show that Christ is a merciful High Priest to His people! It is above all things most essential that the deacons, in bringing aid to the poor, bring the

Scriptures! For Christ is present by His Spirit and Word. Man lives, after all, not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3). When the deacons show this in bringing Scripture, they may be confident that Christ uses them to care for the needs of His church. Furthermore, the deacons must bring material gifts for the relief of the poor, thus manifesting concretely their compassion and Christ's, and showing again that Christ cares, not only for the souls of His people, but also for their bodies. □

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ Women in Office: the CRC and its Y2K Problem

Almost five years ago the synod (1995) of the Christian Reformed Church gave the classes of that denomination the option to declare the word "male" inoperative in their Church Order. It represented a kind of "end run" around the requirements of the Church Order. This opened the way for women to serve in the ministry (or as elders and deacons). This could be done, however, only in those classes which decided to mutilate the Church Order as the synod allowed.

The same synod decided that this issue could not be brought back again to synod until the year 2000. In the meantime, women could be placed in office. Some limitations were made with respect to their serving on synodical committees (for fear of causing too much offense to the objectors).

At the 1998 synod, a committee was appointed to review the entire situation, survey the

churches to determine the mind of the people, and report to synod 2000.

So the synod of 2000 will be facing its own Y2K problem next June.

The *Christian Renewal*, December 13, 1999, has an evaluation of the situation by William H. Kooienga, pastor of the First CRC, Thunder Bay, ON. His report states:

The committee surveyed congregations and classes to determine the impact of the '95 decision, that infamous decision allowing classes to declare the word "male" in the church order inoperative. The fruits of the committee's work were to be presented to the congregations by November 1, 1999.

The report spends a few pages analyzing the responses to the survey questions which are included in an appendix. It then gives two contrasting perspectives on women in the offices of elder, minister and evangelist. It expends a good deal of energy promoting unity in the denomination. The authors also urge upon the churches the use of women's gifts. The report concludes with certain recommendations. The report recommends an extension of the synod of 95's decision with modifications: five more years of the

inoperable "male" word, five more years of limits on the discussion of the matter of women in office along with some incremental changes allowing women to serve as synodical deputies, advisors to synod (seven in number) and as pastors of churches, even (with some limitations) in classes that refuse to render the word "male" inoperative.

The page numbering of the report tells a story. Six pages present the case for closing the offices to women. Nine pages argue for opening the offices to women. Eight pages are given over to exhortations to unity. The conclusions essentially accept the pro-women-in-office argument and deny the case that argues against it. Although it tries to retain the idea that two contradictory Biblical positions are possible on the issue, the report undermines that thesis by its attempt to further open the offices.

The evaluation of Kooienga continues. He presents a summary of the report's presentation of the pro and con of the women-in-office issue. He points out that the emphasis of the report is on unity—unity based upon "wisdom." He states:

The authors of the report insist that this is not a confessional mat-

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ter. They admit that women-in-office is not adiaphora. Yet, salvation doesn't hinge on this issue, they claim. They call it a wisdom matter. Wisdom is not only needed when dealing with others who differ, but wisdom becomes a category alongside the doctrinal, moral and disputable issues. Since it is a wisdom issue, it cannot be in the category of a doctrinal matter, nor can it be a moral issue and it should not be considered a disputable concern. Calling the problem a wisdom issue is an attempt to defuse the charge that those on one side of this issue must be disobeying the will of the Lord and that such disobedience is always a moral issue. Seeing the issue as a wisdom issue also allows us to set aside conscience. That we need no longer be conscience bound by the teaching of the Bible on this issue is also the hope of the authors.

Kooienga continues by pointing out the many flaws in this "unity" argument. He then concludes:

Meaningful discussion has not occurred in the past five years nor, by some standards, in too many of the past thirty years. The committee admits that discussions have been limited by the decision of '95 but proposes at least three and maybe five more years of a similar restriction. That, I suggest, means more years in which raising the office issue will be seen as an attack on our supposed unity.

The survey provides little hope for a meaningful discussion of the big issues. The majority of congregations and classes are said to be weary of discussing the issue and want to get on with so-called important matters. "Eighteen percent of the respondents said that synod should return to the 1994 decision.... Sixteen percent favored opening all the offices to women.... In between these positions, sixty-six percent called for maintaining the options defined in 1995 and possibly moving ahead slowly as the best way to maintain the unity of the church."

The committee chose the middle way, probably guided by the re-

sults of their survey. I think that in spite of overtures from congregations urging a different direction, the committee proposals will prevail and the denomination will, in its cautious manner, slide incrementally toward opening all the offices to women with full privileges. We will probably at some point also claim that there were not two biblical positions on the issue after all. We will say that the Bible, assisted by our insights, is clear enough on the issue and that refusing to support women-in-office is contrary to the wisdom of the church.

Kooienga raises some valid points and, I am convinced, will be proven accurate in his predictions. The moratorium on discussion will be continued. The permission to set aside the "male" statement of the church order will be extended. Indeed, it appears as though all wisdom resides in the current generation—and the church erred in the matter for the past 1950 years!

■ The New Millennium: Admissions and Forecasts

At the end of each year it is normal to read in newspapers and magazines the forecasts for the coming year. This year was very unusual. There was the end of a decade, the end of a century, and the end of a millennium. Forecasts, therefore, are being made not only for the coming year, but the century and millennium ahead of us. What will this look like? What changes can we expect? The child of God derives his "forecasts" from Scripture. The world presents forecasts based on its own philosophies. It is remarkable, though, how one can recognize some of the prophecies of Scripture being fulfilled in the way of man's development.

Newsweek, January 1, 2000, presents some of its own comments and forecasts. It is striking that one of the articles speaks of inventions and its effect on the sexual lives of people in the future. In that con-

nection, an interesting (and true) observation is made:

All the communication technologies we've ever invented—the telephone, movies, the Internet—have eventually been used in the service of lust. Tomorrow's advanced technologies will be no different....

We could have known this all along. Sometimes we close our eyes to the fact. We can easily go along with the technologies and the evil use—because everyone does. Yet we ought to recognize that we are being led, step-by-step, to see and enjoy the "lusts of the flesh." It is Satan's attempt to turn us from the cross and the glory of the heavenly.

Another article indicates that we have begun what might be called the fourth revolution in medicine. The first was the discovery in 1854 that cholera is spread by contaminated water. The result was that sanitation protected people from infectious diseases. The second was surgery with anesthesia. The third was the introduction of vaccines and antibiotics. Now the fourth is near: genetic engineering. There will be, it is claimed, a gene-based therapy for most diseases within thirty years. But the same author fears that this might also involve gene manipulation so that there are changes in one's abilities, intelligence, appearance, etc. Man will be "as God," to determine what the generations will look like. He might, of course, "invent" new diseases also which devastate mankind.

It does appear, then, that man is at the verge of eradicating death or at least of extending life far beyond the 80 years "if strength be great."

There will also be, so is the claim, "computers that enfold you, like a second skin. Rooms that come alive with sensors, cameras and embedded chips, allowing

them to “know” you and adjust to your preferences when you arrive....” The article continues:

In their view (the “digerati”), computing will, by the year 2005, shift decisively from domination by the personal computer to reliance on a variety of “information appliances.” At first most of these devices will be handheld: Web-ready telephones and palmtops,

for example. Increasingly, though, they will be embedded in the background in ways almost invisible to us. Wearable computers will arrive soon after, though it will take some time to make them small and light enough to actually embed them in clothing. Cameras will be everywhere, feeding visual data to the Internet, and some researchers believe that by 2020 we will be on camera nearly nonstop.

Sounds much like the age of the beast and his image of Revelation 13. What seemed for centuries to be a fantastic vision, now is within the realm of possibility. There will be the requirement to worship the beast—and there will be the means to know if one does or does not. Surely the time of Christ’s return must then be at hand. □

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Rabanus and the Victory of Semi-Pelagianism (2)

In our previous article (Jan. 1, 2000) we saw that Rabanus, the archbishop of Mainz, repudiated Gottschalk’s view of the sovereignty of grace in salvation; that Gottschalk courageously accused Rabanus of holding views which were Semi-Pelagian; and that the synod of Mayence condemned Gottschalk. The controversy, however, did not die with Gottschalk’s imprisonment, for he had supporters who not only agreed with his views but protested the scandalous treatment he received. Later synods therefore were forced to deal further with the matter.

Synod of Valence (855)

The synod of Valence was a surprise. In some important respects it upheld Gottschalk. Its decision reads:

We confess predestination of the elect to life, and a predestination of the wicked to death; but that,

in the election of those who are to be saved, the mercy of God precedes good merit, and in the condemnation of those who will perish, evil merit precedes the righteous judgment of God. But that in predestination God has determined only those things which he himself would do, either from gratuitous mercy or in righteous judgment.... But that in the wicked he foreknew the wickedness because it comes from them; and did not predestinate it, because it does not come from him.

The synod also said: Those teachers in the church were condemned who think that “some are predestinated to evil by divine power, i.e., so that, as it were, they cannot be anything else.”

A word of explanation here might be of benefit. The clause in the above decision which reads: “in the condemnation of those who will perish, evil merit *precedes* the righteous judgment of God” is the sticky one. The Canons of Dordt do not say that; nor has any Reformed man ever agreed to that. The statement, as it stands there, seems to teach conditional repro-

bation after all. It seems to say that God reprobates those who make themselves worthy by their unbelief. This is not so. The matter is different. The Reformed have always refused to say that reprobation is simply God’s sovereign determination that men sin so as to send men to hell. This formulation has always been rejected on the grounds that it makes God the author of sin. But the Reformed have also refused to say that God determines that some should go to hell because He foresees that they would reject the gospel and live in unrepentant sin. This is a conditional reprobation which does not do justice to God’s sovereignty. Rather, the very careful language which has always been employed is this: God determines to damn others to hell in the way of their sin. The formulation may not be entirely clear, but it is a formulation which takes into account the two truths that God is sovereign over sin, and that man is responsible for his own sin so that he justly suffers eternal damnation because of sin.

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Two More Synods and the End of the Matter

Quite understandably the enemies of Gottschalk were not satisfied with the decisions of Valence. Another synod was held in Savonieres in 859 which attempted to make compromise decisions; but every effort failed.

The final synod to deal with the matter was held in Touchy in 860. All went against Gottschalk. The decisions of Chiersy were reaffirmed, and the decisions of Valence were altered and revised to fit the decisions of Chiersy. Gottschalk stood alone. But the synod did have its moments when its conscience was pricked. That became evident in the fact that every man at the synod took his turn to profess solemnly his loyalty to Augustine. It was something similar to a husband spending five minutes every day professing his faithfulness to his wife. She might, I suspect, begin to wonder a bit about him.

The Views That Prevailed

The views which finally prevailed in the Roman Catholic Church are best defined by the views of Rabanus himself, for they reflect what became standard RC teaching. When I speak of the views of Rabanus, I mean not only his positive teachings, but also the points at which he condemned Gottschalk. What were these views?

The objections to Gottschalk's teachings were chiefly against the doctrine of predestination. This is not surprising because this was the truth which Gottschalk himself so strongly emphasized. Rabanus brought up many objections, all of which we ourselves have repeatedly heard and which have become old and tired tirades against the Reformed faith. Gottschalk makes God the author of sin, said Rabanus. And, further, God is unjust in His actions towards the wicked when He sends them to hell for doing things which they were

destined to do. And, as far as election is concerned, the doctrine which Gottschalk teaches leads people into carnal security and despair.

But when it came to the atonement, Rabanus made a surprising statement. It really proved conclusively that anyone who teaches an atonement which is for all men must, necessarily, also believe that the atonement is ineffectual, that is, that it cannot accomplish salvation. Rabanus complained that Gottschalk denied that Christ's blood was shed in vain for the lost. Do not let the negatives confuse you. This means that Rabanus insisted that Christ did die in vain for those who are lost.

And so, positively, Rabanus taught that Christ died for all men because God willed the salvation of all. God could not, Rabanus insisted, will the salvation of all men unless that salvation was actually available for all men in the cross.

Hence, said Rabanus, the determining factor was man's faith or unbelief. His faith in Christ's death saved him; his unbelief doomed him to hell. It all hinged on man's choice.

Because the decisive element in salvation was man's choice, this choice became the condition for predestination. God elected those whom He foreknew would believe; and God rejected those whom He foreknew would not believe. Predestination is conditional.

These views became the position of the RC. It is at least a consistent position. One could wish that those who defend a well-meant offer of the gospel would be as consistent as Rome. They rather choose to say that God wills the salvation of all men and wills the salvation of some men; that, in one sense, Christ died for all men, and that, in some other sense, Christ died only for His people; that salvation depends on man's accep-

tance of the gospel offer, and that salvation is by grace alone. And when such flat contradictions are protested, these defenders of the well-meant offer fall back on apparent contradiction and paradox.

Rome's Error and the Doctrine of Merit

We face one more question. It is an important one, for it uncovers the deepest evil of Rome's position — and, of course, the evil of those who agree with Rome on these matters. I have earlier suggested that question. I made the assertion that Rome was *compelled* to reject Augustine and *compelled* to adopt Semi-Pelagianism. It really could do nothing else. That is, it could do nothing else without ceasing to be Rome. It could do nothing else without changing the whole structure of Roman Catholicism from the ground up. This Rome would not and, in a sense, could not do.

What do I mean by this?

I made earlier references to the fact that monasticism had become an integral part of the life of the church. It had not only received the church's approval, but it was encouraged by the church as the ideal life for the Christian.

Monasticism was built four-square on the doctrine of merit. Without the doctrine of merit, monasticism not only lost its appeal, but became a useless exercise in self-denial which really made one who practiced it a fool. But the monastic life was a life of superior holiness. The man who ate bread and water once a day was holier than the man who enjoyed a full evening meal after a hard day's work. The man who lived alone in his cell and slept on a narrow stone bench was holier than the man who slept with his wife. The man who did not own even the clothes on his back, which were borrowed or

*One
could wish
that those
who defend
a well-meant offer
of the gospel
would be as
consistent
as Rome.*

donated, was holier than the man who purchased a new dress for his wife and a new suit for himself.

Why? Why was it holier? Well, such a life of self-denial was holier because one was more obedient to Christ's command. He was doing deeds which were more approved by Christ than the poor normal mortal who simply lived his life to God's glory in his daily calling. Because this greater holiness was closer to the will of Christ and more approved by God, it also brought a greater reward. Why did it bring a greater reward? Because it merited more of Christ's favor.

The whole concept of monasticism is a flat-out denial of Scripture. We are solemnly warned by Scripture that such talk is characteristic of those who depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils (1 Tim. 4:1, 2). They forbid to marry and command to abstain from meats. These are hypocritical lies of men whose consciences are seared with a hot iron (vv. 2, 3). We are, Scripture says, to confess the great truth that every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the Word of God and by prayer (vv. 3-5).

However all that may be, Rome introduced the whole concept of merit with its doctrine of monasticism. This was early, in fact before Augustine's time. It was imbedded in the very fabric of the life of the church. Man merited with God. That was all there was about it.

Other factors contributed to Rome's dilemma when it was confronted with Augustine's teaching. Rome's view of the sacraments was a contributing factor. Rome taught that baptism, in itself, conveyed grace. That is, all that received baptism received grace. How then was it to be explained that some who received grace went lost? Rome had only one answer, namely, that the grace of baptism

enabled a man to choose either for or against the gospel. Interestingly enough, Augustine himself held to this same view of the sacraments, but never seemed to have faced the contradiction in his own views. He could teach that baptism gave grace to all baptized, and yet that grace is sovereign (that is, it always saves) and particular. But Rome made it crucial to its doctrine. We may be thankful for this contradiction in Augustine's theology.

Another factor was the long-held view in the church of the freedom of the will. Augustine was very close to singing a solo when he insisted that the will of fallen man was totally incapable of choosing good. The doctrine of free will won. I know that Rome taught a will made free by baptismal grace. That makes no difference. God frees every man's will. The choice of salvation is now up to him.

And so all the rest followed. A conditional predestination — not only conditional reprobation, but also conditional election. A universal will of God that all men be saved. A cross of Christ for all. Salvation dependent upon man's will. Merit! Man merits salvation by a choice of his own.

And so Rome committed itself to salvation by grace *and works*. From this it never wavered. It has not wavered from this position today. Evangelicals may sign their documents of agreement with Rome, but by their signatures they are selling the truth for a mess of pottage.

It is well to conclude with an observation and a warning. We may talk all we please about salvation by grace alone without human merit. But when we teach a universal love of God rooted in a universal cross, we make salvation dependent upon man's will. All the shouting in the world to the contrary does not change that basic truth. When sal-

vation is dependent upon man's will in any sense of the word, salvation is no longer of grace, but of merit. Man merits his salvation. He earns it by his acceptance of the gospel offer. He has made himself worthy of being saved. He can claim salvation as his own because of his works.

The issue always is one of merit. Can man merit with God? To a Reformed Augustinian (I do not now say "Calvinist," although the two are the same) this very idea is abhorrent. It is not only wrong, but it is a repulsive notion which the believer throws as far from him as he can. It repels because to the extent that man introduces the concept of merit into the work of salvation, one denies God's glory. After all, by grace are ye saved, through faith. That salvation by grace through faith is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. All of it. There is nothing of man. Why must it be all of God? Because salvation by works gives man reason to boast. And boasting deprives God of glory.

You ask: Well, what about our good works, then? This too Paul puts in unmistakably clear language. We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of doing good works. And those God works are prepared by God from all eternity and earned in the cross. God has even sovereignly determined that we should walk in them. Good works do not merit. Good works are given by grace as a privilege to God's people earned in the cross (Eph. 2:8-10).

This is the legacy of Augustine. Rome had the gall to give to Augustine not only sainthood but the honorable title *Doctor Gratiae*, that is, Doctor of Grace. This was after murdering Gottschalk, Augustine's eloquent defender. Such hypocrisy does not go unnoticed in heaven. □

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How We Live in Our Homes: A Tittle (1)

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Familiar words we know so well. But what a blessing it is when we ponder the depths of those words! What a comfort for the child of God to know that his heavenly Father is the Creator of all things. To know that time began in His hands, and time will end in His hands. Yea, to know His grasp is on eternity itself!

Every word, every jot, and every tittle is important in Scripture. The words quoted above are beautiful as they are pondered together as a verse. But let us see what gem we might find if we will consider only the first word of this verse — *in*. Let us ponder this word as it has Christ as its supreme and ultimate object. And let us see what the implications of this are for our families and homes. For there is beauty here for our enjoyment and edification.

In is a word that cannot be understood without its object. It is a mere preposition. And a small preposition at that. Just a jot. Just a tittle of a word. Yet it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than one jot or tittle of the law! (Luke 16:17). So it is with this word *in*. Although we find this word countless times throughout Scripture, just as we find "to,"

"and," and "the," there are instances when its object and context give it significance. It is my opinion that *in*, as it holds the position of the very first word in Holy Writ, occupies just such a place of special distinction. Surely Scripture would not open haphazardly. God could have phrased these opening words differently and attained the same basic meaning. But it wouldn't be the same — not in every facet of every nuance. It is *in the beginning* that God created. We learn more about the beginning in John 1:1-3: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." What a beautiful parallel to Genesis 1:1! "In the beginning" has everything to do with our Lord Jesus Christ! In fact, He *is* the beginning: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Rev. 22:13). The opening words of Scripture portend truths that stand from beginning to end, to all eternity.

But let us back up once more and consider what exactly it is to be *in*. The state of being in — what is that? It describes a relationship. If you are *in* one thing, then you are *out* of another thing. Particularly the opposite thing. And what is it that immediately comes to mind that we most want to be in? What is the most important relationship there is? It is the covenant! What else is there to be in,

but in fellowship with God? No other *in* matters. To be anywhere else is to be *out*, and in a sense, that is no existence at all. Without this *in* there is no life. Without this *in* there is no beginning. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely" (Rev. 21:6b). "In him was life" (John 1:4a). And in John 5:26 we read, "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." Only *in* the covenant, *in* the fellowship of God, is there life!

Scripture shows us more of these things in Paul's epistle to the Colossians: "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell" (Col. 1:17-19). *In Him!* The ultimate meaning of the word *in* has everything to do with Jesus Christ! And because it has everything to do with Him, it also has to do with the triune God: "And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subjected unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15:28). Here is the end of the matter. That God may be *all in all*.

In. It's in the beginning. It's in the end. Do you begin to sense the depths of this word? Do you begin to see the poetry of it all?

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Volumes are buried in this little jot! Volumes that incorporate the truth of the covenant as it spans all of Scripture. The triune God — Three *in* One. As the Athanasian Creed puts it so beautifully, "... the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity...." What is that covenant activity within God? It is being *in*, with all that that entails and implies. And this triune God is revealed to us, how? *In Christ*. The most important question is, "Who?" Who is our Redeemer? Who is our Creator? But then we must also ask, "How?" How do we know Him? How are we connected to Him? The answer is our tittle. We know Him and His love because He has put us *in* Christ and Christ *in* us (Eph. 3:17-19). We know Him because He has brought us into His own covenant life! "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you" (John 14:20). Our only comfort is knowing that we belong to our Savior, that we are in His possession, and that He dwells in us. With the end goal of it all being that God is all in all. Profound and amazing gem, this *in*, when we begin to see the many facets it includes!

For us, this state of being *in* has spiritual as well as physical implications. As cited above in Colossians, we are *in* the body of Christ, the church. And in that body, we are part of and one with the elect of God. This, of course, refers to the church as she is realized on the earth right now, and also to the church of all ages. But she is also that body with whom we gather Sunday after Sunday to hear the words of our Head. She is the grieving, the sick, and the aged, whom we visit and help and comfort. She is that group of believers with whom we diligently study and discuss the words of our Lord as they are contained in all of Scripture.

But there is more. She is also that body with whom God has placed us on a daily basis in our

homes. She is the husband, the wife, the father, the mother, the brother, the sister, and the children whom God has been pleased to grant us. In fact, if we were to ask ourselves where or what we are physically *in* the most, we would have to answer — in our homes. God has made our homes an important place to be! He established the covenant bond of the home already when He brought Eve to Adam. And God has accordingly given much instruction about the different relationships that exist in the home.

So now let us consider one of these relationships. Let us consider *how* our children are *in* our homes. When we bring our children to the baptismal font, as we ourselves were brought, we bring them knowing and trusting that we as a body are baptized into the fellowship of the triune God. We are washed *in* the blood of Christ. We *see* the water and we *know* we are washed. A sign and a seal — that's baptism. But if we are indeed *in* something, that also means we are *out* of something else. Being in the blood of Christ, in the fellowship of the triune God, also means we are *out* of the bonds of Satan, and *out* of the fellowship of the world. We are indeed a separate people. This, then, is how God puts our children in our homes: *in Christ*. Our children, as well as we ourselves, are washed, separate, holy people.

Now the question is — how do we live this out? How do we live *in Christ* in our homes? If baptism has set us apart, then this separation will indeed be evident. In the first place, being *in the home* will separate us. God has ordained and established this all important place, and that is where you will find us. Mom is there. Dad is there. Children are there. We are not gone away in constant pursuit of money, pleasure, and career. We are home because we must follow the injunction of Deuteronomy 6:6, 7, which commandment requires being in

the home together. Teach the words of God to your children *diligently*, the text says: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

Diligence takes time. True, parents for a time may entrust this diligent instruction to Christian school teachers, yet parents are responsible for that instruction. And that instruction doesn't quit when the children walk through the door after school. Whether we're sitting, walking, resting, or rising up — it never quits. The text is clear. God doesn't even give time off for sleeping — we're on call 24 hours a day! Teaching the words of God to our children is to be a *constant* activity.

How are we able to do this? How is it possible? There's only one way we can constantly be talking of these things to our children, and this text makes that plain as well. Where are the words of God found, first of all, before they can be taught? Verse 6: "... in thine heart." And there's that tittle again, that beautiful little tittle. The words of God must be so in our thoughts, minds, and hearts, so *in* us, that our mouths bubble forth with those godly thoughts to our children. Just like a fountain. Just like a prophet. Talking. Ever talking. Showing and explaining. "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34b). There's no other way.

It takes delving into the depths of the truths of Scripture. It takes sincere and diligent study into the truths expressed in doctrine and the creeds. It takes hearing the Word and understanding it. It takes hard work. Very hard work. It takes knowing the well of Scripture to such an extent that we are able to draw up buckets of spiri-

tual thirst-quenching water for us and for our children. And we must be *constantly* drawing up that bucket!

Again, how is this possible? Is this not beyond our human capability? Yes, it is humanly impossible. But even as Christ gave water to the Samaritan woman at the well, so too He gives it to us, and it "shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). This is the text in Deuteronomy as well — "these words ... shall be in thine heart." They "shall be in thine heart" because He puts them there! "To be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16b). It is the Spirit. It is the Spirit that we need for life. It is the Spirit that we need for living. It is the Spirit who will give us the words to teach our children.

We are but dry bones. There is no life in us. No water. To live

like this, teaching our children as we ought, is indeed impossible of ourselves. But also note this — Scripture commands it. And not just this command, but all of the law is humanly impossible! This command is no more attainable than any other command. We are driven where we must also go, even as with all of the law — to Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 44, Q/A 115). And in Christ not only can we do it, we will! It's Christ's work! How can that be? Here's the tittle again: because we are *in* Him. Washed in His blood and sanctified in His Spirit. In Him we have the life. In Him we have the water. We have it because He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Not just our children are separated *out* of the world to be a holy people *in* Christ, but we as parents are separated *out* of the world to be a

holy people *in* Christ. Washed and living. Because we are *in*.

"Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:20b-22). Jesus is the Builder, not we. It is *in Christ* that our children have been given to us. It is *in Christ* that He has made us parents to those children. And because this is all *in Christ*, it is all the work of the Spirit.

Herein shines a glorious facet of that little tittle *in*, a facet that is part of the whole gem from which the radiant truth that God is all in all shines to all eternity. Next time, the Lord willing, we will look at some small, actual, specific rays that have emanated from this precious little facet, this tittle of a word, *in*. □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ron Cammenga

The Nature and Necessity of Christian Discipline

"As Christian discipline is of a spiritual nature, and exempts no one from civil trial or punishment by the authorities, so also besides civil punishment there is need of ecclesiastical censures, to reconcile the sinner with the church and his neighbor and to remove the offense out of the church of Christ."

Church Order, Article 71.

Introduction

Article 71 introduces the fourth and last section of the Church Order. The section is entitled "Of Censure and Ecclesiastical Admonition." The

following overview of the articles in this section may be helpful.

Article 71: The necessity of Christian discipline.

Articles 72 & 73: Reconciliation of private sins.

Articles 74-78: Reconciliation of public sins.

Articles 79 & 80: Discipline of officebearers.

Article 81: *Censura Morum*.

Articles 82 & 83: Membership transfer.

Articles 84-86: Conclusion to the Church Order.

Article 84: Warns against hierarchy.

Article 85: Warns against division over non-essentials.

Article 86: Asserts the binding character of the Church Order.

Article 71 is introductory. It

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treats the necessity and character of Christian discipline. The article asserts the right of the church to exercise discipline over its members. And it points out the benefit of Christian discipline, both for the one being disciplined and the church called to exercise discipline.

It will become plain that the Church Order is primarily concerned in this section to establish the basic biblical principles which underlie Christian discipline. On the basis of these fundamental principles, the Church Order will set forth some basic rules as far as procedure is concerned, rules that will insure that discipline is carried out in decency and good order.

The Church Order is not and does not attempt to be a "rule book" for discipline, multiplying laws in an effort to cover every conceivable situation. That simply is not the purpose of the Church Order. Every "case" is different. And each consistory must be allowed the freedom to exercise Christian discipline according to the exigencies of each case.

The Nature of Christian Discipline

The article states that Christian discipline is "of a spiritual nature." In order to establish clearly the nature of Christian discipline, the article distinguishes Christian discipline from "civil trial or punishment by the authorities." There are several differences between Christian discipline and civil punishment. The following are some of the most important:

Christian Discipline

1. Object is the member of the church.
2. Aims at the purity of the church.
3. Standard is the Word of God.
4. Corrective and aims at the salvation of the sinner.
5. Carried out by the officebearers.
6. Key-power which concerns the opening and shutting of the kingdom of heaven.

Civil Punishment

1. Object is the citizen of the state.
2. Aims at good order in society.
3. Standard is the law of the land.
4. Punitive and aims at the satisfaction of justice.
5. Carried out by the magistrate.
6. Sword-power which concerns the outward deportment of the citizens of the land.

Article 71 clearly asserts the right of the church to exercise Christian discipline. The state may not interfere in this important calling of the church. One of the great achievements of the Reformation, under the grace of God, was that it wrested the key-power from the hands of civil magistrates who had usurped this prerogative of the church. This was at the heart of John Calvin's struggle in Geneva.

At the same time, Article 71 is a word of warning to the church. For not only has it happened in the course of history that greedy rulers have robbed the church of her right to exercise discipline, but it has also happened that the church has lost sight of the "spiritual nature" of Christian discipline. This was true of the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation. Well-documented are the cruelties perpetrated by the Roman Catholic Inquisition. Heretics were hunted, imprisoned, tortured, and executed. Men and women were compelled to be members of the church, on threat of pain and punishment. Our Reformed Church Order repudiates this exercise of sword-power by the church. As Christian discipline is of a spiritual nature, so the means to carry out Christian discipline are of a spiritual nature.

This is not to say that a particular sin may not have both civil and

ecclesiastical consequences. It may very well. The member of the church who is convicted of stealing or of public intoxication will face not only fines and imprisonment but also Christian discipline. For on the one hand he is dealt with as a citizen of the state, and on the other hand he is dealt with as a member of the church. The two spheres of authority, even then, must be kept clearly distinct.

The Object of Christian Discipline

But who are to be disciplined? Who is the object of Christian discipline?

Article 71 speaks of the object of Christian discipline as "the sinner." It ought to be plain that the article does not have in mind all sinners. The church's right to exercise discipline does not extend to all sinners everywhere. Paul makes that plain in I Corinthians 5:9-11, "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, *if any man that is called a brother* be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." The object of Christian discipline is not the sinner outside of the church, but the sinner who is a member of the church. Article 71 makes that plain when it speaks of the purpose of discipline as reconciling the sinner with the church. That presupposes that the sinner is a member of the church. The following articles that spell out the steps of discipline also make this plain. The sinner under discipline is barred from the sacraments. That implies that he is a member of the church who otherwise would have the right to partake of the sacraments.

Even so, the object of Christian discipline is not every sinner in the

church. In that case, we would all be subject to discipline, for we are all sinners. No, the sinner who is the object of Christian discipline is the *impenitent* sinner. He is the sinner who will not repent of his sin, although he has been admonished by the individual members of the church and by the elders. He nonetheless goes on hardened in his sin, living in his sin, openly practicing his sin. Such a sinner is the worthy object of Christian discipline and excommunication from the church.

The object of Christian discipline is the *sinner*. Our Reformed Church Order rejects the foolish and unbiblical practice of the Roman Catholic Church that applies censure to buildings and lands. Christian discipline is to be applied to persons, not to inanimate objects. *Individual* persons. The Reformed also rejected as contrary to Scripture Rome's practice of placing whole provinces and kingdoms under the interdict, suspending the means of grace for all living in a certain locality. Neither did our Reformed fathers approve of Rome's practice of censuring those who were already dead.

The sinner who is the object of Christian discipline is the sinner who is a *communicant member* of the church. That is implied in Article 71 and becomes plain in the following articles. Included in the steps of discipline is that the impenitent sinner is suspended from partaking of the Lord's Supper, according to Article 76. That presupposes that he or she is a communicant member of the congregation.

There is no article in the Church Order that deals with the discipline of baptized members. Our practice of the erasure of baptized members is not set forth anywhere in the Church Order. Some have taken the position that in the strict sense of the word baptized members of the church cannot be disciplined. K. DeGier takes this position.

How must discipline be applied to baptized members? Baptized members are minors who, while living an unchristian life, must be admonished as much as possible by their parents. Being immature members, discipline can consist only in admonition: a baptized member cannot be censured and cannot be excommunicated. (*Explanation of the Church Order of Dordt*, p. 106.)

This is a mistaken position. The adoption of this position has had serious consequences in the churches that have taken this position. It simply is not true that the church is limited to admonition in the case of baptized members who walk impenitently in sin. Baptized members, too, who refuse to heed the admonition of the elders must be put out of the church. They are members of the church. That is the significance of their baptism. And if they embrace false teaching or walk in a wicked way of life, they must be set outside of the church.

Our Protestant Reformed Churches follow the procedure that is usually referred to as "erasure of baptized membership." As is the case with excommunication, a consistory obtains the approval of the classis to proceed with erasure, explaining to the classis the sin in which the baptized member is walking, as well as the labors that have been carried out by the elders. Having gained the approval of the classis to proceed to the erasure, the consistory announces to the congregation that the erasure of this baptized member (his name being mentioned) will take place on such-and-such a date. Usually this will be a month or so down the road. Thus the members of the congregation are provided the opportunity to admonish this wayward baptized member. This is important. A consistory ought not simply to announce the erasure as an accomplished fact. Then the members are unable to visit the member involved, in order to seek his repentance before he is put out

of the church. Congregational involvement is always a critical component of Christian discipline.

It would be good for our churches to adopt a procedure for erasure of baptized members. As it stands now, the procedure is simply a matter of following past practice. And there have been different procedures at different times and in different churches. Nothing compels a consistory, for example, to bring a matter of erasure to the classis. For the sake of decency and good order in so significant a matter as the discipline of baptized members, it would be well that a uniform practice be established.

The Purpose of Christian Discipline

Article 71 sets forth both positively and negatively the purpose of Christian discipline.

Positively, the purpose is "to reconcile the sinner with the church." Christian discipline aims at the recovery and restoration of the sinner. Discipline's design is not primarily punitive. Its goal is not "getting rid" of a troublesome member. But the aim is reconciliation, the glad reception of the repentant sinner back into the fellowship of the congregation. The purpose is the sinner's salvation. Paul expresses the purpose in I Corinthians 5:5, "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Consciously this must be the purpose. The temptation for elders, and even for the congregation, is that although we pay lip service to the purpose of discipline in the sinner's salvation, we become so weary in dealing with the obstinate member that we simply want him gone. And we heave a sigh of relief when finally he asks for his membership papers or is excommunicated. That is wrong. We cannot expect God's blessing on our exercise of Christian discipline,

if we do not consciously seek by means of the discipline the salvation of the brother. The *brother* – remember.

But Christian discipline also has the negative purpose of “removing offense out of the church of Christ.” The motivation for discipline is not only love for the wayward brother, but love for the church. Love for the church does not tolerate impenitent sin in the congregation. Scripture and his-

tory bear out the devastating consequences of that sort of neglect of discipline in the church. Scripture warns that sin unrepented of in the congregation works like yeast leavening the whole lump (I Cor. 5:6, 7) and like gangrene infecting and destroying the entire body (II Tim. 2:17). For the sake of the purity of the church, Christian discipline must be exercised.

In the end, however, the purpose of Christian discipline is the glory of God. Article 71 brings that

out, too, when it speaks of the purpose of discipline as removing offense out of the church of Christ. The church is Christ’s church. Christ is the Head of the church. The church is Christ’s body, called to stand in the service of and for the glory of her Head. But Christ is glorified when the members of His body rightly confess His name and walk according to His will. That is the preeminent purpose of Christian discipline. □

Book Reviews

The Reformed Family Worldwide: A Survey of Reformed Churches, Theological Schools, and International Organizations, compiled and edited by Jean-Jacques Bauswein and Lukas Vischer. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999. Pp. xiii + 740. \$35 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

Committees on ecumenicity, theological libraries, students of the universality of the Reformed faith, and world travelers will prize this thick book. It is a listing, alphabetically by country (beginning with Albania!), of all the Reformed churches in the world. “Reformed” is stretched to its uttermost limits and then some. The total is 746 church federations.

Each denomination is very briefly introduced as to its origin, history, and salient features (in the mind of the editors). Then follows a paragraph giving statistics, confessions, language, church relations, seminary (if any), church paper, and corresponding addresses.

Choosing at random, the listing of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRC) is representative:

33. Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRC) (3219)

In 1924 27 congregations separated from the Christian Reformed Church in North America in a dis-

pute over the doctrine of common grace. In the early 1950s several of the congregations returned to the Christian Reformed Church. The church continues today primarily in the Midwest. It has its own seminary and supports churches in Singapore and New Zealand with a missionary pastor.

TM: 6,291 BM: 2,863 CM: 3,528
Congr: 27 Pstations: 2 OrdM: 33
Eld: 130 Deac: 96 EvgHome: 1
Mission: 2 Women Ord: no
ChurchOrg: 2 classes (East and West, meeting 2-3 times yearly), 1 synod (meeting yearly) Off/otherLang: English DoctrB: ApC, NicC, AthC, BelgC, Cdort, HeidC
Infant or believer’s baptism: both
Frequency of the Lord’s Supper: 4 times a year
Close relations with: Evangelical Ref Churches of Singapore
NatRel: none RegRel: none IntlRel: none
TheolSchool: Prot Reformed Seminary (Grandville, MI)
Periodicals: The Standard Bearer (religious/semi-monthly/2,500), Prot Ref (theological journal/semi-annual/850)

Address: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grand Rapids MI 49418, United States, Tel: +1 616 531-1490, Fax: +1 616 531 3033, E-mail: prc@iserv.net.

It strikes me as odd that “Women Ord” followed by a “yes” or “no” is made a category for every church. Why not “Wives in Subjection” or “Keepers at Home”

or “Women Silent at Church”? Whatever the intention of the editors, one thus has clear identification of a number of Reformed churches that have both renounced the Reformed tradition and abandoned the creedally Reformed doctrine of Scripture, caving in to the pressure of the world.

The book similarly lists and describes some 529 Reformed theological schools (alphabetically by city). Eight international Reformed (ecumenical) organizations are also listed and described.

An introductory chapter gives a helpful history of the Reformed churches, as well as a doubtful analysis of what Reformed essentially is. This doubtfulness goes some way towards accounting for so many different Reformed churches today.

Valuable as a resource, the book makes interesting reading. Concerning the Reformed Congregations in the Netherlands (GGN), a denomination in the Netherlands of about 20,000, we are told that “in 1953 Dr. C. Steenblok was dismissed as a teacher at the theological seminary of the GG ... in Rotterdam because he taught that God does not offer grace to all sinners but only to those persons who are elected and acknowledge their sins.” The formation of the Netherlands Reformed Churches in the 1960s from the Reformed Churches

(Liberated) is attributed, first of all, to the fact that "believers who formed the new church were critical of the tendency within the GK(v) (Liberated—DJE) to consider itself the only true church in the Netherlands."

Of the Evangelical Reformed

Churches in Singapore, we read that this denomination was founded by "Pastor Lau Chin Kwee ... who adopted in 1976, under the influence of visiting guests of the Reformed Church in America, a decidedly Ref confessional position," which reminds one not to accept the data in such a book uncritically.

Although one uncomfortably recalls David's sin of numbering the people, he finds himself drawn to the membership totals.

The editors have obviously put a great deal of tedious work into this unique volume. The product is worth it. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

It was interesting to note that soon after the first of this year a couple of our congregations used their church bulletin, or church newsletter, to encourage their members to lead a more sanctified life. Both our Hudsonville, MI PRC and our Loveland, CO PRC encouraged their members to begin a regular systematic reading of God's Word by providing them with a daily Bible reading schedule. Hudsonville's schedule, if followed completely, would make it possible to read through the entirety of God's Word in just one year, while Loveland's schedule made it possible to read through the Bible in chronological order. To encourage the Hudsonville congregation, the schedule asks by way of introduction, "who in the interest of their eternal soul is truly unable to dedicate so few minutes out of their whole day to such a noble pursuit?"

At their annual congregational meeting this past December, the congregation of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI did more than elect men to the office of elder and deacon and approve their proposed budget for the year 2000. They also approved two proposals from their council: one, to install new carpet in their church narthex and two, to replace the roof of their parsonage.

The Choral Society of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL hosted a Christmas singspiration the evening of December 26. Members of the Chicago area PRCs were encouraged to come together and share the joy of our Savior's birth.

The Choir of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA presented a concert commemorating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ for the enjoyment of their congregation on December 19.

Young People's Activities

Over the past few years we have noticed with growing interest that many of our churches' young people's societies are serving as hosts for families and individuals of all ages to meet together, usually at their church, to arrange groups for delivery of Christmas cards and for caroling. Plans quite often call for the larger group to break into smaller groups of about eight to twelve and visit the homes of the elderly and shut-ins, giving them greeting cards from the congregation and singing a few Christmas carols. This is indeed a wonderful opportunity for many young people to greet these members of their church family, and something that thankfully seems to be growing in popularity, with more and more church members, not just young people, joining in each year.

The Young People's Society of the Byron Center, MI PRC hosted a continental breakfast on Christmas morning. Donations were for this year's PRYP Convention.

The Young People's Society of

the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ was treated to a progressive dinner on January 9. Appetizers, dinner, dessert, and games were all at different locations.

Young Adult Activities

The young adults of the Edgerton, MN PRC will be hosting a Summer Retreat for PRC young adults August 14-17 of this year, the Lord willing. In order to meet some of the expected expenses from that retreat, they recently sponsored an Australian supper with authentic Australian food. I think it's safe to say that their pastor, Rev. D. Kleyn, must have served as a consultant for the menu.

School Activities

Hope Christian School in Redlands, CA and Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI once again this year took a collection for a "kingdom cause" instead of doing a gift exchange with their children. This past Christmas the donations collected were sent to Jack and Judie Feenstra to help them in their work of helping to establish a Bible School in Singapore.

The students of the South Holland, IL PR Christian School presented their annual Christmas program on December 21. The students developed the theme, "Behold, I Come Quickly," based on Revelation 22:12. Future students of South Holland in the year 2000 and 2001 were also part of the program, singing "Away in a Man-

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

ger," Psalter #400, and "Jesus Loves Me."

Sister Church Activities

Rev. Lau Chin Kwee, pastor of the First Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore, has been studying this past semester in our seminary to further his education. He planned to return to Singapore, and home, about the middle of January, and to come back for another semester at the seminary next

year. While here Pastor Lau was able to preach for many of our West Michigan congregations, which served as an excellent occasion to renew friendships and to extend greetings from the ERCS to various churches in the PRC.

Prof. H. Hanko and his wife, who are spending approximately six months in Singapore to help establish a Bible School, took a slight detour south to Australia to visit

with the congregations of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. They were there December 20 until January 3.

Food For Thought

"Faith is fostered by prayer, is fortified by the study of the Word, and is fulfilled by our yielding moment by moment to the Lord Jesus Himself."

—J.C. Stern □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

February 1, 2000 marks the 50th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

HENRY and MURIEL KIEL.

We are thankful to our covenant God and Father that He has granted us such loving parents who have shown us throughout the years the truths of God's Word by their godly instruction and faithful walk. Our prayer is that the Lord will continue to supply their every need and bless them in the coming years. "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies" (Psalm 25:10).

- * Thomas and Kathleen Verbeek
- * Jeffrey and Barbara Steenholdt
- * Thomas and Marcia Kiel
- * Sandra Kiel
- * Daniel and Debra Kiel
- 14 Grandchildren and
- 3 Great-Grandchildren

Kalamazoo, MI

NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Dan Huizinga (Phone: 616-453-3191). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 14, 2000, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Dan Huizinga, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Ladies' Society of the Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to fellow member Henrietta Hoksbergen in the death of her sister,

GERTRUDE POLLEMA.

May she and her family find comfort in the words of Isaiah 53:4, "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

Alden DeJong, President
Verna Westra, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of the Mr. and Mrs. Society of the Southwest PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Phil Baas and their family in the loss of their unborn daughter,

LEAH RENAE,

who was taken to glory before birth. May the family continue to find peace from God's Word. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

James Kuiper, President
Evonne Kreuzer, Secretary

NOTICE!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will be hosted by the Bethel Protestant Reformed Church in Roselle, Illinois on Wednesday, March 1, 2000 at 8:30 a.m., the Lord willing. All material for the classical agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by February 1, thirty days before classis convenes. All delegates or visitors in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify Bethel's pastor, Rev. Carl Haak, 1047 Florida Lane, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007. Phone: (847) 524-4676

Rev. Steven Key, Stated Clerk

TEACHER NEEDED

The Board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association is inviting applications for a full-time teacher (grades 9-10) which will begin in August of 2000, the Lord willing. Successful applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith, biblical inerrancy, six-day creation, male headship, the antithesis between Christianity and the world, and covenantal theology. Reformed Heritage Christian School is located in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Applicants should send a letter of application and resume to Steve DeVries, 1103 Turwill Lane, Kalamazoo, MI 49006. For more information, phone (616) 382-2761.