

# THE *September 1, 2000* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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# Destroyed for Lack of Knowledge

*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.*

—Hosea 4:6

**H**osea was a prophet of God to the northern kingdom of the ten tribes. His ministry was quite lengthy. He began to prophesy during the reign of Jeroboam II, of the house of Jehu, and he continued his ministry until Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 BC. That is a period of about 65 years.

The spiritual climate in Israel was deplorable. The nation had, over many generations, forsaken the Lord. This had resulted in horrible sins. These are described in the beginning of chapter 4. The

land was full of swearing and lying and killing and stealing and committing adultery (v. 2). In other words, every sin imaginable was being committed openly and shamelessly. And what was the cause of it all? There was no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land (v. 1). It all came down to the latter: there was no knowledge of God in the land. All the abominations that filled the land found their source in the fact that there was no knowledge of God in the land.

So we read, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

What a horrible thing to happen to a nation or a people — to be destroyed for lack of knowledge.

If a church today will be spared the same destruction, she must learn from Israel's demise.



There was a terrible lack of knowledge in the land of Israel. The people no longer knew the Lord. This means, first, that there was an appalling ignorance in Israel about the Lord. The people no longer knew the Lord's virtues,

His will for their lives, His promises of salvation, the great works of salvation He had done for the nation in times past. Consequently, the people did not know the Lord spiritually either. The true knowledge of God is more than an intellectual comprehension of some truths about God. It is above all a personal knowledge of love. It is the intimate knowledge that is found in a personal relationship between those who are companions and friends. To know God in this personal, intimate way requires that one first know the truth about God. But since that was lacking in Israel, so too was there a sad lack of any personal knowledge of God.

And there was no excuse for this lack. For the Lord had clearly revealed Himself to Israel.

Israel was the chosen people of God, with whom He had established His covenant. That's why the Lord identifies Israel as "my people." As their covenant God the Lord had given to Israel the law, which is also mentioned here by Hosea. This law was more than the Ten Commandments. It included also the ceremonial laws that had

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been given at Mt. Sinai to instruct Israel how to worship the Lord around the tabernacle. The law also included the civil laws that organized Israel into a nation. These laws, when followed by Israel, provided many wonderful pictures of the works of salvation which God would perform in the coming Savior. The term "law" includes also the word of the prophets, who always labored and prophesied in the context of the law. Through the law, therefore, the Lord had revealed Himself to Israel as the God of their salvation so that they could know him — not only know about Him, but know Him personally and intimately as their covenant God.

But Israel had rejected this knowledge; she had forgotten the law!

Israel despised the true knowledge of God. She despised what God had revealed about Himself through the law. She despised the intimate knowledge of God that this revealed truth afforded in the covenant. And so she rejected it.

Israel forgot God's law. Rejecting knowledge, Israel no longer cared for the revelation of God. She ignored the law. The word of God no longer found a place in her life. The families of Israel didn't meditate on it. Parents no longer taught it to their children. The priests, whose calling it was to teach the true knowledge of God, also ignored the word of God.

This rejecting of the knowledge of God had a long history to it. It all began when the ten tribes separated from the house of David under Jeroboam. It was from the house of David that the Christ was to come, the very Christ proclaimed in the law. To separate from the house of David, therefore, was to reject the true knowledge of God. This is what the ten tribes did. In freeing themselves from oppression under the foolish Rehoboam, who had answered them harshly, the ten tribes had rejected the true knowledge of God, forgot God's law, and went their

own way.

Israel continued this course by worshiping the golden calves. To keep Israel from worshiping at the temple in Jerusalem, Jeroboam instituted the worship of the golden calves. This was violation of the second commandment. Jeroboam convinced the people that they could worship the Lord just as well through his golden calves as they could in the temple in Jerusalem. But the true knowledge of God was not to be found with the golden calves; it was to be found only at the temple in Jerusalem. The worship of the golden calves was a rejection of the true knowledge of God. For the sake of their own independence, the ten tribes willingly walked in this way of rejection.

The worship of the golden calves eventually gave way to Baal worship during the time of Ahab. Baal worship was not a pretended attempt to worship the Lord through another means. It was the worship of another god. This the people gladly followed, as they rejected the true knowledge of God.

So it was that by Hosea's time the true knowledge of God was gone from the land. The law had long ago been forgotten.

We see the same thing in the church world today.

The average church member today has little knowledge of the history of the Bible. There is also a gross ignorance of the main teachings of Scripture as set forth in the Reformed creeds. Very few understand the TULIP doctrines of grace set forth in the Canons of Dordt. Of those who do understand them, perhaps only a minority believe and confess them. It's difficult today to find church people who can discuss the truths of Scripture in any depth or who even consider doctrinal matters and issues to be of any real importance.

How did this come about?

It wasn't always this way. The knowledge of God used to flourish in many churches that have over the years lost it.

What happened? What explains the lack of knowledge so evident today?

It all begins with a willingness to embrace false teachings that elevate man and allow for world conformity. Usually these errors seem to be trivial and of little consequence. But there is no standing still in error. The church must either repent of its error and turn back to the truth or it will develop in its error. Most often the latter is what happens. And the more a church embraces false teachings, the more she comes to despise and reject the true knowledge of God. With that she also forgets the law and Word of God, ignoring what God has revealed about Himself and the way of salvation in Jesus Christ. Parents no longer teach the Word to their children. Families no longer meditate on the Word. Nor is the Word proclaimed anymore from the pulpit. The end result is that the true knowledge of God is almost gone; and in its place are the wisdom of men and worldly living.



Hosea speaks of Israel's destruction.

That destruction was, first of all, political. After a time of prosperity under Jeroboam II, the political and economic situation in Israel deteriorated rapidly. There were internal feuds, and there were political rivals who sacrificed the interest of the nation for their own. Of the six kings who succeeded Jeroboam II only one died a natural death. The rest were assassinated. During this time Assyria made increasingly heavy demands on Israel for tribute money. Finally, Assyria came and led the nation away into captivity. Israel as a nation was cut off.

But worse, Israel was also destroyed spiritually. Israel was the covenant people with whom God lived as Friend, to whom He revealed Himself and gave His promises, in whom He worked His salvation. With the breakup of the



nation, however, Israel lost its place in the covenant. The few faithful that had been found in the nation were called out by God by the godly Hezekiah king of Judah. The people who were taken into captivity no longer enjoyed the covenant blessings of God and were spiritually lost.

What explains this destruction?

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

The Lord goes on to explain.

"Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee." As we have seen, Israel despised and rejected the true knowledge of God. For that reason, the Lord also despised Israel and rejected her as His people. What a horrible thing to be despised and rejected by the Lord!

But the Lord has more to say.

"Seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." What a terrible thing, for the Lord to forget you. This means that He no longer loves


you or cares for you. When you call to Him, He will not hear. He will ignore you when you are in distress. Because Israel forgot the law of their God, the Lord forgot them. And, more seriously, He also forgot their children, that is, their future generations. There would be no more remembrance of Israel by the Lord in the future.

Here we learn how the Lord deals with people who through apostasy no longer know Him. He cuts them off spiritually, so that they lose their place in the covenant. No, the Lord never cuts off from the covenant individuals whom He has chosen and saved in Christ. But He does cut off generations, who through departure no longer know Him. They are rejected and cut off from the covenant. Their children are forgotten.

This has happened repeatedly in the history of the church. We see this terrible thing happening also today in the church world.

There are churches that have departed so drastically from the Lord and from His Word that they no longer know the Lord. They are cut off. They may thrive numerically and financially. But spiritually they have been rejected by God. He no longer works His salvation in those churches. Their children will be forgotten.

For the church to avoid such disaster it is necessary that she be faithful to the Word of God in doctrine and in life, rejecting all philosophies and practices of sinful man. The Word of God must be taught. It must be preached faithfully from the pulpit. It must be taught to the children in catechism and in the schools they attend. And the Word must be the center of each home. In short, the Word must be loved and embraced.

The church and people who so embrace the Word of God will find God's covenant blessings. So will their children to the third and fourth generations. 

## Editorial

# "Reformed in... the Fundamental Truths" (2)

**I**n the April 2000 issue, the *Calvin Theological Journal* (CTJ) commemorated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Christian Reformed Church's adoption of its doctrine of common grace. In so doing, the journal of the seminary of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) was calling to mind the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the existence of the Protestant Reformed Churches

(PRC). For the PRC came into existence as the direct result of the adoption of the three points of common grace by the CRC in 1924.

Two articles in the CTJ reflect on the common grace controversy that came to a head at the 1924 synod of the CRC. The first, by Christian Reformed professor of theology John Bolt, analyzes the history of the controversy, particu-

larly the deposition of Herman Hoeksema. I summarized this article in the editorial of the June 1, 2000 *Standard Bearer*. The second article is by Christian Reformed theologian Raymond A. Blacketer. Blacketer's article examines the doctrine of common grace that the CRC adopted in 1924. In this editorial, I summarize this second, doctrinal article. All quotations are



from this article in the April 2000 CTJ.

### Examination of the Well-Meant Offer

The title of Dr. Blacketer's article is "The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed: A Reexamination of the So-Called Well-Meant Offer of Salvation." The first part of this telling title plays off the title of Louis Berkhof's important defense in 1925 of the doctrine of common grace that the synod of the CRC had drawn up and adopted the year before. The title of Berkhof's defense is *De drie punten in alle deelen gereformeerd* (English translation: "The Three Points in All Parts Reformed"). One part of the doctrine of common grace that the CRC adopted in 1924 is *not* Reformed, in the judgment of Dr. Blacketer. That is the teaching of a well-meant offer of salvation. To this specific element of the doctrine of common grace is Blacketer's article devoted.

The reference is to the doctrine taught in the first point of common grace in these words:

Concerning the first point, regarding the favorable disposition of God with respect to mankind in general, and not only to the elect, synod declares that according to the Scripture and the confessions it is certain that ... there is a certain kind of favor or grace of God that he shows to his creatures in general. This is evidenced by the aforementioned Scripture texts and from the Canons of Dort II, 5 and III/IV, 8, where the confession deals with the general offer of the Gospel ... (Blacketer's translation of the Dutch; emphasis added).

The CRC itself calls the doctrine set forth in this part of the first point "the well-meant offer of salvation." Blacketer correctly explains the doctrine of the well-meant offer as teaching that God "sincerely intend(s) and will(s) to save" all those who hear the preaching of the gospel (p. 42); that

God "desire(s) that they [the reprobate] accept" the atonement of Christ and be saved (p. 44); that God "earnestly desires the salvation of all who hear the preaching of the gospel" (p. 59); that there is in God some "volition" for the salvation of the reprobate to whom the external call of the gospel comes (p. 63).

At issue in the controversy over the well-meant offer is not whether the gospel must be preached to all, or whether the preaching of the gospel to all includes a serious call to all, to repent and believe. But the issue is precisely whether the preaching of the gospel to all is the expression of God's sincere desire to save all who hear the preaching and, thus, a gracious offer to all.

Blacketer judges, and demonstrates, that the well-meant offer adopted by the CRC in its common grace decision of 1924 is not traditionally Reformed, is not confessionally Reformed, and is not biblical.

### Not Traditionally Reformed

The well-meant offer is not traditionally Reformed. Here Blacketer takes issue with the statement in the first point of common grace that "declarations of Reformed writers from the most flourishing period of Reformed theology" give evidence that "our Reformed fathers of old have advocated this opinion." Examining those theologians appealed to by the Christian Reformed synod of 1924 and by later defenders of the well-meant offer, Blacketer contends that none of them taught that God in grace desires to save all those to whom He sends the external call of the gospel.

Van Mastricht "does *not* say

that the external call represents God's intention to save the reprobate" (p. 45). On the contrary, van Mastricht teaches that God's "intention with respect to the reprobate is to silence them, to take away all their excuses, and to add more weight to their condemnation" (pp. 45, 46).

"Witsius emphatically does not teach a well-meant offer of the gospel" (p. 46).

As regards à Brakel, "it should be quite clear that à Brakel does not believe that the external call of God constitutes an offer of salvation to the reprobate" (p. 48).

The advocates of the well-meant offer like to appeal to Calvin. They restrict their appeal to Calvin's commentaries on such texts as Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11; and Matthew 23:37. They are noticeably reluctant to discuss what Calvin has to say on preaching and its external call in his *Institutes* and in his great work on predestination, *On the Eternal Predestination of God*. Blacketer carefully examines the commentaries of Calvin to which the defenders of the well-meant offer appeal and comes to this conclusion concerning Calvin's doctrine:

The universal call is a testimony of God's grace but not his common grace. It is a testimony of his saving grace that is only operative in the elect. It is not grace for the reprobate. Calvin teaches that God hates the reprobate—not as his creatures, but as those who are bereft of his Spirit and worthy of condemnation. The opponents of predestination claim that God extends his grace to all indiscriminately; but Calvin replies that this is only true in the sense that God extends his grace to whomever he wills in his good pleasure, without regard to any merit (p. 54).

What Blacketer says about Calvin's explanation of I Timothy

...the well-meant offer adopted by the CRC in its common grace decision of 1924 is not traditionally Reformed, is not confessionally Reformed, and is not biblical.



2:4, another favorite text for all defenders of a well-meant offer, serves to describe Calvin's doctrine generally: "It does not mean that God earnestly desires the salvation of all who hear the preaching of the gospel" (p. 59).

The Reformed tradition is accurately represented by the statement on the subject of God's grace in the preaching of the gospel in the *Leiden Synopsis*. The *Leiden Synopsis*, a summary of Dutch Reformed theology immediately after the synod of Dordt, says this:

Thus they delude themselves, who extend the grace of God's calling to all, and to every individual. For they not only confuse that love of God for humanity by which he embraces all persons *as creatures*, with that [love] by which he has decreed to receive in grace certain persons from among the common mass of sinful humanity, who were lost in their sin, and that they should follow his beloved Son Jesus Christ; they also rob God—who is bound by none—of any freedom to single out those whom he will from among the rest of his enemies, all equally unworthy of his mercy, in order that he might convey them from a state of guilt to a state of sin (pp. 49, 50).

### Not Biblical

By demonstrating that the appeal by the advocates of the well-meant offer to the explanation of a few texts by Reformed theologians of the past is mistaken, Blacketer proves at the same time that the well-meant offer is unbiblical. Its slight biblical basis is a half-dozen texts or so, all of which are wrongly interpreted by the defenders of the well-meant offer.

### Not Confessionally Reformed

Nor is there any ground for the well-meant offer in the Reformed confessions. The Christian Reformed synod of 1924 cited as evidence for the well-meant offer certain passages from the Canons of Dordt: Canons II.5, Canons III/

IV.8, and Canons III/IV.9. "But," declares Blacketer,

these passages speak of no such thing. Canons II.5 speaks of the mandate to proclaim the gospel to all, including its promises and obligations, to all persons without discrimination. But this refers to the command to preach the gospel to all nations, and really has no bearing on whether this activity, known as the external call, constitutes an offer on God's part to all who hear it (p. 40).

Canons III/IV.8 teaches the "serious call," to be sure. But the synod of 1924 assumed, in the face of the testimony of all the rest of the Canons, that the Synod of Dordt had the same conception of the serious, external call of the gospel as did the Arminians. For the Arminians, the serious call of the gospel was, indeed, a call "with a sincere and completely unhypocritical intention and will to save." But "Dort does not share that view.... Dort rejects the idea that God wills or intends to save all, as should be clear from Canons I.6 and 15." For Dort, the serious call "does not imply any will or intention to save on God's part; it only reveals the obligation of sinners" (pp. 41-43).

As for Canons III/IV.9, which does mention the word "offer," the meaning is that "all persons who hear the gospel are *confronted* with Christ, or that they encounter Christ in the gospel" (p. 45).

### Not Logically Reformed

The CRC has always defended the well-meant offer against the charge that it contradicts the biblical doctrine of predestination and particular grace by asserting that truth is "paradoxical." Because the PRC maintain that God's revelation in Scripture is non-contradictory, harmonious, and logical, the CRC ac-

cuses Protestant Reformed theologians of being "rationalists."

Blacketer denies that Reformed theology is paradoxical, that is, "that apparently incompatible theological statements are in fact somehow resolved in the mind of God." Calvin certainly did not view theology as paradoxical. "Calvin argues with his opponents by pointing out the logical inconsistencies in their arguments, and demonstrating *both* the biblical faithfulness *and* the logical coherence of his own." Calvin was no "Barthian before Barth." The recent Reformed and Presbyterian glorying in paradoxical theology stands in conflict, not only with the thinking of the Reformation but also with the thinking of the church of all ages. It was "the Reformation and pre-Reformation conviction that God's revelation is not only reasonable, but accessible to reason and capable of a coherent systematization."

The fact that not everything is revealed to us, and that our theology is limited by our human capacities, does not give us permission to advance an incoherent system of theology. We may not set faith over against logic or confession over against understanding (p. 51).

### Hyper-Calvinism?

The Christian Reformed theologian defends the PRC against the common but unjustified charge of hyper-Calvinism:

*The recent Reformed and Presbyterian glorying in paradoxical theology stands in conflict, not only with the thinking of the Reformation but also with the thinking of the church of all ages.*

Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches do not deny the serious call of the gospel; they simply deny that this call should be characterized as an offer of salvation or represented as

God's intention to impart salvation.... The charge of hyper-Cal-



vinism is an unjustified and uncharitable instance of guilt by association (p. 50).

### The Well-Meant Offer: Arminian!

Blacketer's conclusions are weighty. Because the doctrine of the well-meant offer was at the heart of the common grace controversy in 1924, the expulsion of those who then formed the PRC was "the most significant ecclesiastical schism that the Christian Reformed Church has yet endured in its history" (p. 37).

In adopting the well-meant offer, the 1924 synod of the CRC committed a "substantial error." The error was "its acceptance of the Arminian definition of the sincere call—a definition that is clearly rejected by Canons III/IV.8.... The

1924 synod added Arminian elements to Reformed soteriology." Blacketer correctly relates the CRC's acceptance of the Arminian doctrine of the call of the gospel to the teaching of Christian Reformed theologian William Heyns, that God gives covenant grace to all the children of believing parents enabling them all to believe and be saved, if they will (p. 64).


As a result of the CRC's misinterpretation of the confessions and of prominent Reformed theologians, "the ministers Hoeksema and Danhof were condemned, in part, for defending the proper interpretation of the Reformed confessions" (p. 39).

As Dr. Bolt does in the first article, Dr. Blacketer urges the two denominations to work at being reconciled:

In the future, the Christian Reformed Church and the Protestant Reformed Churches should strive to amend the errors of the past, and perhaps even obtain a greater degree of charitable respect for their brothers and sisters in Christ (p. 65).

I will comment on these two significant articles in the April 2000 CTJ in the next issue of the SB, God willing.

One thing must be plain to all. The remarkable articles underscore the grand testimony that the 1924 synod of the CRC itself gave to Hoeksema and Danhof and, thus, to the PRC.

"Reformed in ... the fundamental truths!" 

— DJE

## Letters

### ◆ Sacrificing Christ

In an article entitled "Berengar and Transubstantiation" (May 1, 2000 *Standard Bearer*), Prof. Hanko states that when a Roman Catholic priest "changes the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood," in doing this the priest "performs the sacrifice which Christ offered for sin on the cross. Golgotha is reenacted. Calvary takes place every mass...." I don't doubt that this is the case, but would you please ask Prof. Hanko to elaborate, for I don't understand how the "changing the bread and wine into a real body and blood" is, in the Roman Catholic church, performing the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. I don't see the connection. Thanks.

Doug Cheaney  
Flemington, Missouri

### Response:

In the early history of the church the Lord's Supper was already considered a kind of sacri-

fice, but it was a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for Christ and His benefits. This was a fairly innocuous idea, but the identification of the sacrament with a sacrifice was fatal.

The Romish Church developed an entire sacerdotal or priestly system over the years. The clergy became "priests"; priests, after all, offer sacrifices. Their office and work were considered the continuation of the Old Testament order of Levitical priests. The office of believers was denied, for the priests stood between God and man — as in the Old Testament. While early in the history of the church, the priests pronounced God's forgiveness of sin only when people made confession, later in the Middle Ages priests actually forgave sins as representative of the church, which was empowered to forgive.

That priests could offer sacrifices was not a big jump from these other ideas. Old Testament priests

offered sacrifices, and, in fact, with the doctrine of transubstantiation came the idea of a sacrifice. The elements of bread and wine were literally and really changed into the body and blood of Christ. As the bread was broken, the body of Christ was broken. As the wine was poured out, the blood of Christ was literally poured out. This is what happened on Calvary. Thus the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary was performed over and over again. And it was all done on an altar.

Schaff writes: "The altar represents the cross, the priest represents Christ in whose person and power he pronounces the words of consecration, and the celebration represents the passion of the cross" (*History of the Christian Church*, vol. 5, 720). And so, "The eucharist is an unbloody but 'real immolation' performed by the priest" (*ibid.*).

This is the reason why the Reformers burned the altars and put pulpits in their places; and this is



the reason why they all emphasized that we are saved by the *one perfect and complete* sacrifice of Christ on Calvary.

"Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of

themselves, or anywhere else? They do not; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior; for one of these two things must be true, either that Jesus is not a complete Savior; or that they

who by a true faith receive this Savior must find all things in him necessary to their salvation" (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 11).



— Prof. Hanko

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. MaryBeth Lubbers

## The Reformed Family: Memory

*That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord... and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever.*

—Joshua 4:6, 7

M

emory is both my bane and my blessing.

Imprinted upon it are injuries done against me long, long ago. Slight, snubs, and unkind words and deeds seem to be etched there for life. Just the mere mention of a name may release those memories from the dark prison of my sub-conscious. Without indulging memory, something as simple as the slant of the sun on the sill, uncovering an old photo, or humming a strain of music will trigger a long-forgotten memory. For some, the strength of unwanted

memories has meant a lifetime of suppressant drugs. For others, the force of grim memories has resulted in shock treatments. Dusty memories of old sins, disappointments, and unhappiness mar an otherwise good life. What you desire, and even pray, to be suppressed, comes back again and again to trouble you in recurring memories.

Scientists do not present a united front as to just how memory works. They are nonplussed as to how to keep it functioning vigorously into old age. But with today's emphasis on total health and fitness, with the risk of Alzheimer's looming large, and with the "fountain of youth" as yet undiscovered, more and more research is being channeled into this unexplored field.

Scientists are agreed that the brain stores information by strengthening the connection among stimulated neurons. In other words, our brains remember things by linking them to what we already know. "Unlike a computer, which stores related facts separately, the brain strives constantly to make associations" (*Newsweek*, June 1998). Scientists also make bold to assert that if a

newly encoded memory doesn't get used, it will quickly fade. On the other hand, if the memory is repeatedly activated, the pattern of connection becomes more deeply embedded in our brain tissue. Well-encoded memories last a lifetime, they say.

God must be amused by man's "discoveries." He has determined from all eternity both memory and the principles for its proper retention: "Remember ... think upon ... meditate ... recite ... recall to mind ... repeat ... etch ... inscribe..." Since the beginning of time, He has instructed how He is to be praised, and how we are to benefit by rehearsing and remembering His goodness.

Every parent, teacher, minister, and sanctified believer knows the value of memory. Imagine a consciousness made up of random, disconnected bits of information. No "working memory" for juggling information at the present moment, and no "long-term memory" for storing information over extended periods of time. Past experiences, earlier judgments, abstract thought would mean nothing. Musing and meditating would be impossible. Nor would any of these be able to form a solid foundation upon

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which to receive new perceptions, information, and knowledge.

Because God gave us the gift, the precious gift, of memory, He tells us in many different books and chapters in both the Old and New Testaments to exercise this gift. The Old Testament is replete with injunctions for Israel to “remember.” Her many feasts were memorials. Whether it was the heaping up of a pile of stones, the commemorating of a particular day, the setting of costly stones in the priestly garments, or the blowing of trumpets over the sacrifices, all were commanded for this one purpose: to stir up in the Israelite’s soul the distant memory of a sovereign God and His wonderful works. “I am the Lord your God.” Remember Me.

For this reason, the teachers in the Protestant Reformed Christian schools set aside adequate blocks of time in the school day for giving children instruction and practice in memorizing large portions of God’s Word. Many verses, and entire chapters, are committed to memory by each grade throughout the course of the school year. Our school — I’m sure other schools have similar goals — requires a goodly number of passages to be learned each year so that by graduation from the elementary school, each student has a litany of Scripture passages committed to memory. And while some in Reformed circles have begun to lament the loss of the Psalter as the songbook of the church and school, in our schools the Psalter is faithfully used as the Book of Praise, with scores of songs memorized by the children. One concern that remains is this: are the expectations for memorization high enough? Whatever the answer, our confidence remains that, though God may use us to plant and water, He Himself gives the increase.

How thankful we may be that the King James Version of the Bible is uniformly used in our schools and churches so that the children

have a common book eminently suitable to memory. I recall a new family who decided to join our school association in South Holland several years ago. As the father toured the school building, he mentioned that one of the primary reasons he had chosen to send his children to our school was the emphasis placed upon the memory of Scripture. He explained that over the course of his own school years he had been subjected to at least five different versions of the Bible, ranging all the way from *Good News for Modern Man* to the NIV, and as a result of this constant change he had never memorized any selections from Scripture.

It is crucial in any exercise of memory to have a fixed point of reference. “What mean ye by these stones?” asked Israel’s children. It is neither good pedagogy, nor good theology, capriciously to be changing the stones each year. And, as a result (a bonus, we might say) of a standard Book, those beloved Scripture passages and songs are indelibly written upon the hearts of the children. They delight day after day to recite and sing His majesty and faithfulness. They never seem to tire of it. Eagerly they learn the songs of Zion now, in their youth. We older saints know experientially the vast benefit of that for the future. In moments of fear and distress, in times of great calamity, in harsh persecution — which surely will come to these little ones — they will recall with clarity what they have believed and memorized in their childhood, and content themselves with its comfort both in life and in death. May we and our children have committed great portions of the Bible to godly memory just as did the Waldensians of the twelfth century. To the fury of their enemies, the Word of God could not be taken from them because it was inscribed through

careful memory upon their hearts.


Children and loved ones of aged parents regularly tell that a Psalm learned as a child is the only piece of memory their parent retains. Their own children look like strangers to those old ones, and there seems to be no break for them in the dense fog of disassociation. With almost no communication possible, “Mother, let’s recite Psalm 23,” suggests a son or daughter. The precious words begin to fall from her cracked lips, as she recites in a high, thin, reedy voice, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want....” Culled from an ancient memory unfolds an ancient truth. God’s promises are sure. It is true: well-encoded memories last a lifetime.

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” Our children, our homes, our schools, and ultimately our churches are enriched through this careful, regular memorization of God’s Word. Our God is magnified when we remember and “think on these things” (Phil. 4:8).

Nor is the art, and thrill, of remembering restricted to children. How many aching and burdened hearts have not been uplifted and refreshed by the sweet words of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper? “Take, eat, remember, and believe.” And, like His disciples, we eagerly receive the elements of His body and blood, eating and drinking, remembering the sacrifice once and for all accomplished for us. The memory of that wondrous event never fails to arouse within us the desire to love the Lord our God and live a life

of gratitude to Him.

A lifetime of memories, all of them, in a way that I cannot sort out, tied up with the goodness of God.

Memory, my blessing. 

*the Word of God  
could not be  
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hearts.*



# Lively Stones

*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*

—I Peter 2:5

**T**he church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord. That church is made up of the elect of God, described in Scripture as sheep that the Father has given to the Great Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ. There are, of course, other beautiful descriptions of that church in Scripture. She is the Bride of Christ for whom Christ laid down His life and for whom He will return on the clouds of glory at the end of time.

Here in this passage God's people are described as stones, lively stones, in the spiritual house of God.

Today we are gathered to rejoice with thanksgiving that God is establishing His church in our midst here in Pittsburgh. Presently we are known as the Protestant Reformed Mission of Pittsburgh. Now we have an office. A few years ago we had not heard the true gospel of grace. Then we heard the Reformed faith and became a fellowship. A few years later we became a mission and, the Lord willing, some day we will become a full-fledged church. But what I want to do for a few moments this afternoon is to remind you that the church is not the

building that we hope to occupy someday. The church is you. You are the building of God; and the grand opening of this mission office is the proof that God is already building His church here in Pittsburgh.

Undoubtedly, when the apostle Peter speaks of the church as the spiritual house of God he is referring to Isaiah 28 and particularly to verse 16 of that passage. Jehovah promised that He would lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a precious corner stone. Now the apostle points to Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of that promise, for by His death, resurrection, and ascension He Himself has fulfilled all the promises of God to establish the glorious city of Zion, the Old Testament type and shadow of the New Testament church. The Son of the living God is the Rock of the church. Flesh and blood will stumble at this stone, as Peter so clearly tells us in this passage. We must be sure of that: this stone will be rejected of man. No one, humanly speaking, will receive our report. All will turn away. But to whom the Father reveals this marvelous truth, Christ is precious. Blessed therefore are ye, Jesus said to Peter, who confessed Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto you, but my Father which is in heaven.

Now notice, with that in mind, how verse 5 begins: "Ye also. Since Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior is the living stone, the life-giving stone, ye also the people of God are as lively stones. If the Jews thought their temple in the



Old Testament was beautiful, made up of all kinds of precious stones, let them hear this. The fulfillment in the New Testament is far greater; the foundation is the very Son of God, and the building blocks, the bricks that are laid, and the beautiful variety of stones which make up that church are the saints of God, washed in the blood of Christ. Stones which themselves were hard, stubborn, and dead are now living, regenerated by the Spirit, and made the spiritual house of God!

Yes, a house is usually made of brick and stone, or wood, or other physical material. But God's house is different. That is why we read in our text that the church is a spiritual house – that is, not earthly, not physical, not carnal, not fleshly, but spiritual. A spiritual house ye are, where God is pleased to dwell by His Word and Spirit. Zion, the city of God, was the type, but ye are the fulfillment. God dwells in His church with His beloved people, His sheep, His elect. They are His lively stones in His spiritual house.

At the end of Ephesians 2 the apostle Paul describes the church in the same way. The church is built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:20). Paul goes on in that passage to describe the New Testament church as the temple of the Lord, where God is pleased to dwell so that we are now the habitation of God through the Spirit. Imagine that! The church is the house of God. That, of course, is the crux of the covenant of God. He comes

*Rev. Mahtani is the eastern home missionary of the PRC. This article is the text of his dedication speech at the opening of the PR Mission Office in Pittsburgh on June 10, 2000.*



to dwell with His people in Jesus Christ. He did this in the Old Testament in types and shadows. Finally, in the fullness of time, He sent His Son, Immanuel, God with us! Now, after His death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father's right hand, He continues to dwell with us by His Word and Spirit. Then, finally, on that glorious day, in the new heavens and new earth, the tabernacle of God will forever be with men! What a privilege to be a lively stone in the spiritual house of God!

That is what we must remember, and for that we must rejoice on this happy occasion. God is building His spiritual house in our midst. He is gathering His lively stones from Pittsburgh who have come and are coming by faith to Jesus Christ, the living stone. God, by His Word and Spirit, is cementing them together so that His holy temple may be built in our midst. Ye also are lively stones. How true. We look at this place — the books, the pamphlets, the tapes, being made ready for display. All the cleaning, carrying of books, organizing — how did that all take place? This is only the outward manifestation, the proof. The real blessing is that God has given us lively hands and hearts, willing to dedicate themselves to the establishment of a Protestant Reformed church in Pittsburgh.

Because God has raised up these lively stones by the wonder of His grace, we can expect that there will be development which will result in a congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ in this place. Because there is a love for the glorious doctrines of grace so clearly revealed in the Scriptures and so beautifully presented in the Reformed creeds, we can hope for a Protestant Reformed church to be established here in Pittsburgh. We may not be many in number, but let us not despise the day of small things. What is important is that we continue to grow spiritually, that we continue to be lively stones

in the spiritual building of God. Then numerical growth will also come, if that be the will of God.

But why the desire to see such a spiritual house established among us? Yes, for the spread of the gospel of grace. Yes, to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. But what really is the chief purpose of the church? I will remind you: The worship of God! In fact, our desire to spread the gospel also through this office, our commitment to defend the Reformed faith, and everything else we do, is and must be rooted in this one central and chief purpose of the church: Ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices! God's church is called out of darkness into His marvelous light for this purpose — that she may show forth His praises! That is why, as verse 9 tells us, she is a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation.

If we forget that the worship of God is the chief end of man, and the chief end therefore of the church, we will surely go astray. If we make growth the chief end, and sacrifice true worship, we are in deep trouble. Yes, even if we make the defense of the truth our sole objective, and forget that the underlying motive of that defense is the pure worship of God, we will go astray. God, and the worship of God, must be at the center of our church. The worship, the praise, the adoration of God is the sole reason for the existence of this spiritual house.

As lively stones we do many things. We defend the truth, we witness of His truth, we cooperate to do what needs to be done. But at the heart of it must be worship of God. Because we love the worship of His name we want to de-

fend His truth. Because we love the praise of His name we want to spread the gospel of grace so that all the people would praise Him. But the root of it must be worship. That must be the ultimate purpose of this spiritual house. We must remember this for ourselves, for our children, for those whom God will add to our number.

Do you love to worship God? Are you increasing in your love for the Lord's day? Do you love to hear the sweet sound of the gospel under the faithful preaching of His Word? Is it your delight to sing His praises in the psalms? Then indeed God's church is being built! Then indeed we are as priests offering spiritual sacrifices to God. Then indeed a Protestant Reformed church is in the making in Pittsburgh.

So I ask you this afternoon, are you behaving as a priest should behave in God's house? Ye are a holy priesthood, according to our text. A priest is dedicated to the service of the temple. He is to be consecrated by the oil of anointing to sing praises to God, to read the law, to magnify the name of God himself and to lead others to do likewise.

One of the great truths of the Scriptures restored to the church through the sixteenth century Reformation was the priesthood of all believers. It is true that there are special offices in the church, to be filled by the men whom God is raising in our midst as officebearers. But it is also true that we all partake of the office

of Jesus Christ as prophets, priests, and kings. We are lively stones in the house of God.

Jesus Christ has come as our perfect Priest, and no sacrifices need to be made for the atonement of our sins. In fact, that is the gospel of grace we hold so dear. Salvation is by grace alone. We hum-

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bly confess that God is sovereign in all things, especially the salvation of His church. So we do not need to earn our salvation. It is free. It is grace. We make no sacrifices to earn or merit salvation. No, not one sacrifice needs to be added to the perfect work of Christ. All our tears, all our deeds, all our labors — they are not necessary as far as our salvation is concerned. Salvation is of the Lord, from beginning to end.


But yet we are as lively stones, a holy priesthood — because whomsoever God makes alive, He also makes holy by His Spirit, and such lively stones are consecrated now to the worship of God. We bring now not offerings for sin, but thank offerings, expressing our gratitude to God for what He has done! We sing His praises, we honor and adore Him, we obey and serve Him, out of a new heart and new mind. We are recreated in Christ. If He as the living stone is consecrated to God, to do His will, so must we also be, as lively stones founded on Him, abiding in Him,

being built upon Him, the chief corner stone.

That is why we must conclude also with the only possibility. It is not of us. It is according to His mercies that we present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable in the sight of God, as Romans 12:1 teaches us. Our text tells us that too: “acceptable to God by Jesus Christ!” Many want to insist on our accepting Jesus Christ. They say the most important thing is our decision to believe. But really the Scriptures have it the other way around. We are made acceptable to God in the beloved. We are by nature sinners. We are by nature enemies of God. We are unable and unwilling of ourselves to worship God. But now we are made lively stones, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices. How? We have been made acceptable, pleasing to God through Jesus Christ. He is our blessed Savior. He is the corner stone, elect, precious in the sight of God. And now He is become to us also precious, for we

are lively stones only because of Him, the living stone.

Let us not be ashamed to acknowledge this. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man can come to the Father but by Him! All of our salvation is dependent upon Him, the precious corner stone. Many will stumble at this stone, but to you who believe He is precious. And you have believed in Him because ye are chosen, ye are His royal priesthood, an holy nation, to show forth His praises. Living stones!

One day in perfection this will be our worship too. Salvation, honor, glory be unto our God and to the Lamb which sits upon the throne. Let us learn to do that now. This is the purpose of Christ’s church on this earth. This is why we want to see a PR church established in Pittsburgh. As lively stones (and we hope you others will join us), let us rejoice with thanksgiving as we continue to labor together for the fuller manifestation of God’s spiritual house in Pittsburgh. Amen. 

## All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

### ◆ Religion and Politics

Cal Thomas, syndicated columnist for the Los Angeles *Times*, often writes on the subject of politics and religion. In the *Grand Rapids Press*, April 19, 2000, he addresses the question under the heading, “Falwell should keep pulpit out of politics.” He makes some interesting and true remarks.

At a news conference last week in Washington and on his “People of Faith 2000” Web page, Falwell announced a drive to register 10 million new voters in order to im-

pose a moral code through government which most citizens, comfortable in their materialism, are not willing to impose on themselves.

Falwell will not register 10 million new voters who will vote as he wishes because there aren’t that many unregistered. People who still believe the solution to moral decline lies in Washington registered to vote in the ’80s and found that, even in the idealized Reagan era, not much changed. In fact, with the exception of a slight decline in abortions (due not to legislation but to the establishment of thousands of centers to help women with unplanned pregnancies), things have gotten worse. Many church members are follow-

ing the ways of the world, divorcing and consuming pornography in increasing numbers, according to several surveys.

On his Web page, Falwell claims that “people of faith are *persona non grata* in the American political process.” No, they’re not. They just shouldn’t expect to constantly run the Republican Party to which his wing of the church has attached itself.

The lower kingdom (politics) is about compromise. The higher kingdom (The Gospel) is about no compromise. Falwell is trying to apply the principles of the higher kingdom to the lower one. Such attempts are futile.

Thomas continues by pointing

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out that the situation for the Christian today is as Christ Himself declared:

Falwell says he resents Christians being treated as "second-class citizens." But that is precisely what Jesus told His true followers they could expect. He said, "If they hated me, they'll hate you," and "if they persecuted me, they will persecute you," and "a servant is not greater than His master." If such people are truly living godly lives, they should expect to be persecuted. They are not commanded to form a political movement to stop it. They should instead increase their godly behavior....

"People of Faith 2000" will raise some money and make noise, but it will change little. The message of Easter can change everything.

### ◆ Judas on Trial

What if Judas were tried today for his betrayal of the Christ? The Greeley (CO) *Tribune* reports such a mock trial which took place at St. Peter's Catholic Church in Greeley:

For a Bible study group at St. Peter's Catholic Church, even 2,000 years doesn't exceed the statute of limitations for a crime.

The group put Judas Iscariot on trial Friday night — and in the process changed the way church members perceive the disciple who betrayed Jesus.

In their play, "The Trial of Judas Iscariot," the group charged Judas with three crimes: crimes against humanity, conspiracy to commit murder and the murder of Jesus of Nazareth.

Complete with opening and closing statements, sworn testimony and objections, the mock trial asked a jury of audience members to determine the guilt or innocence of Christianity's most famous betrayer.

"Throughout history, Judas has been deemed guilty. But guilty of what?" asked Roberta Meehan, who acted as judge in the play. "Betraying a friend is certainly not nice, but it is also not a crime."

Prosecutor Steve Mallett argued that Judas acted in free will and chose to betray Jesus. Judas, he said, traded the life of Jesus for 30 measly pieces of silver.

But defense attorney Thomas Peterson argued Judas was just a pawn in a prophecy. Judas didn't have control over what he did because the crucifixion of Jesus was supposed to happen.

In the end, the jury could not decide whether Judas was guilty or innocent and came back to the mock courtroom as a hung jury.

Audience member Marcella Gallegos understood why the jury couldn't make a decision.

"I had thought Judas existed because the prophecy had to be fulfilled — somebody had to do the dirty work," Gallegos said, "But at the same time, I think Judas had a free will."

It is a sad commentary on man's evaluation of Judas' act that some should consider it excusable and not punishable because it had been eternally determined that Christ must die to deliver His people from their sins. It is the old "conflict" between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. And the old evil is proposed: because God sovereignly determined the cross, therefore Judas cannot be held accountable. But that is not the judgment of Christ — and His judgment is infallible: "And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.... The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matt. 26:21 & 24).

### ◆ The "Antichrist"

It is a matter of interest and curiosity: what of the Antichrist? Many theories have been set forth. Stories have been written concerning the coming Antichrist. There are those also who deny the existence of a personal Antichrist — whether in the past or in the future. The subject was discussed in

the religion section of the Redlands (CA) *Daily Facts* of April 11, 2000. This is the answer given:

The traditional answer to this question is that the Antichrist is the leader of Jesus Christ's enemies. The term is used for a character who has developed more in Christian mythology than in actual biblical evidence or responsible research.

The term "antichrist" (Greek: "antichristos") appears in the Bible only in the Epistles of John. There, the author tells us that "you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know it is the last hour." (I John 2:18) The epistle goes on to define the antichrist as the one who denies the Father and the Son. The Second Epistle of John adds that the antichrist is a "deceiver" who denies the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. (II John 7)

So in the Johannine epistles the term "antichrist" is applied to anyone who opposes the mainstream Christian understanding of the incarnation of Christ.

The author uses the plural and says that many such have already come. He does not seem to be referring to one specific person or thing as "the Antichrist."

Christian ideology has also tended to identify the antichrist with an unnamed figure mentioned in II Thessalonians, the "man of lawlessness" who is going to be revealed, who will lead many astray and will be under the power of Satan, but whom Christ will ultimately destroy. (II Thessalonians 2:3-12)

Many commentators have associated the words of these epistles and have assumed that these two figures, the "antichrist" of John and the "man of lawlessness" of Paul, are one and the same. Further identifications between these two shadowy figures have been drawn with the Scarlet Beast of the Apocalypse, who is said in the Revelation to make war on the saints, and whose number is 666. He is also said to be full of blasphemous names, bearing seven heads, and ten horns, doing all



manner of horrible things to the faithful. (Revelation 17:1-13)

It has to be said that while all three of these biblical texts identify evildoers (the "man of lawlessness," the "antichrist" and the "beast") it may very well be that each author has a different religious problem or villain in mind. My own academic opinion is that this is indeed the case, and that the New Testament does not profess that there is one single or unique Antichrist.

The writer nicely summarizes the passages in the New Testament which speak of the Antichrist. He continues in his article by identifying those individuals in the past who have been labeled the "Antichrist" by some in the church. He speaks of those who have identified the papacy with the Antichrist. Of this he states, "Although I am not a Roman Catholic, I find this a bigoted and biased interpretation."

When one compares these various Scriptural passages, two things


should stand out. John reminds that there have been "many antichrists." Jesus Himself gave as a sign of His return that "many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:5). But the second truth which stands out is that all things become worse and worse. The "lawless one," the "man of sin," the "Beast" (the kingdom of Antichrist) of Revelation 13 all indicate that there is development in sin. The climax of the development in sin is seen in the coming of the final Antichrist, ruling over the antichristian world power. And that time can well be close at hand.

#### ◆ Was Christ a Vegetarian?

The question, of course, is absurd. Even our children can show that He was not. Still, there are the activists in many causes who will make preposterous claims to support their foolish positions. The Associated Press reports on a billboard at Cheyenne:

A billboard that claims Jesus was a vegetarian has drawn criticism from pastors, including one who called it "almost blasphemous" because it ties Jesus to a political cause.

The Interstate 80 billboard is part of an Easter-timed campaign by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals that asks people to "show respect for God's creatures" by not eating them.

One critic points out that Jesus ate fish and lamb at the traditional Jewish Passover. We certainly know that He must have eaten Lamb at the Passover if He celebrated it — and He did. Scripture does also record His eating of fish. But the nonsense of all of this ought to remind us of the fact again that Christ demands that He be presented in His crucifixion and resurrection. He is the Savior of His people — not an advocate for animals which might otherwise be eaten by man. 

Apples of Gold

Mrs. Suzanne Looyenga

## "Not Unto Us"

When energy burst forth from God's creating mind,  
His Spirit, by the power of His spoken Word, gave form,  
And there was light. What *creature* saw it when it shined,  
Illuminating, radiating warm  
Upon the universe of matter waiting there?  
When firmament was for the heavens placed,  
And waters gathered from the land still bare,  
Hills skipped and vales rejoiced as waters raced.  
A universal chorus started thus —  
"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,  
But unto *Thee* be glory given,  
Whose Word has called to being Earth and Heaven."

When trees sprang up at His command,  
Full-flowered, bearing seed of kind,  
And herb and grass and flowers filled the land,  
And sun was for the bearing of day's light designed,  
When moon and stars were in the heavens strung  
As lesser lights illuminating night,  
And planets circled, in their courses hung,  
He called from dust His creatures — fish and birds in flight,  
And animals of sizes small and great.  
Then formed in His own image from the dust,  
A man, who with God's breath inspired, joined with the chorus,  
"Not to us."

Mrs. Looyenga is a member of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church. She wrote this poem for the 75th anniversary and read it at the Pre-Convention Singspiration.



Then fallen Lucifer came into Eden's glade,  
And saw the beauty of friend-servants walking with their God  
Beholding goodness of the things that God had made,  
He formed a plan, and evil was abroad.  
Inhabiting a serpent, he came there to tempt the man,  
Approaching woman formed from man — his life, his love,  
And bringing her the lie to taste it first and question God's  
command:  
"If you shall taste of knowledge — you shall be as God  
above,  
And unto us — yes, unto us — shall glory then be given."  
She ate forbidden fruit, and gave to Adam. Since then man  
has striven  
For the glory of himself — this creature formed of dust.  
And all Creation then began to groan, "Deliver us!"

God saw the man and woman hidden and afraid,  
Ashamed and naked in their sinful state,  
The serpent, arrogant, was on his belly laid,  
Devouring dust until the Devil met his fate,  
The man and woman, by sin's stroke condemned to die,  
But not before abundant weeds sprang up to choke the earth,  
While man would toil beneath a blazing sky.  
The woman, also, in her giving birth,  
Would find as her attendant Sorrow now,  
And tension greatly strain the tender vow  
She made to serve the one God gave to be her head.  
But grace breaks through with promise that the woman's seed  
Would slay the serpent's. God would do this mighty deed.

Not unto us be glory giv'n — not unto us, O God,  
For shedding of the blood that would clothe Adam and his  
wife,  
Not unto us the glory for an ark of grace upon the mighty  
flood,  
Bearing thy chosen man of righteousness and all his kin to  
life.  
And not to us the glory of confusion in great Babel's plain,  
Where tongues demanding "Glory unto us on earth!"  
Were silenced, and man's strivings proved in vain.  
Not from our mouths the call that separated Abram from his  
land of birth  
And brought him safely to the Promised Land.  
Not from our arms the strength that brought forth Israel's  
band  
From their Egyptian bondage — holding back the sea,  
And feeding them with bread of life conveniently.

Not by our wills the parting of the Jordan's mighty swell,  
Nor safe returning to the land promised by Thee.  
Not unto us the glory for kings routed while the great walls  
fell,  
For that inheritance that spoke of rest eternally.  
*Thine* be the glory, *Thine* alone.  
For type and shadow of the One to ransom Israel,  
For David, man after Thy heart, upon his royal throne,  
From whom the Son of God would come — Emmanuel.  
The prophets' voices brought Thy Word of comfort and of  
warning  
To those who, long in darkness, waited for salvation's morn-  
ing.  
In disappointed wrath their God would not destroy,  
Dry bones would rise to sing "Not unto us!" with joy.

And so it was accomplished through a mighty paradox:  
A virgin maid gave birth to this Emmanuel  
Within a stable's walls. While lowly shepherds over flocks  
Were watching, an angel chorus came from Heaven to tell.  
"Glory to God!" their voices chorused,  
And as they echoed through the hillside, all Creation sighed  
with joy.  
Salvation's riches came to lowest, poorest,  
Ancient of days appeared incarnate in a baby boy!  
And sent from heaven's eternal throne,  
The Son will wrap Himself in time to save His Own.  
Not unto us, O humble Lamb, not unto us,  
The glory of atonement, the Just One perishes to make us  
just!

The burden of our sins, our griefs, the Savior bears,  
Saddened with sorrows, and languishing with loss  
We should have borne ourselves. The cares  
Of all His Own He gathers willingly. His steps turn toward  
the cross,  
And in the space of but a few short hours,  
The Woman's Seed unto this single Root diminished  
Takes on the Serpent and his fiendish powers,  
Then with triumphant voice cries, "It is finished!"  
And now the grave awaits His broken body; blood and  
water into dust shall seep,  
For but a little while, only for three days He shall sleep.  
Before the day of resurrection — day of hope for all who die  
in Him.  
Not unto us the power that flung the dark tomb open, releas-  
ing us from sin!



Not by our power the Spirit's pouring out on Pentecost,  
With sound of rushing wind, and cloven tongues of flame,  
And words that fell upon the opened ears of Gentiles that  
were lost,

Not ours the grace that called the persecutor, Saul, by name  
On that Damascus road, and turned his heart to spread the  
Way with zeal.

Thine is the glory for the apostolic band  
That by Thy Great Commission set out to reveal  
The gospel to all men in every land.

Not by their strength did Ancient Fathers faithfully defend  
The Truths on which Thy promises depend.  
Though slain by wild beast, and fire, and swords,  
They went to Death as martyrs for their Lord.

Not ours the glory of the Reformation's Sun,  
Dispelling all the shadows of the darkest age  
Since Christ had come, in which Thy Word from common  
tongue  
Had all but disappeared, interpreted by those who sought to  
gauge  
Man's faith again by deeds of righteousness.  
Praise be to Thee for seeking men who found within Thy  
Word revealed

"The Just Shall Live by Faith." Who in their great distress  
For those deceived reopened Truths that long to them were  
sealed.

Not unto us the honor for the Truth preserved from then  
Until this day by multitude of faithful men,  
Who championed Thy uncommon grace, Thy sovereignty,  
Maintaining *Soli Deo Gloria*, "Not to us, but unto Thee!"

Not unto us, who march beneath Truth's standard here on  
earth,

'Til He returns upon the clouds to claim His Own.

No — unto Thee, Eternal Covenant God, be all the worth,  
Thine be the praise, the glory — the work is Thine alone.  
In deep humility we bow before Thee, Sovereign One,  
Who sought and bought Thy church, Thy blessed bride,  
With blood and water of Thy Own Begotten Son,  
And poured the Spirit of the very One who died  
Upon us, that we might go forth to every nation, tribe, and  
tongue,

Bearing salvation's truth. In every land therefore be sung,  
"Not unto us, O Sovereign, Covenant Lord of Earth and  
Heaven,

But unto Thee, our Maker and Redeemer, be all glory given."



## Decency and Order

Rev. Ron Cammenga

# Private Sins

*In case any one errs in doctrine or offends in conduct, as long as the sin is of a private character, not giving public offense, the rule clearly prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed.*

—Church Order, Article 72.

### Background

**A**rticles 72 and 73 concern private sins.\* Article 72 prescribes how private sins are to be handled.

Article 73 forbids the members of the church informing the consistory about private sins. Our Church Order and Reformed church polity makes an important distinction between private and public sins. In either case, the sin may be in doctrine or in life. But a private sin, so long as it remains private, is to be treated quite differently than a public sin. A private sin is to be dealt with exclusively by the one against whom the sin is committed, apart from the involvement of the consistory.

An article like our present Article 72 was incorporated into all of the church orders that preceded

the Church Order drafted by the synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19. The very first Dutch Reformed synod, the synod of Wesel, 1568, adopted the following:

As far as censure and punishment concerning a person's way of life is concerned, the institution of Christ ought to be observed in everything so that in the case of secret sins, which are not accompanied by public offense, no one

\* Article 72 speaks of "private" sins. Article 73 speaks of "secret" sins. There is no difference between these two. In the Dutch, the same word, *heimelijk*, is used.

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be hauled before the tribunal of the consistory, unless he has with a stubborn heart despised and rejected the frequently repeated admonitions. After having been accused before the consistory, he will however be seriously admonished, and if he will not repent, he shall be cut off as a corrupt member.

The synod of Embden, 1571, decided:

Therefore if anyone has gone astray in purity of doctrine or has sinned in regards to uprightness of life: insofar as it has happened secretly without open offense, the rule shall be maintained which Christ expressly prescribes in Matthew 18.

Our present Article 72 is substantially the same as that of Dordrecht, 1618-'19:

When someone sins against the purity of doctrine or godly conduct, insofar as it is secret and has given no public offense, the rule which Christ clearly prescribes in Matthew 18 shall be maintained.

### **The Nature of Private Sins**

Article 72 prescribes the manner in which private sins are to be dealt with in the church. Private sins are to be dealt with according to the rule laid down by Christ in Matthew 18.

What is a private sin? When is a sin a private sin? And when is a sin not a private but a public sin?

The article itself gives the answer. A sin is a private sin if it does "not give public offense." In other words, if the sin is not known generally, but only by one or by a very few, the sin is to be considered a private sin. This means that the sin is not known generally in the *world*, so that there is no danger that reproach is brought against the church and the name of Christ. And it means that the sin is not known generally in the *church*, thus

causing offense among the members.

A question was put to the synod of Dordrecht, 1578, regarding what constitutes a public sin. The synod's response is worth noting.

A public sin is one which is committed publicly before everyone, or which is committed in a place that by its nature is public (as the lawyers say) even though there are few people, or which through the stubbornness of the sinner from being private becomes public, or lastly because of its grossness is deemed worthy of public punishment. Thus the sins of David against Uriah, of Ananias and Sapphira against the Holy Spirit were made public and punished as public sins.

It is not always easy to determine whether a sin is private or public. Prof. H. Hanko comments on this in his *Notes on the Church Order*.

The question has often been asked: How many have to know of a sin before it is public in character? The answer to this question cannot be given by setting definite figures. The circumstances must determine this question. A sin committed in a large congregation may remain private, while in a small congregation it is soon public though the number of those who know of the sin is the same. This must, in individual cases, be decided with wisdom and discretion on the basis of the general principle: a private offense gives no offense to the congregation as a whole (*Notes on the Church Order*, p. 141).

### **The Way of Matthew 18**

Sins of a private nature are to be dealt with according to the rule laid down by Christ in Matthew 18. The specific reference is to Matthew 18:15-17. It is worthwhile quoting this passage in its entirety.

Moreover if thy brother shall tres-

pass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

It is significant that Christian discipline begins with brotherly admonition. The first responsibility for upholding the true doctrine and godly living is not with the consistory. But the first responsibility is with the individual members of the congregation. Private admonition is the bedrock of Christian discipline. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches this same truth in Q.A. 85.

How is the kingdom of heaven shut and opened by Christian discipline? Thus: when according to the command of Christ, those who under the name of Christians maintain doctrines, or practices inconsistent therewith, and will not, *after having been often brotherly admonished*, renounce their errors and wicked course of life, are complained of to the church....

Other Scripture passages besides Matthew 18 refer to private admonition. In Leviticus 19:17, Moses exhorts the children of Israel, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him." Solomon says in Proverbs 27:5, 6: "Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Jesus says in Luke 17:3, "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him." In Galatians 6:1 Paul exhorts, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the



spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." And James writes in James 5:19, 20: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

The way of Matthew 18 includes three distinct steps. Every church member ought to be familiar with these three steps. Consistories ought to be sure that young people who make confession of faith are familiar with the steps outlined by Jesus for dealing with private sins in the church. What are those steps?

**The first step.** If a member of the congregation has been sinned against or has knowledge that another member of the congregation is walking in sin, he must go to the offending member privately. Out of the Word of God, he must show the erring brother his sin and the seriousness of the sin. And he must admonish the brother to repent of his sin. This private admonition may be brought more than once before the matter proceeds to the next step.

**The second step.** If the erring brother will not repent after having been admonished privately for his sin, but goes on impenitent in his sin, the offended brother must visit him again, this time taking with him one or two witnesses. Jesus' teaching here is based on the principle set forth in Deuteronomy 19:15, "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth; at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." If the erring brother admits to the fact of his sin, but refuses to repent, then also these witnesses ought to join in urgently calling him to repentance.

**The third step.** If the erring brother still does not repent of his sin, the offended brother must go

with his witnesses and tell the matter to the church, that is, the elders of the church. At this point the elders must take up the matter and begin officially to work with the erring brother.

These are the steps of Matthew 18. Nothing too difficult to understand. Pretty straight forward. Article 72 refers to the steps of Matthew 18 as the rule "*clearly prescribed*" by our Lord Jesus Christ.

All too frequently, however, the members of the church do not follow Matthew 18. Rather than to go to the erring brother, church members find it easier to look the other way — not to become involved. Or, rather than talking to the brother, they talk to everyone else in the church *about* the brother, detailing his horrible sin and blackening his good name. Or, rather than to go to the brother and meet with him face to face, they take the cowardly approach and send an anonymous letter.

But the reason for this failure to follow the way of Matthew 18 is not that the steps laid down by our Lord are so convoluted that it takes a theologian to figure them out. Not so! The reason is willful disobedience to the will of Christ. The reason is that, knowing how Christ requires us to deal with private sins, we all too often deal with them — and with the brother — our own way.

### The Witnesses

A word, yet, about the witnesses referred to in Matthew 18. Some have taken the position that these witnesses are witnesses of the sin alleged to have been committed by the erring brother. The Canadian Reformed Church Order commentator W.W.J. Van Oene is of this opinion. He writes:


The witness taken along is not just a silent partner who sits in and listens, but he admonishes the sinner together with the one whom he accompanies. He can do this only when he witnessed the sin itself....  
(*With Common Consent*, p. 305.)

To take the position that the witnesses are witnesses of the sin is untenable. For one thing, if the sin is a private sin, in the strictest sense of the word there are no witnesses. The very fact that Jesus is speaking in Matthew 18 about private sins ("...if thy brother shall trespass against *thee*....") precludes the idea that the witnesses are witnesses of the sin. In addition, that Jesus goes on to speak of the purpose of the witnesses "that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established" indicates that the witnesses are to be witnesses of what transpires at the meeting with the erring brother. The *sin* is not to be established, but *every word* is to be established. The obvious reference is to every word spoken at the meeting between the brothers.

A couple of practical suggestions with regard to one's choice of witnesses are in order. First, they ought to be members of one's own congregation or at least the denomination. Second, they ought ordinarily not to be one's own relatives. In the interests of impartiality, this is a matter of common sense. And third, they ought, if at all possible, not to be members of the consistory. Consistory members ought not to be involved prior to the time that the matter is officially laid before the consistory.

The way of Matthew 18 is the way of love. Following Matthew 18 is the brotherly thing to do. It is with good reason that Jesus begins His instruction in Matthew 18 by saying, "Moreover if thy *brother* shall trespass against thee...." We are brothers and sisters in the church. The bond of love unites us. That love must motivate us to go the way of Matthew 18 when another member of the church sins against us.

For the sake of the brother's restoration!

For the sake of the peace of the congregation! 



# Lot

In both the Hebrew and the Greek, the word translated "lot" has the original meaning of a small stone, a bit of wood, or a piece of cord. These small stones, with certain markings on them, were cast down in order to determine a certain person or a certain course of action or a certain piece of ground. The ceremony of casting lots was not gambling or trusting in chance, but was the God-approved way of determining a matter. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (Prov. 16:33). What was determined by lot was considered settled and binding, for "The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty" (Prov. 18:18). The word "lot" refers not only to the stones that were cast, but by implication to that which was determined by lot: a part, a portion, an inheritance.

The lot was used throughout the history of the Old Testament church. Aaron cast lots to determine which goat would be offered for a sin offering and which goat would be kept alive as the scapegoat (Lev. 16:8). The land of Canaan was divided by lot as the inheritance of the tribes of Israel and of their families (Josh. 13-21). The cities given to the Levites, forty-eight in number, were determined by lot (Josh. 21:20, 40). Achan and his sin were discovered by lot (Josh. 7:18); the soldiers who would fight against Gibeah were chosen by lot (Judges 20:9); and Jonathan was found to have eaten honey against Saul's command by the casting of lots (I Sam. 14:41).


Naboth refused to sell or trade his vineyard to King Ahab because "the Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee" (I Kings 21:3). The portion of land given to each Israelite by lot might not be relinquished; the land shall not be sold forever (Lev. 25:23). Salvation could be enjoyed only in the way of keeping that portion assigned by the Lord, but to sell that land was to despise the inheritance. Therefore the ancient landmarks, stakes of wood or piles of stones, might not be removed (Deut. 19:14; Prov. 22:28).

Lots were also cast much later, near the fullness of time. Zacharias' lot was to burn incense in the temple when the angel announced to him the birth of John. When Jesus was crucified, the soldiers cast lots for his garments (Matt. 27:35) as it had been prophesied (Ps. 22:18). Judas Iscariot was replaced as an apostle by Matthias, upon whom the lot fell (Acts 1:26). Strangely

and beautifully, we do not read of the church casting lots to make binding decisions after Acts 1. The reason for this is that, according to Acts 2, Jesus poured out of His Spirit so that every member of the church was filled by the Spirit of Christ. Before the Day of Pentecost the church was but a child, and God treated her as a child. The casting of lots fit the dispensation of the law, the time of types and shadows. But with the outpouring of the Spirit the one church of God suddenly matures, reaches adulthood, and is enabled to make decisions and determinations by the Spirit of truth that is in her. The office of believers comes into its own. Just a few days after Pentecost that office was exercised in the Jerusalem church by the choosing of deacons (Acts 6:1-6). The church chose or elected seven men to be deacons, and then the apostles prayed over them, laid their hands on them, and ordained them. We heard recently of a congregation that was considering the casting of lots to determine her officebearers. Perhaps this practice has been adopted in some congregations. How unbiblical, foolish, wrong! That is a denial of the maturity of the church, the Spirit's leading of the church, and the office of all believers.

We believe that the ceremonies and figures of the law (including the casting of lots) have ceased at the coming of Christ, and the use of them must be abolished amongst Christians; "yet the truth and substance of them remain with us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have their completion" (Belgic Confession, Art. 25). This is brought out very beautifully in Psalm 16:5, 6, which is true for every believer even today. "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." The lot that has fallen to us, the property lines drawn out for us with gracious care, the cup we are privileged to drink, the inheritance which is maintained and preserved for us, is Jehovah God Himself! Is that not a goodly heritage? God has given Himself to us in Jesus Christ. He has given us His inspired Word and its preaching along with the sacraments. He has given us Reformed confessions and our precious Church Order. We may worship God with an order of worship that adheres closely to the principles of Scripture.

This is our lot. This is our inheritance, for which we did nothing. These are the lines which give to us a pleasant life. For these things we bless the Lord.

Remove not these ancient landmarks! 

*Rev. Kuiper is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*



# The Proud, Troubled, Roaring Sea

**W**ith this article we begin a study of the creation, examining what the Bible says is illustrated by the works God's hands have made. In the second article of the Belgic Confession we confess that the creation is a beautiful book, a book that sets forth for us the glory of our God. We know our God by two means, the first of which is:

... the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, His power and divinity....

Creation and history together form a book, a most elegant book, a book that can be read. But it can be read only by means of faith. God must tell us how to understand the things He has made. Only by faith in this Word can we begin to see the heavenly things that are illustrated for us in the earthly things God has created.

We, God's people, have been given eyes to see that which is hidden from the ungodly world. By nature we also are completely blind to these truths and are no different from the reprobate. But God unconditionally chose us, and sent His Son to die for us, that our blindness might be removed, and that we might receive the heavenly eyes of Christ, eyes through which

we are able to begin to see the wonders our Father has made.

## The Earth and the Seas: A Fundamental Distinction

We begin by considering one of the most basic distinctions seen in the creation, namely that between the earth and the seas. Already in the first chapter of Genesis the sea is contrasted with the earth. In the third day of creation God called the dry land *earth*, and the waters He called *seas*. This fundamental distinction is seen also in the last book of the Bible, where we find the promise that God's people will inherit the earth, and that in the new heaven and new earth there will be no more sea (Rev. 21:1).

Heaven is pictured as land, the promised land; and the wicked are likened to a troubled, tumultuous sea. The latter is referred to in Isaiah 57:20, "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." By the wicked is meant not only reprobate men, but also the devil and the demons and our sinful nature. Our threefold enemy is likened to the troubled sea, as it tosses and turns, casting up the mire within it.\*

With this knowledge we begin to consider some of the distinguishing characteristics of the earth and the seas, and what these make known to us concerning the antithesis between the church and the ungodly world.

## The Sea: Unable to Rest

Isaiah 57:20, quoted above,

says that the wicked are like the troubled sea in that they cannot rest. Even if they are very lazy, and lie around watching television hour after hour, they are never at rest, never at peace. Spiritually they are constantly tossing and turning, this way and that, like the waves of the oceans. Like the seas they are *unable* to rest. They constantly live in the fear of death, for God's wrath is always abiding upon them.

From this restlessness we have been delivered. We are set upon a solid rock, which is Christ. We live in the heavenly promised land that cannot be moved – a land in which we enjoy spiritual rest, the rest of the covenant.

Yet we, too, at times can experience being tossed about like the waves of the sea. Sometimes our mind seems to be whirling this way and that, and we experience little or no rest in our soul. This is what happens when we are failing to live in Christ by faith. When we are consciously living in Christ, we experience being at peace with God, and we enjoy the Sabbath rest of the promised land. But if we live in sin for a time, God will cause us to experience what it is like to be troubled as the sea.

Take, for example, a child of God who lives for a time in the sin

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\* Sometimes that which is good is likened to the sea. God said, for example, that our righteousness would be like the waves of the sea (Is. 48:18). At this time, however, we consider only how the wicked are likened to the sea.



of hating and refusing to forgive a brother in Christ. He condemns a man for whom Christ died, and he refuses to promote his brother's honor and well-being. Instead he delights to think of this person being humiliated and put to shame. He talks evil of him behind his back and strives to destroy his name. Such a person, who refuses to forgive a brother, does not experience the forgiveness of God. He lacks peace with God. He finds it very difficult to rest. Perhaps not in his body, but in his soul, he tosses and turns like the waves of the sea. Then, by the grace of God, he cries out to God to deliver him from these waters and to draw his soul out of this sea. This prayer the Father answers. He pulls out His repentant child, setting him once again upon dry land.

Jonah was one who lived in sin for a time, and this was the judgment and the salvation he experienced. He described what happened to him in his prayer uttered from within the giant fish (Jonah 2:5). "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head." A

dead man he must have thought he was, for a while. But the Lord delivered him. By a very severe blow God brought Jonah to repentance, causing him to cry out for deliverance. Then Jonah was spit out. He again stood upon dry land, not only physically, but also in his soul.

### **The Roaring Sea: Unable to Prevail Against the Sand**


The sea, unlike the land, makes a noise. If you were hiking in the woods and approaching the ocean, you often would be able to hear it. The sea, in contrast with the earth, is said to roar. Its waves are said to be proud, and their roar illustrates for us the constant roaring of the ungodly (Jer. 6:23).

The sand serves as a barrier over which these proud, roaring waves are unable to pass.

Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? (Jer. 5:22)

How often do we think of this when we walk upon the sand, listening to the crashing of the waves? Though our enemies proudly rise up against us, they come crashing down, and all their effort is in vain. God has set a barrier over which they cannot pass.

When we die there is a sense in which we go under the waves. God strikes us with the enemy of death, and we go under. But we go under only from the viewpoint of our outer man, which is perishing. But in our inner man we have the resurrection life of Christ, a life that never ends. Although our enemies proudly crash into us, they are unable to bring us under their dominion, just as the waves are unable to prevail against the barrier of the sand.

God sets the barrier. Sovereign over all things, including evil, is He. This is the comfort that we have in Christ. This is the comforting truth declared to us by the waves that continuously crash in vain, unable to pass over and conquer the land upon which we dwell. 

## **Book Reviews**

**A Critical and Expository Commentary on the Book of Judges**, by Andrew R. Fausset. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999. Pp. viii-340. \$19.99 (cloth). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert Decker.]


Here is a fine commentary of the book and era of the Judges. The work is detailed and complete. The exposition is correct for the most part. Ministers and lay persons alike who are looking for good, solid exposition of this book of the Bible will find it in this commentary.

The Rev. A. R. Fausset correctly

views this period as one during which the Lord chastised His people for their repeated apostasy and raised up Judges to deliver them from their enemies. In this way, the author maintains, and rightly so, the Lord prepared Israel for the "king after His own heart," the typical, Davidic theocracy.

Fausset (1821-1910) was curate of Bishop Middleham, County Durham from 1848 till 1859. He was rector of St. Cuthbert's York, from 1859 until his death.

Those interested in other works on the Judges would benefit from the syllabus written by the late

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema, *Era of the Judges*, available from the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary bookstore. 

**Let's Study Mark**, by Sinclair B. Ferguson. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999. Pp. xix-304. \$14.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

This attractive book was written not for the scholar, but for ordinary Christians. Ferguson's purpose is twofold, *viz.*, to lead the reader into an understanding of the Gospel according to Mark and to



lead the reader into an understanding of how this Gospel account applies to his life and situation.

While we are certain, and that too beyond any doubt whatsoever, that Dr. Ferguson is committed to the truth of the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures by the Holy Spirit, he misses a nice opportunity to state that truth in the introductory section in which he discusses the "author of the Gospel." The discussion is limited to the identity of John Mark, but nothing is said about the inspiration of this account of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit.

What we have in this volume is a very nice, brief, devotional commentary in paragraph form on the Gospel according to Mark. The book is well written and easy to read. Ferguson offers pithy sum-


maries of the various sections of which this Gospel account consists.

The book is enhanced by a useful "Group Study Guide" which not only guides the reader into a study of the various passages, but which also includes instructive comments on how one ought to go about leading a group Bible study. Ministers and others called upon to lead group studies of the Scriptures will benefit from these comments.

Some of the expositions are too brief, thus leaving the reader with unanswered questions. Dr. Ferguson is committed to the error of a well-meant gospel offer. His exposition of Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-31, pp. 164-170) is incorrect. The fact is, Jesus loved the young man. This means He saved him.

The young man came to faith and repentance in the way of a tremendous struggle. All things are possible with God! Even the salvation of a rich young ruler.

Under the title, "For Further Reading" (p. 304), this reviewer was disappointed to find only two commentaries listed, viz., *Mark* by L. A. Cole and *The Gospel According to Mark* by W. L. Lane. There are many more commentaries on Mark, some of which are arguably much better than the two listed, e.g., Wm. Hendricksen, R. C. H. Lenski, and John Calvin's *Harmony of Matthew, Mark, and Luke*.

In spite of the negative comments above, we recommend this study of the Gospel according to Mark. It should prove useful for private or family devotions and for Bible Study groups. 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Evangelism Activities

**T**his summer the members of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ have been keeping themselves busy with various evangelism outreaches. First, back on June 24, they were able to distribute many pamphlets and *Standard Bearers* at an event known as "Big Splash," in Ocean Grove, NJ. This event, sponsored by a local Christian radio station, gave Covenant the opportunity also to speak to many individuals about their particular beliefs. This was followed on July 29 with a similar event in Harlem, NY. Here again many new contacts were made and much of our literature was handed out. Let us pray, along with the church at Covenant, that God's blessing will rest on this effort and on the seeds that have been sown.

You may also be interested to

know that "The History of the PRC Church," the definitive history written by Rev. Herman Hoeksema himself, is now available for your perusal in cyberspace. It can be found by visiting Covenant PRC's web site, [www.covprc.org](http://www.covprc.org). Rev. Martin VanderWal, Covenant's pastor, assures us that if our reading provokes any evocative questions, we may feel free to post them on the discussion page. It's what it's there for.

Again, going back to June, we find that the Byron Center, MI PRC once again sponsored a special Sunday evening worship service on June 18. Rev. Doug Kuiper, pastor at Byron Center, planned to preach on the Word of God as found in Acts 4:12 under the theme "Salvation: In Jesus and in None Other." Again, as in past years, special efforts were made to invite those from the area outside of our churches.

Once again this summer the congregation of the Southwest PRC

in Grandville, MI sponsored what has become known as their "Annual Summer Seminar." The theme this year was "Ready to Give an Answer: Responding to the Cults." The sessions were scheduled to be held the first four Wednesday evenings of August at Southwest. Rev. Ron Cammenga, pastor of Southwest, led the first and third classes, looking first at what is a cult, and then, who are the Seventh-Day Adventists. Rev. Charles Terpstra, pastor of First PRC in Holland, MI, led the second and fourth classes, on who are the Jehovah's Witnesses and who are the Mormons.

### Mission Activities

**I**n August some in our churches were able to attend a conference on "The Love of God," sponsored by the Sovereign Grace Reformed Church in Spokane, WA, a mission of our churches. Western home missionary, Rev. Thomas Miersma, and Rev. Garrett Eriks, pastor of the Loveland, CO PRC, spoke on

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various aspects of that topic. Rev. Miersma spoke on both, "The Love of God and the Sinner" and "The Love of God and Affliction," while Rev. Eriks spoke on "The Love of God and Salvation," and "Walking in the Love of God." Those in attendance were also invited to stay through Sunday and enjoy worship on the Lord's Day with the Spokane congregation.

Rev. Jaiki Mahtani, home missionary in the Eastern US, was able to present a program featuring his work in Pittsburgh, Washington, DC, New York City, and Fayetteville, N.C. to the congregation of the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore on July 12. Rev. Mahtani, along with his wife and children, was in Singapore from July 7 to August 15 to visit family. He also planned, the Lord willing, to preach for the FERC on August 13.

Various of our churches' pastors have been traveling to Fayetteville, NC this summer to bring the lively preaching of the

Word to the Reformed Fellowship there, who desire to have more contact with us in the future. Rev. Mitch Dick was there earlier, followed by Rev. Ron VanOverloop in July, with, the Lord willing, Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma following in early August.

Rev. Richard Moore, our churches' missionary to Ghana, writes that they continue to look for properties (on which to construct a church home) and that they are working to find one that will be suited to their needs. No matter what, the process always seems to take a little longer than they would prefer.


#### Minister Activities

Rev. Arie denHartog declined the call extended to him by Hope PRC in Walker, MI to serve as the next minister-on-loan to Singapore.

Rev. Steven Key was installed as the twelfth pastor of the Hull, IA PRC on July 26. In what has to be a first for them, Rev. Richard

Smit, of the Doon, IA PRC, preached the sermon and Rev. Daniel Kleyn, pastor at Edgerton, MN, did the installation.

Rev. Carl Haak declined the call he had been considering to serve as pastor of the vacant Randolph, WI PRC.

Rev. Steven Houck, pastor of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL, resumed preaching on July 23, preaching twice for his congregation. This was the first time he preached after his recent heart surgery. We give thanks to the Lord that He has granted Rev. Houck a good recovery and also the privilege once again to bring His Word to the saints at Peace. 

#### Food For Thought

*"He who provides for this life, but takes no care for eternity, is wise for a moment, but a fool forever."*

— John Tillotson

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Ladies' Society of the Hull PRC wish to express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to fellow member Henrietta Gritters and her family in the death of her grand-daughter,

#### CRYSTAL SUE KING.

May she and her family continue to experience God's sustaining grace and may they be comforted through the truth that we confess in Lord's Day 1, that our only comfort in life and death is that we are not our own, but belong body and soul to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

Alden DeJong, Pres.  
Verna Westra, Sec'y.

#### NOTICE!

The new bulletin clerk for Randolph is Stephanie Key, 215 A Second St., Randolph, WI 53956 (920) 326-6180. Her e-mail address is: sjkey@internetwis.com.

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Ladies' Society of the Hull PRC express their sincere Christian sympathy to fellow member Ramona Streyle and to our Missionary's wife and former member Jan Moore, in the death of their sister,

#### SHIRLEY GONSER.

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

Alden DeJong, Pres.  
Verna Westra, Sec'y.

#### NOTICE

All who have a PRC denominational directory should make note that the area code for our Pella PRC members has changed from 515 to 641. Please note the change in your directories.

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their condolences to Mr. and Mrs. Paul Machiele in the death of Mrs. Machiele's brother,

#### MR. JAMES DEYOUNG.

May they be comforted by God's word from Romans 8:28, "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."

Rev. A. Spriensma, President  
Jack Brands, Assistant Clerk

#### SEMINARY CONVOCATION

The PR Seminary will hold its Convocation on September 12, 2000 at 7:30 P.M. in Southwest PRC. Prof. R. Decker will give the address. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend.



## NOTICE!

With gratitude to God, the congregation of First PRC of Edmonton, AB will celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary on Friday, September 22, 2000, with a congregational supper and a public program to be held at the Parkland Immanuel Christian School. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."

Former members and friends are welcome to attend and share in our joy.

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory of Kalamazoo PRC expresses Christian sympathy to the friends and loved ones of

### THERESA SLAGER

whom the Lord recently took to glory. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, President  
Tom Kiel, Clerk

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC extend Christian sympathy to fellow elder Roger Veldman, his wife, and family in the death of Rog's sister,

### MRS. MARIANNE VANDER LEEST

May they be comforted by God's word in Psalm 116:7, 8, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling."

Rev. A. Spriensma, Pres.  
Jack Brands, Assistant Clerk

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Victor Oosterbaan in the death of her brother,

### MR. LEE DYKE.

Our prayer is that they may be comforted by the words of Romans 14:7, 8, "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

Rev. A. Spriensma, Pres.  
Jack Brands, Assistant Clerk

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 1, 2000

### ED and CLARICE GRITTERS

will celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

We thank our heavenly Father for their faithfulness to each other and to the church, and for their love and covenantal instruction to us.

May our faithful God continue to uphold and bless them in the years ahead.

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

- ◆ Jerry and Shirley VanderKolk
  - ◆ Ed and Jeanne Karsemeyer
  - ◆ Rev. Barry and Lori Gritters
  - ◆ Mike and Brenda Gritters
  - ◆ Roger Gritters
  - ◆ Rick and Shari Gritters
- 26 grandchildren  
1 great-grandchild

Redlands, California

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their sympathy to Dennis and Sharon Gleason in the passing away of their brother-in-law,

### TOM HEYBOER.

May they be comforted by the words of Romans 5:9, 10: "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

Rev. Dale Kuiper, President  
Ed Hekstra, Clerk

## REMINDER TO PARENTS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

The *Standard Bearer* is sent free of charge to young people who are away from home to attend college. Please inform the Business Office of your desire to take advantage of that opportunity

## NOTICE!!!

Each issue of the *Standard Bearer* is available on cassette tape for those who are blind, or who for some other reason would like to be able to listen to a reading of the SB. This is an excellent ministry of the Evangelism Society of the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church. The reader is Ken Rietema of Southeast Church. Anyone desiring this service regularly should write:

Southeast PRC  
1535 Cambridge Ave. S.E.  
Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

## NOTICE

Needed: Photocopy of a 1948 RWH sermon by Rev. Hoeksema on Romans 9:10-13 — for reference in a new book, soon to be published by the RFP. Anyone able to help may call the RFP business office at (616) 224-1518.