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Thankful Lips

Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.

Psalm 63:3

In just a few days our readers who live in the United States will observe the national holiday called Thanksgiving Day.

Thanksgiving is a deeply spiritual exercise which only the believer in Jesus Christ can possibly perform. As seen from our text, this involves two things: first, God's lovingkindness is manifest unto His people; then, in response of faith, they praise God. Only the redeemed Christian has this privilege, for only the redeemed Christian has faith. In that light we pray that on this coming Thanksgiving Day we may offer thanksgiving properly.

We give thanks both with respect to our natural life and to our spiritual life. There is, first of all, our physical body. We desire to be of good health. We are very

thankful when we can arise in the morning, contemplate the work that lies before us, and have the strength to do that work. This requires also the necessary mental capacity, whether we work at home, at the office, in the field, or on the road. In addition, we need the physical energy to press on in the midst of all kinds of dangers that would threaten our health and safety.

Our physical body is our house of the soul. As soul-creatures our life includes our relationships with each other as human beings. Closest and most precious to us is our home life. It is blessed when husband and wife live in harmony and peace, directing their love to each other without an adulterous third party. Life in such a happy home takes on an entirely different perspective when it is blessed with children. As parents we rejoice in the happy voices of healthy children or the cry of a newborn infant. Grandparents fondly remember the day when they enjoyed the

babble of children about the table. Perhaps some will relive that experience when the children and grandchildren gather about the Thanksgiving Day table. This is all part of life.

To enjoy this blessed life we are in need of many things. There is the obvious necessity of food, clothing, and shelter. Compared to the standards in other countries, even the poor among us are rich with this world's earthly goods. At present we live in relative peace, in contrast to many who live in countries that are torn apart by war. When we desire we can travel and view the wonders of God's hand in the creation about us. On the Sabbath day we can go to the house of God and worship Him without fear for our lives as we sit under the pure preaching of His Word. Whenever we please we can read from an abundance of inspirational material to nourish our hungry souls. All these are precious physical blessings.

If we said no more, we would

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

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. David J. Engelsma
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: engelsma@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Don Doezema
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49468-0603
PH: (616) 531-1490
(616) 538-1778
FAX: (616) 531-3033
(e-mail: doezema@prca.org)

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: seancourtney@cprc.freeserve.co.uk)

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be dishonest, for there is also the spiritual side of our life. Though our text speaks of life, the Scriptures also reveal to us that, because sin entered into the world, our life is a continual death. God warned our first parents, "The day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Man ate and man died. Since then, all mankind and all the environment, including man in his social relationships, have been plunged into the abyss of death, for the wages of sin is death.

This misery caused by sin is manifest in a number of ways. There are diseases of every imaginable sort that plague the body. With all the disappointments in life there is an abundance of mental illness. Then we can add to that, broken homes, violence, crimes, war, apostasy, plus much more, all of which bring us to despair.

David looks at all of this from the viewpoint of a child of God. He realizes not only the terrible-ness of sin in general, but also the terribleness of his own sins that were committed before the just and holy God. Listen to him in Psalm 51:3-6: "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity: and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom."

The misery of sin brings heart-ache and sorrow. It was this fact which moved David to pen these words of our text when he was in the wilderness fleeing from Absalom. In the first verse of Psalm 63 he writes, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is."

We, too, often cry from that wilderness. For the sake of Christ

we may lose our job because we refuse to work on the Sabbath day or to join the union. There are times when we have to give up friends for the sake of the truth. Our life is often like a wilderness. Then we begin to understand the words of our text.

It is exactly when we understand the words of our text that we lift up our voices and with thankful lips praise God for His lovingkindness. When we praise God we must not focus on the circumstances of our life and say, "Yes, even though I may have sicknesses, even though there are problems that are in my life, yet in spite of all these things I can yet give thanks." If this is our idea of thanksgiving, then we have not come to see even the most simple aspects of Christian faith. It is not in spite of these things that we give thanks. Unbelief says, "We still have many reasons for which to be thankful; there are still bright spots in our life; every cloud has a silver lining; things are bound to get better." All such talk is the talk and thanks of unbelief.

Instead, we fix our eye of faith on the lovingkindness of our God. This is everything for the Christian and constitutes the exclusive reason for thanks. This is true because the child of God recognizes the reality of sin. The root of all misery is our disobedience against God. Over against this is the lovingkindness of God, which is revealed in His work whereby He takes from us the guilt of our sins. This has been determined already in eternity, where He willed by the sovereign decree of election to save some. What He willed in eternity He carried out in time when He sent His Son to redeem us from all our guilt and shame.

The root idea of this loving-kindness is God's mercy. In mercy God has compassion upon the sin-

ner and works to deliver him from his misery. Upon the cross of Calvary this was accomplished when, by sovereign and free determination, He transferred the guilt of His elect upon Christ and dealt with Him as the guilty one. Moved by infinite love, God poured forth the vials of wrath, which we deserved to bear, upon His own Son. Christ made perfect and complete satisfaction, fulfilling all that God demanded as payment for sin. God received this payment and imputed to our account all the benefits of perfect righteousness.

This lovingkindness is made known to us through the preaching of the gospel. This same Jesus, who is now crowned with glory and honor, comes to us through the preaching of the gospel and applies the salvation which He merited on the cross to our hearts. Through the Holy Spirit He crushes all our pride and reveals to us who He is and who we are, thus working in us the response of a living faith. With the church of all ages we cry out, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord, and in the Holy Ghost." This confession we confirm with a daily walk in all good works.

The words of our text then become an expression of joy. The one real joy of all our earthly pilgrimage is that we are the friends of God and have the privilege of enjoying His covenant blessings. We recognize that our only purpose in life is to glorify His name. Thus, doing His will, we fix our eyes upon the day when we shall inhabit the new heaven and earth.

God's lovingkindness is more than life. This means that it is the overruling power of our life. Apart from it our daily life is meaningless. Only in the way of faith have we a real purpose and joy in this life. Our whole life is wrapped up

The one real joy of all our earthly pilgrimage is that we are the friends of God and have the privilege of enjoying His covenant blessings.

in the one purpose of making the name of our God great in every sphere of life. We recognize that, because God is sovereign over life, all things work together for good because His love to us is in Jesus Christ. We then understand that sickness, misery, war, economic stress, and all which constitutes this life are under the direct control of God and therefore serve the purpose of strengthening the bond of covenant friendship between God and His people.


Now we can see why all men cannot thank God and even do not have the right to do that. Without God's lovingkindness in our hearts all we would do is seek self. God

would not be in our thoughts. Only when our whole life is filled with His lovingkindness will our thanksgiving be true praise from our lips. Apart from this lovingkindness, all our lips do is boast in self and curse the living God.

May our thanksgiving be true praise to God. He alone is the object of all our praise, for of Him and through Him are all things. Unto Him, therefore, the praise must be directed. By this praise we acknowledge that He alone is great and worthy of all honor. We praise God as we bow our heads and bend our knees and say, "I am nothing but a sinner; Thou, O God, art great; Thou art the God of our

salvation."

Thus it is not in spite of troubles that we thank God, nor is it being free from troubles. Rather, it makes no difference what our circumstances in life may be, for our eye of faith is focused upon our God. We know that whatever portion He sends us, whether it be pleasing to the flesh or difficult, it is spiritually good for us. He never sends any trial, but that He also provides the grace to endure it.

This brings us peace. We are so thankful, that our lips shout forth His praise. The joy of heaven is that we will be able to do this in perfection, to sing praise to our God forever. 

Editorial

The Kingdom of God

"Who ... hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." (Col. 1:13)

The kingdom of God is not as well known among us as are the covenant of God and the church of God. It does not receive as much attention in the teaching as do the covenant and the church. This is a weakness, for the kingdom is of central importance in the revelation of Holy Scripture.

If the kingdom of God is seen, not as something different from the covenant but as the distinct form of the covenant, the Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Ridderbos was right when he said that the kingdom of God is "the central theme of the whole New Testament revelation of God" (*The Coming of the Kingdom*). Mark tells us that Jesus began His ministry "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of

God, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:14b, 15). Everyone knows that Jesus' favorite form of preaching was the parable, and the parables set forth the kingdom of God. In explanation of this form of teaching, Jesus Himself described the content of the parables as "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11). Usually, the parable is introduced by the words, "The kingdom is like unto...." In Luke 4:43, Jesus said that preaching "the kingdom of God" was the very purpose of His ministry. This was His mission: "Therefore am I sent."

The importance of the kingdom of God, especially in these last days, is plain from the book of Revelation. The theme of the book is the victory of the kingdom of God and its king in the great war be-

tween the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the dragon.

As Jesus indicated in Mark 1 when He said that the coming of the kingdom fulfilled the time, the kingdom of God was also central in the Old Testament. At the heart of the Old Testament was the history of Israel, which was the kingdom of God. At the very center of that heart was the coming of Messiah the king.

The biblical truth of the kingdom of God is also of great interest to us because of the controversies that swirl about it. The Roman Catholic Church identifies the kingdom of God with its own papal organization. Liberal Protestantism makes the kingdom of God the peaceful, prosperous condition of society that results from carrying out Jesus' teaching on love and brotherhood. The World Council of Churches and similar agencies

are striving for the kingdom of God, which for them is a world of united nations; the absence of war, poverty, disease, and discrimination; and the enjoyment of earthly well-being.

For many fundamentalists and evangelicals all over the world, the kingdom of God is a future Jewish nation in Palestine that will be ruled by Jesus and that will continue for 1000 years. These are the premillennial dispensationalists. This view of the kingdom is very influential among religious people. Today it makes inroads into the secular world, at least in the United States. The last few months books in a series called "Left Behind" are high on the New York *Times* bestseller list. These books are the fictionalized and popularized presentation of the doctrinal notion that the kingdom of God is to be a restored nation of Israel.

Closer to home, certain Reformed and Presbyterian theologians teach the kingdom of God as mainly a worldwide earthly rule of all nations by the church in the future before the second coming of Christ.

We may not overlook that the kingdom of God has practical significance for us. We are citizens of the kingdom of God according to the apostle in Colossians 1:13. Implied are our blessedness and our calling.

By the kingdom of God in this and following editorials we have in mind God's reign by Jesus Christ in distinction from God's rule over all things by His almighty power. The kingdom of God that is central in the gospel of the Scriptures is God's reign of grace by the Spirit and Word of the incarnate, crucified, and risen Son of God. This is proved from Jesus' announcement at the beginning of His ministry, "The kingdom of God is *at hand*" (Mark 1:15). The kingdom was then near to be established. God's sovereign rule of all as Creator, of course, was always a reality.

That the kingdom of God is

God's reign of grace in Christ is also proved by the second petition of the model prayer: "Thy kingdom come." The coming of the kingdom implies a progressive realization of the kingdom of God. One day in the future, as the Heidelberg Catechism explains in Lord's Day 48, "the full perfection of [God's] kingdom [will] take place." This cannot be said of God's almighty rule over all by His power. God's rule of power does not *come*, but *is*. But it is true of God's gracious reign in Jesus Christ that it comes.

The kingdom of God is the same as the kingdom of Christ. Sometimes the New Testament speaks of the kingdom of God; at other times it speaks of the kingdom of Christ. One and the same kingdom is in view. Kingdom of God emphasizes that the triune God conceived and established this kingdom and that the kingdom exists for His sake. Kingdom of Christ brings out that God conceived and established this kingdom in Jesus Christ and that Christ governs this kingdom on God's behalf, as the servant of God.

Since some deny that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ are identical, explaining them as two different kingdoms, and since this results in serious error about the kingdom of God, the identity should be demonstrated.

In Colossians 1:13 the apostle tells us that we have been translated into "the kingdom of God's dear Son," that is, the kingdom of Christ. In I Thessalonians 2:12 the same apostle tells us that God has called us unto "his kingdom," that is, the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God's dear Son and the kingdom of God are one and the same. Ephesians 5:5 calls the kingdom by both names: "the kingdom of Christ and of God."

The kingdom of God, therefore, is the Messianic kingdom of salva-

tion and glory. In his commentary on the second petition of the model prayer, Herman Hoeksema describes it as "the commonwealth in which God is King, in which He is known and acknowledged, loved and freely obeyed, by willing subjects as the only Sovereign of all, whose Word is law, written in the hearts of all the citizens of the kingdom" (*The Triple Knowledge*, vol. 3). It is the kingdom typified and prophesied in the Old Testament by the nation of Israel, especially in connection with the kingships of David and Solomon. It is the kingdom established as a reality in the world by the incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ and extended throughout the world by the preaching of the gospel, first by the apostles and then by a church faithful to the great commission.

The kingdom of God brings deliverance from the tyranny and death of sin and bestows righteousness and eternal life. To be in the kingdom is to enjoy God, whereas to be outside the kingdom is to perish under His wrath. According to Colossians 1:12, 13, when God translated, or transferred, us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, He blessed us in two wonderful ways. He rescued us from the power of darkness, and He made us partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Revelation 22:15 represents the final state of the damned as exclusion from the city, which is the "full perfection of the kingdom of God" spoken of by the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 48. Outside the kingdom will be dogs, sorcerers, whoremongers, murderers, idolaters, and who-

soever loves and makes a lie.

The kingdom of God will be the kingdom of Jesus Christ forever. It is a mistake to suppose that the kingdom of Christ will end with the second coming of the Lord Jesus, when He has perfected the

To be in the kingdom is to enjoy God, whereas to be outside the kingdom is to perish under His wrath.

kingdom of God His Father. Some make this mistake on the basis of a faulty understanding of I Corinthians 15:24-28. Verse 25 teaches that Christ must reign "till he hath put all enemies under his feet." Verse 24 teaches that when Christ has finally put all enemies under His feet, He will deliver up the kingdom to God the Father. Some explain the passage as teaching that this will be the end of the Messianic kingdom. Christ will no longer be king. Kingship over the perfected kingdom of God in the entire renewed creation will be exercised directly by the triune God.

But the Bible elsewhere clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is an everlasting king and that the kingdom of Christ—the Messianic kingdom—is everlasting. According to Daniel 7:14, the kingdom that is given to the Son of Man by the Ancient of Days is "an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." Revelation 22:1,

3, which pictures the kingdom of God which Jesus Christ has established, defended, and perfected, unmistakably speaks of the "throne of God and of the Lamb." Correctly, Lord's Day 12 of the Heidelberg Catechism calls Jesus "our eternal king."

In I Corinthians 15, the apostle does not teach that Christ will one day cease being the king of the kingdom of God under God His Father. But he teaches that the goal of Christ's reign is the subduing of all His enemies. When He accomplishes this at His second coming and when at the same time He perfects the kingdom in all the new world, He will, in a solemn ceremony, present the kingdom to God as the accomplishment of the work that God gave Him to do. Under God and on behalf of God, Christ will continue to reign over the kingdom forever.

This honors Christ and delights us, as William Symington states at the end of his fine defense of the

everlasting kingship of Christ against the mistaken interpretation of I Corinthians 15:24-28:

It cannot but be honouring to Christ to regard him as reigning for ever and ever; and it cannot but be pleasing, beyond all description, to his saints to think that they are never to lose sight of him as their King, never to cease to be his subjects, never but to yield him their grateful heartfelt homage. It cannot but rejoice them to know that they are to be ever under his rule, and that, even after they are taken to glory, they shall continue to behold him as the Lamb in the midst of the throne for ever and ever. What a prospect! How should it excite us to prepare for its being realized! Happy they who, having submitted themselves to him in time as King of saints, shall be eternally under his sway as King of glory! (*Messiah the Prince*)

(...to be continued)

— DJE 

Letters

■ The Holy Spirit Speaks Externally in the Preaching?

In his article "The Spirit's Life-Giving Work: not Merely a Moral Advising" in the May 15, 2000 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, Rev. Laning writes, "Let there be no confusion. By confessing this article, we are not rejecting the truth that the Spirit speaks to us externally in the preaching, persuading us to repent and believe. But we are maintaining that the Spirit also speaks to us internally...."

I agree that the Holy Spirit speaks to us internally through the preaching of the Word, but I am not convinced that the Canons or Scripture teach that the Spirit speaks externally in the preaching.

The Spirit certainly speaks internally in the hearts of elect preachers as they preach, and speaks internally in the hearts of elect hearers so that both elect preachers and elect hearers "hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 2:7), and thereby hear the voice of Christ their Good Shepherd (John 10:27). But, for the Spirit to speak externally in the preaching, would He not have to speak personally through the mouths of preachers? In which case would not preachers literally become the infallible voice of Christ Himself, rather than remaining "ambassadors for Christ" speaking externally "in Christ's stead" (II Cor. 5:20)? If we maintain that the Spirit speaks externally in the preaching, are we not

making an error similar to the error that the Roman Catholics make when they teach that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper literally become the body and blood of Christ?

Chuck Doezema
Holland, Michigan

Response:

Your question, it appears to me, has to do with what is meant by the word "external" in this connection. I was using the common Reformed distinction between the external and internal aspects of the saving call of the gospel. The external aspect is the official preaching of the Word by the instituted church, and the internal aspect is the writing of that Word in the hearts of God's elect people. Not

only the internal, but also the external aspects of the saving call are performed by Christ through His Spirit. Christ is indeed the One speaking in the preaching of the gospel, so that the preached Word is not merely the word of man, but the Word of Christ, as is taught in Romans 10:14, among other places.


It is, of course, true that the preacher can err. The preached Word is the Word of Christ insofar as it agrees with Holy Scripture.

— Rev. J. Laning

■ The “Pantlind Conference”

Thank you for starting off the 2000-2001 publication year of the *Standard Bearer* with editorials reminding us of the meeting of some CRC and PRC ministers at the Pantlind Hotel in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1939. It was the English translation of Herman Hoeksema’s speech before that group that at last made clear to me

the errors of common grace. After reading what Hoeksema said in a pamphlet of it published by one of our churches, I was enabled, at last, to join the PRC myself. I pray that the reprinting of Hoeksema’s speech will help others to understand why we maintain the particularity of God’s grace over against the watered-down version of it maintained by the common grace camp.

Natalie Jefferson
Grandville, Michigan 

Ecumenicity

Herman Hoeksema

The Reunion of the Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed Churches:

IS IT DEMANDED, POSSIBLE, DESIRED? (3)

Essay read at a Conference of some Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed Ministers

(Translated from the Dutch by Rev. H. Veldman)

It will now not be difficult for the brethren to understand that it was impossible for us to subscribe to the three points, or also to promise that we, privately or publicly, would never teach anything which would conflict with those points. Such a promise would forever silence our mouth and cause our pen to become dry. Although it is indeed our conviction that the synod of 1924 saw the trees of the three points, but not the woods of common grace, yet it is beyond all doubt that it, in those points, really adopted the entire common grace view of Dr. Kuyper.

Nevertheless we also desire to express our objections against those three points in particular.

The first point speaks of a favorable inclination in God towards all creatures. We have declared more than once that, if it were possible to take this expression by itself, we would have no objection against the implied proposition. We have always emphasized that God’s grace is not directed individualistically to a few elect, but to all creatures in organic connection. This, however, is not the case here. This explanation may never be given of the first point. The contrast in the first point is not “elect only or all creatures,” but “elect only or also reprobate.” It is the teaching of the first point that there is in God a gracious attitude to-

wards all men, among whom also the reprobates are included. Apart from the saving grace of God shown only to the elect, there is also a non-saving grace of God, both as an inclination in God and as an operation proceeding upon the creature, in which also the reprobate share. That this is indeed the implication of the first point appears clearly from the discussion which preceded the adoption of this point at synod. This was the issue. This is plain from the texts which the synod quoted to substantiate the teaching of the first point. And this is especially clear from the proof which was quoted from the confession, relative to the preaching of the gospel. Moreover, this also appears from the discussion which later was carried on

Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of the *Standard Bearer*.

about the three points. But concerning this there is no difference among us. We cannot accept this gracious inclination of God and operation of grace towards the reprobate wicked. Over against this we maintain that the grace of God goes out to the organic whole of the creatures in mutual affinity, and in connection with the elect in Christ, as the elect kernel. And we declare that at the same time an operation of God's wrath and indignation proceeds upon the reprobate shell.

However, the first point expresses more. Fact is, the synod of Kalamazoo also included the preaching of the gospel in this gracious inclination in God and this operation of grace. Synod, in our modest opinion, did this *volens*. Fact is, it sought proof for common grace in the Reformed Confessions, especially in the Canons. Now those confessions, in the nature of the case, do not speak of common grace in the Kuyperian sense of the word. The synod of Dordrecht busied itself with the question of salvation. A grace which did not save simply lay beyond the pale of its views and deliberations. The only place where the term "common grace" is used in the sense of natural light and, therefore, in a non-saving sense, places the term upon the lips of the Remonstrants. It lay, therefore, in the nature of the case that synod, seeking proof for common grace in the confessions, was compelled to arrive at the general preaching of the gospel, whereof the confessions do speak, but the grace whereof it always conceives as particular. Thus it happened that in the first point the proposition was adopted that God is gracious in the preaching of the gospel, that is, that He in that preaching is prompted by a gracious inclination, not only towards the elect, but towards all men. This was expressed by the synod of 1926 at Englewood still more clearly than by the synod of 1924. In its answer to the

consistory of Middleburg, Iowa, which had protested against the declarations of 1924, it speaks of a "goodness or grace of God in the causing to go forth of a well-meaning offer of salvation to all to whom the preaching of the gospel comes," as well as of a "certain grace or goodness or favorable inclination of God," which "is revealed over against a group of men broader than the group of the elect, and that this, among other things, also is evident from the fact, that God wellmeaningly calls each one to whom the lovely invitation of the Gospel comes" (*Acta Synodi*, 1926, p. 116).

We believe that this presentation is not in harmony with Holy Writ, neither with the Reformed confessions. And over against this we maintain that the preaching of the gospel is grace only for the elect, and at the same time a savor of death unto death for the reprobates. That the preaching of the gospel is general we understand very well. But we believe that the content of the preaching is always particular, that it promises salvation only to those who believe, that is to the elect, and that it can never be said that it is an evidence of grace to all who hear the gospel. According to our earnest conviction the synod, with this declaration, passed into the camp of the Remonstrants.

The second point speaks of a general operation of the Holy Spirit, outside of regeneration, whereby sin is restrained in the individual man and in the community. If this means anything at all, it implies that, outside of regeneration, a spiritual-ethical operation of the Holy Spirit proceeds upon sinful man, for his good, with the result that he is not as sinful and corrupt in the reality of life as he would be without that working of the Spirit.

Dr. Kuyper differentiates here between mind, will, and inclinations on the one hand, and the Ego on the other hand; in the Ego he

distinguishes further between the kernel of the Ego and the different functions and motions of that Ego. Common grace now can influence, according to him, that entire man, with the exception of the kernel of the Ego. He writes in *De Gemeene Gratie* II, 306: "Having correctly understood this, one will perceive immediately how only that Ego, as the most inner center, remains what it is, but how on the other hand those inclinations, that thinking and willing activity, by reaction, undergoes a certain influence of common grace. Test this yourself by taking three or four thin brass wires, which you fasten together at a certain point, spreading them out in various directions; underneath the point where these wires join, you with your left hand will bend them toward the left, and at the same time with your right hand, at the point where the wires join, bend the upper half of the wires to the right. Then you will feel for yourselves how the pressure exercised by your right hand not only bends the ends of the wires to the right, but will exercise a certain pressure upon the lower half of the wires, which sensation you clearly feel in the fingers of your left hand. The same is true of common grace. When it, at whatever point of the line, takes hold of that line, and in its further progress bends it to the right, this will produce a tension, a pressure downwards, which will never affect the *center* of the Ego, but will have its affect upon the inclination, the consciousness, and upon the will. This explains how the unconverted undergoes the influence of common grace in his inclinations, in his consciousness, and in his will."

Thus far Dr. Kuyper.

Whatever one may think of the psychological distinction between the Ego and the *center* of the Ego, one thing is certain: if words have any significance, and we replace the copper wires by reality, then Dr. Kuyper teaches here a spiritual-

ethical improvement effected by the influence of divine grace upon natural man, his mind, his will, yea, even changing the deepest inclinations and motives of the heart into the proper ethical direction, changing him wholly for the good, except the kernel of his Ego. Dr. Kuyper also makes the Heidelberg Catechism give this answer to the well known eighth question: "that there is in that Ego inability to any good and a continuous inclination to all evil. Whatever of this Ego is improved or does not reveal itself is not of the Ego, but of common grace." He writes literally that the Catechism expresses it in that manner (*De Gem. Gr. II, 307*). This spiritual-ethical operation of grace for good is even similar to regeneration, differing from the latter merely in this that it does not effect the center of the Ego. If the same operation were to penetrate to that center it would regenerate the man.

It is this doctrine of Dr. Kuyper which the synod of Kalamazoo sought to express and exalt to an ecclesiastical dogma in the second point. This surely appears from the declaration "that God by the general operations of His Spirit, without renewing the heart of man, restrains the unimpeded breaking out of sin." What Dr. Kuyper understands to be the center of the Ego the synod of Kalamazoo understands to be the heart. Only, the synod improved upon the conception of Dr. Kuyper somewhat by adding the phrase: "by the general operations of His Spirit." At any rate we do not say too much when we assert that the second point teaches that, by a general operation of grace, the natural man is wholly improved, except his heart. His mind and will and all his inclinations can be changed or inclined for the good.

We have various objections against this presentation. We do understand, as Article 13 of our Confession of Faith teaches us, that God restrains all evil men, yea even

the devil. But of a general operation of the Spirit, whereby God would improve the mind and will and inclinations of the natural man, the Confession surely does not speak. The English translation might possibly allow the presentation of synod, inasmuch as it reads: "that He so restrains the devil and all our enemies." But the Holland translation, "*hij de duivelen en al onze vijanden in den toom houdt*," is undoubtedly the more correct. We read in the French: "*En quoi nous nous reposons, sachant qu'il tient les diables en bride, et tous nos ennemis, qui ne nous peuvent nuire sans sa permission et bonne volonté.*" In answer to a protest against this declaration the synod of Englewood of 1926 observed rather simply, that this expression, indeed, does not appear in the confessions, but that it therefore is not less correct, inasmuch as it is certain that "as God operated by His Spirit in creation so He also operates by the same Spirit in the work of providence. And whereas that operation of the Spirit did not cease after the fall of man but continues, to those general operations of God's Spirit the restraint of sin must also be ascribed" (*Acta*, 1926, p. 118). As if the truth that in the works of God *ad extra* all three Persons of the Divine Trinity operate according to their own place in the Divine Household would necessitate the conclusion that a spiritual-ethical operation of grace proceeds from God upon the natural man, improving him in his mind and will and inclinations. The keeping of devils and evil men under bridle ("*in den toom houden*") is something altogether different from the restraining of the process of sin in the individual man and in mankind. Duly understanding that all the actions of devils and men are bridled by God and governed by Him unto the realization of His counsel and the salvation of His own in Christ we, nevertheless, deny that there is such an operation of grace by the Spirit, outside of regeneration, whereby the natu-

ral man is improved to any degree.

As stated above we have many objections against this view. Viewed psychologically it simply is absurd. It does not even hold with respect to the copper-wires, much less with respect to man. I reject with all that is in me the determinist view that the natural man would be able to perform deeds in which his Ego, the center of his Ego, or his heart would not be involved. Scripture teaches us that exactly from the heart are all the issues of life. Yet, my weightiest objection is that, according to this view, the Reformed teaching that the natural man is so corrupt that he is wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil has become a mere abstraction. He may be ever so corrupt in the center of his Ego, that center is really shut off from the actual world by common grace. What the natural man actually does in this life does not come forth out of his Ego or heart, but out of his mind, will, and inclinations, and these have been greatly improved by the general operation of grace by the Spirit. As the natural man appears he is not wholly corrupted, but he certainly exceeds one's expectations.

We opine that this view not only conflicts with our Reformed confession but also with Holy Writ. Scripture not only knows of no such wholesome operation of the Holy Spirit, but it teaches the very opposite. It, after all, teaches us that an operation of God's wrath is revealed from heaven, whereby He in such a way operates upon the godless deserter of the way of the Lord, causes such an operation to proceed upon his lusts and desires, that he is given up in an evil sense, to do things unseemly, to proceed from bad to worse. While we readily admit that the sinner is restrained in various ways by the all-controlling providence of God according to the counsel of His will, and at the same time duly understand that the process of sin is bound to the organic development

of the human race, and, finally, also clearly perceive that every man does not commit all the actual sins but that each, according to his own place and time, his own adaptability and character, gifts and means, develops the one root-sin of Adam unto the completed fruit, we will continue to maintain that the second point is in conflict with both Scripture and confession.

With respect to the third point we can now be brief, inasmuch as it stands or falls with the second. In this third point the synod declares that God, without renewing the heart, so influences man, that he, although incapable of performing any saving good, can perform civil good. It is evident, from the context of the expression, as well as in the light of the discussion which preceded this declaration, that with civil good the doing of good in civil life is meant. Here we meet the "doctrine of spheres," "*terreinen-leer*." In the "sphere" of the first table of the law man is unable to do any good. This after all is "spiritual" good. But in the "sphere" of the second table of the law he can perform good. And by the "influence" of God mentioned in this third point the same is meant, of course, as the "general operations of the Spirit" in the second point.

Now one must understand that we, before the synod of 1924, had written also concerning this so called civil good, and that therefore synod consciously condemned our view in this matter. To wit, in *Langs Zuivere Banen*, pp. 72, 73, we wrote: "And what then is civil righteousness? In our opinion the sinner notes the God-instituted relations, the given laws, means of fellowship, etc. He notes the propriety and usefulness of them. And now he makes use of them for his own sake. If he succeeds fairly well in this, an action will result which formally appears to be in harmony with the laws of God. Then you have civil righteousness, regard for virtue, and an orderly

external deportment. If this attempt fails, as is of course often the case, then also civil righteousness falls away; then the opposite is true. His fundamental error is, however, that also in striving for external deportment, he does not seek or purpose God. To the contrary, he seeks himself also in fellowship with other sinners and tries to maintain himself in this sin, with the entire 'world' in whatever he does. And that is sin. This also actually has evil results for him and his fellow-creatures. His action over against his neighbors and fellow-creatures takes place according to the same rule and with the same results. It therefore happens that sin always develops and that corruption continues, and, yet, there remains relatively a formally just behavior according to the laws laid down and instituted by God. And yet the natural man never performs ethical good. This is our view. Who now will venture another explanation?"

This view, which completely explains the so-called "civil righteousness" as out of the totally corrupt man, who, however, has natural light, without any influence of common grace upon him, synod did not want. At any rate, it thought it necessary to put something else in its place. And that something else is that wholesome influence of God, those general influences of the Spirit, those general operations of grace by God upon the nature of sinners, whereby these are enabled to perform civil good.

This view we deem to be in conflict with Scripture and confession both. It is not necessary at this time to quote from Scripture. The confession, however, teaches in the Canons III, IV 4 that man has retained certain glimmerings of natural light, that he thereby has some knowledge of God and of natural things, as well as of the difference between good and evil, but adds in that part, which the synod of 1924 forgot to quote, that he

does not use that light aright even in things natural and civil, yea that he renders it wholly polluted and holds it in unrighteousness. By this latter presentation we would abide.

I would conclude by placing before you certain propositions for discussion:

1. God is God, and He always performs all His good pleasure. Therefore, He also always proceeds directly to His goal according to His eternal counsel, while all things, also Satan and sin and the godless world included, serve Him thereunto. At no moment in history whatsoever, from creation to the parousia, can we speak of a frustration of an original plan.

2. God's grace is not directed individualistically, particularistically to the elect, but it is directed to the organic whole of the church in Christ as its Head and that in connection with the organic whole of all creatures of the entire cosmos. However, the godless reprobate is never object of this grace, viewed either as an inclination in God or as an operation of grace.

3. Besides the operation of God's drawing and saving and exalting, glorifying grace proceeding only upon the elect kernel of the created things, there is also an operation of God's rejecting, repulsing wrath proceeding upon the reprobate shell.

4. The covenant with Noah is no friendship-covenant of common grace established with the sinful world *qua talis* and outside of Christ, but a revelation of the one covenant of God's friendship in Christ as it embraces and takes up into itself the entire cosmos. Temporally creation bears the curse, but presently also the dumb creature will share in the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

5. All things of this present life, rain and sunshine, food and

gladness, gift and talent, houses and goods, name and position and might, are means which God uses, but which also man uses as a rational moral creature. Inasmuch as God uses them, they serve Him in the fulfillment of His counsel. Inasmuch as man uses them, they are as so many obligations whereby he is placed before the demand to thank and serve God.

6. The preaching of the gospel is as such neither a blessing nor a curse. It addresses man as a rational moral being who is therefore responsible before God. God, however, uses also that preaching to realize His counsel of predestination, both of election and reprobation, so that He, without nullifying the ethical nature and responsibility of man, calls the one unto salvation, and hardens the other. The preaching of the gospel is, therefore, never grace for the reprobate, neither is it ever intended to be such by God.

7. Bound to the organic development of our race and bridled by God's all-controlling Providence, sin develops as rapidly as possible, also through an operation of God's wrath upon the lusts of the flesh. There is no operation of the Holy Spirit whereby the natural man without regeneration would be improved to any extent. Every man bears the fruit of the root-sin of Adam according to his time, place, circumstances, means, adaptability, and character.

8. Man has some remnants of natural light, not of his original knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. These latter are not only wholly lost, but have turned into their opposite. Consequently, the natural man can do nothing else than wholly pollute this natural light and hold it under in unrighteousness.

9. Civil righteousness is an attempt of the sinful man whereby

he, inasmuch as he perceives by his natural light the God-instituted relations and laws in the cosmos and recognizes their usefulness for his own benefit, will adapt his life in connection with the life of his fellow-creatures to those laws of God in an external sense. If he succeeds, God, who holds Himself to His own ordinances, grants him success. But success is not blessing. In the way of success he becomes ever greater, becomes ever more responsible, and under the wrath of God increases his own judgment.

10. There is in Holy Writ no essential distinction in meaning between such terms as grace, favor, love, friendship, goodness, mercy. They all concern the relation and operation of God's covenant of friendship towards the elect kernel.

11. The idea of a common grace begins in dogmen-historical sense, not with Calvin, neither can it be traced to Augustine, but its beginning must be sought in the age of the Scholastics, particularly with Thomas Aquinas. It cannot be said that this doctrine is preeminently Calvinistic.

12. The Three Forms of Unity know of no common grace. The only place where the term "common grace" appears places it upon the lips of the Remonstrants. The "Three Points" are not explanations but additions to the confession of the Reformed churches.

13. The synod of Kalamazoo, in its "Three Points," has essentially exalted Kuyper's "*Gemeene Gratie*" (Common Grace) to a dogma and thereby rendered all further study of this question impossible.

14. The Christian does not separate himself in Anabaptistic sense from the world; neither is it his calling to better the "world," but to live, throughout his life in

the world, from the principle of regeneration and according to the Word of God, and represent the cause of the Son of God as of the party of the living God.

15. Inasmuch as the distinction "image of God in broader and in narrower sense" can easily occasion misunderstanding, as if a remnant of the positive operation of the original righteousness had remained in the fallen man, it is better to speak of the image of God in the formal and material sense and say that the latter was changed into its opposite through sin.

16. The so-called "covenant of works" was no covenant of works, but the first and earthly manifestation of God's covenant of friendship. In this covenant man could not merit eternal life, neither ever attain unto it, but merely retain the earthly life which he possessed in the way of obedience.

17. Government as such, irrespective of the sword power, was not instituted because of sin, but it came up out of the family. Its authority can therefore be defended by appealing to the fifth commandment.

18. A godless magistrate does stand in the place of authority, wherewith he is clothed of God, but does not rule by the grace of God.

19. Synod and classes are not assemblies clothed with a power higher than the consistory, but merely larger or broader assemblies; they, therefore, cannot have the authority to depose officebearers.

20. History abundantly proves that the present Protestant Reformed Churches did not secede from the Christian Reformed Church, but were expelled by the latter from their fellowship, because they felt obliged to resist the declarations of the synod of Kalamazoo. ❀

The Church and Her Catholicity (2)

Why the Church's Catholicity Is Important

It is important that the church be catholic. It is important because that is the only way God can reveal the fullness of the riches of His grace. In the last verses of Ephesians 2 the apostle Paul describes how the middle wall of partition was broken down through the blood of Christ and reconciliation was accomplished, so that Jew and Gentile alike could become one body in Christ. Together they form that one glorious temple built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets of which Christ is the chief cornerstone, and in which God dwells.

That is possible because we are saved by grace. That is why this entire section is introduced with the words, "For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works" (Eph. 2:8). It is grace alone.

Why? The apostle explains that in verse 7 when he says, "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." The riches of God's grace are infinite. Every time we confess the Apostles' Creed, including that one article of which I am speaking tonight, we say, "I be-

lieve." Then the thought passes inevitably through my mind, "I believe it. I can't demonstrate it. I can't prove it. I can't understand it. I can't make it clear to you. But I believe it. It's an object of faith." The riches of God's grace are so infinitely great that they can be revealed only in a church composed of a multitude which no man can number, of individuals saved by grace in different ways. That is, all are saved in full connection with the kind of people they are, the place where they were born, the nature of their upbringing, their racial and national characteristics, the personalities with which they were endowed, the spiritual pilgrimage which led them out of the bondage of sin into the fellowship of the church — their own grace in each one.

When I look at you, I see a different grace, a different kind of grace, than is manifest in me. It takes a catholic church. Diamonds alone will not do it. You need sapphires and rubies and emeralds and all the precious stones known to man to reveal the beauties and riches of God's grace in this life and in the life to come. The riches of God's grace cannot be sung by a soloist. They have to be sung by a choir, by a choir composed of a large number of different voices singing different parts, but harmonizing and all singing one song, the song of Moses and the Lamb. The riches of God's grace cannot be revealed by a piano solo or a violin solo. It takes an orchestra. You have to look for the trumpets and the violas, and the cellos and the

base viols, the clarinets and the flutes, and all the rest. One instrument cannot do it. The riches of the grace of God are too great. How can one individual, how can even a million individuals, each one of them in his own way, contain the riches of the infinite grace of almighty God? And, if I may say so, it ought to be obvious that this is why the doctrine of salvation by grace is fundamental to the whole of the Christian faith — the doctrine one can sacrifice only at the cost of destroying the church.

What Are Its Implications for Us?

That is the catholicity of the church. What a marvelous doctrine! What a profound purpose. Into all eternity we shall marvel at the riches of God's grace only because we see each other and dwell together as the body of Christ. Yes, as the body of Christ — one body. "I believe one holy catholic church." Catholicity is impossible, absolutely impossible, without unity. It is a strange doctrine, so strange that the Scriptures say we ought to look at some figures in order to appreciate what this is.

A human body is one organism, one unity. But if you did not know anything about a human body, or if you had never seen a human body, and you looked at a toe lying on a table and alongside of it an ear, you would say to yourself, "It's utterly impossible that these belong to the same entity. How can two such diverse things belong to the same organism?" Paul alludes to that in I Corinthians 12. Strange members, totally dif-

Prof. Hanko is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. This is the text of the speech given at the graduation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Seminary in June, 2000.

ferent from each other, go to compose the unity of one body. So much is this true that not one single member of the body has any meaning or any significance or any importance, and, as a matter of fact, cannot even be saved apart from the unity of the whole.

That means that the unity of the church is a complete and perfect unity because not one additional member can be added to that unity. From that unity cannot be subtracted even one member. Somehow, in some mysterious way, it is a perfect unity because *all* of God's grace is revealed right here in this unity. Take one away, you subtract from the grace of God. Add one, the grace of God becomes a monstrosity. Add a third ear to a person's head — what kind of unity do you have? None. Catholicity rests on unity because all the attributes of the church are true of the church only in Christ.

It is with a few remarks about this that I conclude.

The unity of the church is what we are urged, compelled, by Scripture to seek. The unity of the Spirit, Paul calls it in Ephesians 4. And he calls it the unity of the Spirit because he wants us to be sure that we understand that this unity and diversity is God's creation, not ours. We are called diligently to seek to preserve the unity of the church. But it is not a unity which we, by our labors, create. It is a unity of such infinite diversity that it would be impossible for us to do it.

However that may be, it is that unity of the church that is sometimes so difficult to define. Each denomination draws a kind of a circle by which it defines what it means by the unity of the church. Some draw a great big circle — a circle that is so big that it embraces not only Christianity in a broad, general way but also those who are still committed to the idolatry of heathenism and to pagan ritual and idol worship. They are willing to do that. But that is not the true

unity of the church. When they draw that kind of a circle, they are not drawing a circle that defines the limitations and boundaries of the church.

The unity of the church is in Christ. And Christ, in His own person and natures, as the head of the church, is the fullness of the revelation of God who is truth in Himself and in His own divine being. Because the unity of the church is a unity which she has in Christ, that unity must be defined in terms of the truth as it is revealed in God and as it is contained on the pages of the infallible Scriptures.

In a way, the Spirit helps the church draw that circle and has been helping the church draw that circle throughout the centuries by the confessions of the church. Our own churches have said that we seek contact with the church of Christ which confesses the truth of the Scriptures as expressed in the three forms of unity and the Westminster standards. That is the circle we draw. It is a proper circle because really the Holy Spirit drew it. The Holy Spirit drew it because the confessions are the fruit of the work of the Spirit in the church in the past.

Within that circle we stand. Within that circle we stand with the church of Christ. We are called to stand there and we are called to live together within that circle with all the churches throughout the world insofar as God makes that possible for us in the unity of the Spirit. In that way, here on earth, something of the catholicity of the church is experienced. You cannot go to Singapore or to Myanmar without pondering the mystery of the catholicity of the church. It is impossible.

There are many in every nation, tribe, and tongue who are working in the great task of building the house of God. Once in a while we hear far away the sound of hammers pounding nails and we pause to listen and we say, "Ah,

there are others building the house." Sometimes we hear the whirl of saws and we say, "There are others elsewhere working on the house that God is building. We don't know where. We can't quite tell where. And we don't know who they are. But we can hear it if we will listen."

But sometimes there are some of God's people working in another room right next to the one in which we are working. It pays for us to walk over to that room once in a while and talk to them. That is what, God willing, we are going to continue to do with our sister churches and others with whom we have contact. We are going to go over to another room as they have come to this room. We are going to talk to them about building the house. The conversation we will have about building the house is going to be crafted, under God's blessing, according to our faith in the catholicity of the church. We are not going to be telling each other, "You are not really working on the house." We are not going to say, "It looks to us as if you are building a shack or a shanty and you ought to quit and come into the house and get to work on the house." No. We are going to say, "You're working on the house. Thank God we know you." And we are going to talk about what a joy it is.

Synod just said that, did it not? When we talk together, we must talk together not only about those things on which we disagree, but about those things on which we do agree. That means talking about those things that are involved in being busy with the same house.

It will happen sometimes that others are going to say to us, when they come to our room where we are working, "It looks to us, brethren, as if you are using bent nails. You ought to straighten your nails. You can do a better job." Or, "You ought to sharpen your saw. The lines that you are cutting with your saw are crooked." And what we

ought to say when you tell us that is, "Thanks! We didn't notice that we were using bent nails."

But sometimes we may have something similar to say to them. We will look at the corner of the wall and ceiling where you are building and we will say, "Is that quite square? Will you check it again with the architect's drawing, the Holy Scriptures?" In that way we will help each other to build the house and be able to cooperate in the work more and more.

But we are not going to go to another church, and they may not come over here, and say, "Quit working in your room and come into our room and help us," because God has called them to work in their room, whether it be Australia or Singapore or Northern Ireland. We are working in our room which is called the United States.


And we are not going to ask

them to wear the same kind of clothes we do because we think our coveralls hold the hammer better. No, they have found that the clothes they are wearing are suitable for the work that God gives them to do.

In that way we talk about the same house on which we are laboring, but appreciate and rejoice in the diversity of laborers and the size of the house. And we remember that God saves Australians as Australians, and Welsh as Welsh; and He does not save them by making them Dutchman. Thank God.

So we rejoice in the riches of grace. That is our calling: to rejoice in the riches of sovereign grace revealed in that wonderful work of saving a church catholic. Once in a while, I hope that when we visit another room in this great house, we can sit down with the

laborers there and take a break from the work and have a cup of coffee together. Then we can talk about what a privilege it is to be busy in the same work and how thankful we can be that God builds the house and that we are only laborers. I think if we do that, then we will probably set our cups down for a moment and sing together: "Except the Lord the house shall build, the weary builders toil in vain."

In that way we will look together to the day when God will have completed that glorious temple that Paul describes in Ephesians 2. Then God Himself will dwell in it and all the riches of His grace will be revealed perfectly and completely. And we will revel in the riches of the grace of almighty God revealed in that which we confess: one holy catholic church. 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ Prayer in Public Places

There is a continuing struggle between those who want prayer in public schools and in other public gatherings, and those who insist that there ought not to be prayers in public places.

What is particularly irritating for the Christian is the constant attempt of the unbeliever to limit and prevent prayer in public places—for the wrong reasons. Many want a "separation between church and state," as though somehow it is proper for the state to exist in separation from God and with a disregard of His Word and law. Many insist that there ought not to be prayer in public schools—because education can properly be separated from the Word of God. There is the idea that education is

secular and therefore has nothing to do with what Scripture has to say. Recently the Supreme Court ruled that prayer is the improper mixture of church and state when it is offered before football games! The idea appears to be that one can play games in complete isolation from the teachings of Scripture and dependence upon God. It is a great evil when the world seeks increasingly to push out any reference to God and prayer.

Having said this, however, we ought also to be reminded that the believer and unbeliever, light and darkness, have nothing in common. How can prayers be uttered which are pleasing to God when it joins light and darkness? How can one properly pray that God will bless the children, all children, who enter the public schools for their education? How can one ask God's favor upon such institutions that insist on teaching evolution and a godless humanism?

Columnist Cal Thomas, of the Los Angeles *Times* Syndicate, wrote of this in the *Grand Rapids Press*, June 22, 2000. Surprisingly, those who usually detest Thomas for his religious approach now wrote letters to the editor to speak highly of the article referred to above. Thomas is correct—and the "religious right" ought to pay close heed. Thomas wrote:

For more than 50 years, since a 1947 case called "Everson," the Supreme Court has been getting it wrong on religion.

In that long-ago case, the Court ruled that what the federal government was prohibited from doing—establishing a national church—the states also could not do. Fifteen years later, atheist leader Madalyn Murray O'Hair successfully challenged prayer and Bible reading in public schools, and it's been downhill for certain expressions of religious views ever since.

Rev. VanBaren is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

In his dissenting opinion on the latest case, which forbids student-led prayer at public-school football games, Chief Justice William Rehnquist said the majority opinion "bristles with hostility to all things religious in public life." He is right, of course. But the decision offers an opportunity for religious believers if they will seize it.

The greater power to do good lies within individuals, not the state. Conservative Christians, especially, are fooling themselves when they think public prayers are a sign that all must be right with the world. Such prayers before football games do nothing for the quality of the game, and there is no evidence, nor could there be, of fewer injuries because God's name has been invoked over the loudspeaker.

Furthermore, such prayers trivialize the act of prayer. No less an authority than Jesus spoke about public displays of worship when He said of the Pharisees (the fundamentalists of His day): "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi' " (Matt. 23:5-7).

Elsewhere, Jesus has this advice on prayer: "Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them.... And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.... But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen" (Matt. 6:1 and following).

The Supreme Court said nothing at all about that far more powerful and effective type of prayer. But in our culture, which highly values what the world values (filled stadiums, television appearances, and other visible expressions of "success"), things done out of public view don't count for much. In fact, the only kind of faith that actually does work is that which is first practiced. St.

Francis of Assisi is credited with the statement: "Preach the gospel. Use words if necessary."

The article concludes:

People with faith that the next election will turn the Court and the nation more to their way of thinking might wish to consider that three of the justices who voted to prohibit prayer at football games were appointed by Republican presidents. If George W. Bush is elected president, who can guarantee any judges named by him will not also lean to the left?

Whether they do or don't should have no effect on the prayer life or acts of people who worship an authority higher than the state.

We too ought to take great care lest we equate prayer in public places as proof that we are a "Christian" nation. If the uttered public prayer is satisfactory to Christian, Jew, Muslim, and Hindu, can it possibly be pleasing to God?

■ 75th Anniversary

After almost two years of planning, the 75th anniversary celebration is over. Our denomination has celebrated an important milestone in its history. Those who attended this event at Calvin College appeared in agreement that it was a wonderful celebration. In fact, many mentioned that we ought to have such an event every five years!! Even the *Grand Rapids Press* presented a short account of the celebration.

They don't sing flashy songs during their services and they pride themselves on being traditional and orderly. But that doesn't mean members of the Protestant Reformed Church (sic) don't know how to celebrate....

...Conference speakers talked about the denomination's missions in Ghana, Singapore and Northern Ireland. There were also talks on the church's Calvinist tradition and the nature of public worship in light of the movement by many

churches toward more contemporary services.

That trend has been resisted by the Protestant Reformed Churches. There are no bands, praise choruses (those who might be interested in knowing the difference between "praise choruses" and "hymns" can e-mail me at vanbaren@prca.org and I will explain. GVB) or contemporary hymns in their services. The hymnal consists of the Book of Psalms. Services are held Sunday morning and evening and last about 90 minutes, with 45 to 60 minutes of preaching.

"Our services are very orderly and reverent," Engelsma said. "You would also notice no women in the pulpit or the deacons' benches."

Engelsma said the denomination has remained true to the intent of John Calvin in teaching that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone, and the grace of God extended to his chosen followers only.

This differs from the theology of other reformed churches, which holds that in addition to the grace given believers in Christ, there is also a general grace of God that extends to all people in the world, according to James Bratt, a history professor at Calvin College. That general grace includes things like the changing of the seasons and the sustaining of life.

"That philosophy has a ripple effect that results in the church being more conservative generally," said Bratt, who has watched the PRC movement.

"The growth in the PRC, outside of the natural growth of members' children into the church, has come from people who are dissatisfied with the Christian Reformed Church," Bratt said. "The PRC is sort of a satellite around the CRC."

Bratt said there has been little change in the PRC over the past 75 years.

A person who was a charter member in 1925 would notice little difference in the PRC, other than English replacing Dutch, and a better standard of living among the members.

There are some interesting and accurate statements made in the article. One might wonder about some of the quotes from Prof. James Bratt. Did he really say that general grace involves “the changing of the seasons and sustaining of life”? Did he speak of “general” grace instead of “common” grace, which is supposed to distinguish the PRC from the CRC? We surely do not disagree when he declares that God sends the changing of the seasons and sustains life upon all. We would term that (properly) “providence.” But the question is: is there a difference when God sends these on elect and reprobate? Has God no different attitude, no different purpose, in sending these on both?

Interesting too is his statement that the PRC’s view of grace has a “ripple effect that results in the church being more conservative generally.” Does this represent a sort of recognition that the teaching of common grace does indeed tend to bring into the church some of the philosophy of the world? That the conservative character of the PRC is indeed the fruit of their emphasis that the grace of God is always and only particular and directed towards His people?

■ The “Scientific Method,” Right?

Much has been made of the “scientific method” in which the scientist will seek to establish “facts” on the basis of scientific study and investigation. By way of contrast, the “creationist” believes the literal account of Scripture as presented in Genesis 1 and 2. It is for such a matter of faith—not scientific discoveries. Where the two conflict, the creationist holds to the testimony of Scripture rather than to the claim of the “scientist.”

Yet the creationist can often find himself opposing what appear to be proven facts and indisputable evidence. One can easily become

intimidated by the scientist with a degree and be awed by his learned discourses.

But—what about those “facts” which subsequently are proven wrong? The “scientific method” would indicate that acknowledgments would be made about errors. If it would not prove that the creationist is correct, nevertheless the evolutionist would admit that he is not always correct either. Right? Wrong!!

That’s what Mr. Roger DeHart discovered when he tried to teach his students about recent corrections to Neo-Darwinian theory. *World* magazine, June 24, 2000, reports:

A biology teacher at Burlington-Edison High School outside Seattle, Wash., Mr. DeHart had taught the evidence for and against evolution for 10 years. He had also taught about the alternative theory of intelligent design, using the supplemental textbook *Of Pandas and People*. With his boyish face and engaging brown eyes, Mr. DeHart was a popular and effective teacher, staging lively classroom debates to help students think independently.

But two years ago, following a student complaint, the ACLU started intimidating the school board with threats of a costly lawsuit. Critics accused Mr. DeHart of teaching creation, though students testified that he did not talk about God or religion in class. Indeed, he presented the issues so objectively, students couldn’t even tell what his own position was. Yet in 1998 a new superintendent ordered Mr. DeHart to cease and desist from teaching students about intelligent design; he could, however, still talk about problems in Neo-Darwinism.

Then this May, the administration imposed even more draconian restrictions. Mr. DeHart wanted to alert students to recent reversals in key evidence for Neo-Darwinism, and sought approval to distribute articles from mainstream scientific journals to correct old, outdated information in the textbooks. Astonishingly, the

principal said no. In short, the ACLU’s intimidation tactics have been so successful that Mr. DeHart is being compelled to teach a caricature of the scientific method.

For example, the textbook the school requires Mr. DeHart to use presents Stanley Miller’s 1953 life-in-a-test-tube experiment as evidence that the building blocks of life arose spontaneously in a “primeval soup” on the early earth. But today most biologists dismiss that experiment as outdated, since it relied on assumptions about the early atmosphere now known to be false. An article in *Scientific American* tells the story, yet the school forbids Mr. DeHart to tell the students how science has corrected itself.

Again, the most famous example of natural selection involves the speckled peppered moth. Supposedly, when industrial pollution darkened tree trunks, birds could see the lighter moths against the blackened trunks, while darker moths blended in and increased in numbers. Yet a recent article in *The Scientist* reveals that these moths don’t even rest on tree trunks—and that photos shown in textbooks are staged: Dead moths were glued onto tree trunks. Yet the school forbids Mr. DeHart to correct this false impression for his students.


Finally, many textbooks include an illustration of vertebrate embryos lined up side by side, supposedly demonstrating common ancestry. Yet as *The American Biology Teacher* reports, biologists have known for years that these drawings were fudged to look more similar than they really are. Mr. DeHart wants to tell his students the truth, but school officials won’t let him.

When defenders of Darwinism are willing to suppress data and teach outright falsehoods, you know they’re in trouble. Last April, a teacher who helped write the standard textbook for Alberta high schools admitted in a Canadian newspaper that he and his colleagues “were aware of the questions” about the peppered moth when writing the text. Yet they decided to include the story anyway, he explained, because of

its persuasive power ("it is extremely visual"). When students are older, he said, then "they can look at the work critically."

In other words, it's OK to teach

false or misleading information, so long as it supports Neo-Darwinism.

That's the "scientific method," right? And these are the very men who oppose "creationism" because it is not proper "science"! 

Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

U.S. Supreme Court Affirms Freedom of Association; Boy Scouts Organization May Revoke Membership of Homosexual Activist

Having determined that the Boy Scouts is an expressive association and that the forced inclusion of James Dale [an avowed homosexual] would significantly affect its expression, we inquire whether the application of New Jersey's [anti-discrimination] law to require that the Boy Scouts accept Dale as an assistant scoutmaster runs afoul of the Scouts freedom of expressive association. We conclude that it does.

The Boy Scouts assert that it "teaches that homosexuality is not morally straight" and that it does "not want to promote homosexual conduct as a legitimate form of behavior." Dale was a co-president of a gay and lesbian organization at college and remains a gay rights activist. Dale's presence in the Boy Scouts would, at the very least, force the organization to send a message, both to the youth members and the world, that the Boy Scouts accept homosexual conduct as a legitimate form of behavior.... A state [anti-discrimination] requirement that the Boy Scouts retain Dale as an assistant scoutmaster would significantly burden the organization's right to oppose or disfavor homosexual conduct.

*Majority Opinion, Boy Scouts of America v. Dale,
(U.S. Supreme Court, June 28, 2000).*

Divided Court

A bitterly divided U.S. Supreme Court ruled this summer that the Boy Scouts of America has the constitutional right to exclude homosexuals as troop leaders. In a close 5-4 decision written by Chief Justice Rehnquist, the Court overruled New Jersey's highest court, which held last year that a state

public accommodation law prohibited the Boy Scouts from "discrimination because of affectional or sexual orientation." The New Jersey supreme court ruling last year forbidding the Boy Scouts from expelling a homosexual activist troop master quickly gained national notoriety and became a *cause célèbre* for the homosexual subculture. The Boy Scouts immediately appealed the adverse ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court, which held that the state's interests embodied in anti-discrimination laws did not justify such a "severe intrusion on

the Boy Scouts' rights to freedom of expressive association."

The Boy Scouts

The Boy Scouts of America is a private, not-for-profit organization, whose mission statement declares that its purpose is to "serve others by helping to instill values in young people and to prepare them to make ethical choices over their lifetime...." The "Scout Oath and Law" declares that a member must be "morally straight" and "clean." In 1978, the Boy Scouts adopted a position statement declaring that

Mr. Lanting, a member of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, is a practicing attorney.

the organization "believes that homosexual conduct is inconsistent with the requirement in the Scout Oath that a Scout be morally straight and clean in word and deed...."

James Dale joined the Boy Scouts as an eight-year old in 1978. In 1989 Dale applied for adult membership and became an assistant scoutmaster. While a college student at Rutgers University in 1992, he became the president of the Rutgers University Lesbian/Gay Alliance and otherwise publicly identified himself in a local newspaper interview as a homosexual activist. Upon learning of his homosexual activities the Boy Scouts revoked his membership in the local New Jersey Chapter.

Dale filed suit, alleging that the Boy Scouts had violated New Jersey's public accommodation law, which prohibits "discrimination" based on "sexual orientation." The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled in Dale's favor, declaring that Dale's membership would not affect "in any significant way" the organization's ability to carry out its mission and purpose.

Anti-discrimination Laws

As a result of the feminist movement in the 1970s and "gay rights" activism more recently, many states (and cities) have adopted statutes and ordinances that outlaw discrimination in "places of public accommodation," such as restaurants, apartment buildings, retail shops, etc. Such anti-discrimination laws forbid employers, landlords, restaurant owners, and others from denying "advantages, facilities or privileges" to anyone because of race, age, sex, or marital status.

The New Jersey law at issue in the Dale case also outlawed discrimination based on "affectional or sexual orientation." The New Jersey courts held that the Boy Scouts organization was "a place of public accommodation," and, moreover, was not exempt from the

law simply because it engaged in "expressive activity." The Boy Scouts presumably violated the law when it revoked Dale's membership solely because of his "sexual orientation." The New Jersey supreme court declared that it was "not persuaded ... that a shared goal of Boy Scout members is to preserve the view that homosexuality is immoral."

The Right of Association

The U.S. Supreme Court disagreed and held that the New Jersey anti-discrimination law was trumped or superseded by an important constitutional right of the Boy Scouts organization — the right of expressive association. The Court held that there is a fundamental right "to associate with others in pursuit of a wide variety of political, education, religious, and cultural ends." This right, explained the Court, is crucial in preventing the majority from imposing its views on groups that would rather express other, perhaps unpopular, views.

Moreover, forcing a group to accept certain members it does not desire may impair the ability of the group to express the views it intends to express. In other words, said the Court, the forced inclusion of an unwanted member "infringes the group's freedom of expressive association" if the presence of that person affects in a significant way the group's ability to advocate public or private viewpoints.

Applying the principles of the freedom of expressive association to the Boy Scouts' exclusion of an avowed homosexual, the Court held that Dale's presence in the Boy Scouts would force the organization to send a message it did not want to send, *viz.*, that homosexual conduct is an acceptable or legitimate form of behavior.

But assuming the Boy Scouts organization enjoys the constitutional freedom of the right of expressive association, what about the state's interest in prohibiting

"discrimination" based on "sexual orientation"? The Court held that, notwithstanding the state's interest in discouraging discrimination, those interests "do not justify such a severe intrusion on the Boy Scouts' right to freedom of expressive association." Accordingly, the judgment of the New Jersey Supreme Court was reversed, and the right of the Boy Scouts to expel homosexuals was affirmed.

The Dissent

Four of the nine Supreme Court justices, however, filed a vigorous and lengthy dissent, essentially contending that state anti-discrimination laws have a noble and "courageous" purpose which did not abridge any constitutional right of the Boy Scouts. The minority opinion also suggested that the Boy Scouts' views on homosexuality were vague and equivocal ("The Boy Scouts' inability to make its position clear and its failure to connect its alleged policy to its expressive activities is highly significant").

Secondly, the dissent argued that the right to associate is not "absolute," but infringements on that right may be justified by regulations serving compelling state interests. The dissent reviewed the history of anti-discrimination laws and declared that such laws were necessary to root out "unfavorable" prejudices "nourished by sectarian doctrine" and "mere adherence to traditional ways of thinking" about "unfamiliar classes" of people such as homosexuals.

Thirdly, the dissent argued that even though Dale was an avowed homosexual, his forced membership would not significantly affect the message of such a large, diverse, and open organization such as the Boy Scouts, which currently has more than one million adult members. Finally, the dissent made much of its observation that homosexuality has gained greater societal acceptance, footnoting the fact that most recently the major

automobile manufacturers have extended employment benefits to homosexual partners, evidencing, in the dissent's view, a "laudable decline in stereotypical thinking on homosexuality."

Comment

The *Boy Scouts of America v. Dale* case is a landmark decision and arguably one of the most significant decisions by the Supreme Court in the last decade. Although the close (5-4) decision is perhaps somewhat ominous, Reformed Christians can be relieved that at least five Supreme Court justices affirmed an organization's constitutional right to exclude those who represent and promote views inconsistent with the group's stated goals and purposes.


This constitutional right of expressive association, which now includes the freedom to expel unwanted members, is of fundamental importance to private Christian

organizations such as our parental schools and colleges. It is now clear that a Christian school or college, because it is an "expressive association," may expel members, teachers, and others who would interfere with the school's choice not to propound a view contrary to its beliefs.

Moreover, the Court clearly held that this right of expressive association particularly applies when the organization or association in question promotes views that are unpopular. Indeed, one of the most reassuring sentences in Chief Justice Rehnquist's opinion states: "The fact that an idea may be embraced and advocated by increasing numbers of people is all the more reason to protect the First Amendment rights of those who wish to voice a different view."

It should be noted, however, that the Court made clear that this constitutional right of expressive association has several qualifica-

tions. First, the organization must be an "expressive organization," that is, one engaged in some form of expressive activity. Secondly, the organization's goals and mission statement must clearly state its views and purposes in a precise and unequivocal manner. Thirdly, the membership of a person may be denied or revoked, notwithstanding an ostensible violation of anti-discrimination laws, if the forced inclusion would "significantly affect" the organization's right to promote its views.

Accordingly, evangelical churches, schools, and other Christian organizations engaged in political, social, educational, and religious pursuits may be assured that anti-discrimination laws may not result in the forced inclusion of unwanted persons when the presence of such a person affects in a significant way the organization's ability to advocate its own public or private viewpoints. 

The Blessedness of Persecution

Matthew 5:10-12

There are a number of reasons why one might separate the first seven beatitudes, found in verses 3-9, from what follows in verses 10-12. There is an obvious difference of character. The first seven beatitudes follow one upon another in rapid order, and are in a very clear format. "Blessed are ... for" In contrast, verses 10-12 must be seen as

one lengthy beatitude. The first seven identify different aspects of the blessedness of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven from a very positive viewpoint. The one under consideration is negative, at least from the viewpoint of the earthly. This latter is a difficult blessedness. There is also the fact that the number seven is the number of the covenant, God in fellowship with His people. Are there here seven or eight beatitudes?

I am convinced that this one beatitude is in very proper connection with the first seven. It belongs

with them, as part of a whole. This eighth beatitude is the fullest development of the number. As the citizens of the kingdom manifest their blessedness, persecution necessarily ensues. Possessing the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven, and showing that righteousness in showing mercy, being pure in heart, and making peace, will bring down the wrath of the wicked world. Persecution is, therefore, the *seal* of the blessedness of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. It is the solid proof that they belong not to the kingdoms

Rev. VanderWal is pastor of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Wyckoff, New Jersey.

of this world but to the glorious kingdom of heaven.

Because of this connection, the citizen of the kingdom must reject the vain dream of postmillennialism. In that vanity, there is no room for persecution and suffering. In the postmillennial kingdom, there is only great riches, glory and honor, power and influence for those in Christ. Persecution for righteousness' sake simply does not exist there. Receiving evil at the hands of the world for Christ's sake is impossible, for their world is the church and their church is the world. One can only wonder what will happen to such dreamers when their illusion is altogether shattered by the fierce storm of persecution. As far as our Lord is concerned, to the persecuted belongs the kingdom of God. How blessed to believe that word!

The Blessing Promised

To show that this beatitude belongs with the other seven, we must first consider the blessedness indicated therein. That blessedness is the very same as shown in the very first beatitude: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." To such as are persecuted belongs this glorious kingdom. They possess this kingdom as citizens. They have a guaranteed place in it. There is a plot of land that is ascribed to them. It awaits their entrance. Through tribulation the believer enters the kingdom of heaven.

The second mention of this blessedness, as our Lord indicates in verse 12, is a great reward in heaven. This reward is a glorious compensation for their suffering. Every drop of blood spilled, every tear shed, will receive the recompense of the reward. That reward is an eternal weight of glory to which the sufferings of this present life cannot even compare. Confer Romans 8:18, II Corinthians 4:17. The essence of that reward is to see the very same cause that led to their persecution fully vindicated, Christ and His righteousness.

What we finally see as the measure of this blessedness is an identification. According to the word of Christ spoken in verse 12, the persecuted must identify themselves with the prophets that were before them. Can there be any doubt of the reward that these prophets received? While the false church persecuted the prophets who rebuked her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry, the prophets maintained their word given them by the Lord. Though it meant bodily afflictions and torture, and though it meant even death, they were faithful.

Even greater, this persecution is the sign that one is identified with Jesus Christ Himself, the Chief Prophet. Such was the word that Jesus spoke to His disciples before His own suffering at the hands of men. "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my sayings, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20). Persecution is the definite sign that the believer will be glorified with Christ; therefore, it is cause for great joy. "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (I Pet. 4:13). Persecution belongs to the children of God as heirs of that glory. "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17).

How necessary is a living faith to lay hold on this blessedness! When one experiences this persecution, the temptation is to turn back from the calling. It is a hard and narrow way. Always those persecuting will hold out the easy and broad way: simply keep silent, and you may walk this way—with us. What must be of great assistance in the bearing of this persecution is the knowledge that such

is a gift of grace. Philippians 1:29 places persecution on the same level as faith in that respect. "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." Persecution is a gift of grace! Also, the reward given for such persecution is wholly gracious.

To Those Persecuted

We do well to notice a difference within the beatitude as Christ speaks of it through these three verses. Verse 10 is distinguished from verses 11 and 12 in terms of the persons addressed. Verse 10 is given objectively. It identifies the objective ground upon which this persecution takes place: for righteousness' sake. The object of that persecution is simply defined as "they." Putting those two things together, we come to understand the character that brings about this persecution. It has nothing to do with the personalities or native qualities of those so persecuted. The reason for their persecution exists really outside of themselves: for righteousness' sake. The world sees in the church the righteousness of God. In their hatred for God and His righteousness, they vent that hatred upon those whom they see and touch.

There are two things that we must say about that. First, the blessedness of those persecuted is that they do indeed represent that righteousness of God. They are being persecuted, not because they have made themselves different, but for God's sake. In this way they may be sure that they are of the party of the living God, members of His covenant of grace. Second, here is a calling to discriminate between the reasons for persecution. There is plenty of persecution in this world. Millions suffer at the hands of others, for the sake of their ideologies. Persons are persecuted in the realm of the political. Persons are persecuted in the realm of false religions. Moslems persecute Buddhists, and

Buddhists war against Moslems. Persons are persecuted because they are personally very difficult. You may meet with certain persons who claim persecution as members of the church. However, as you watch and observe them, you see that they are always in trouble with others because they are simply hard to get along with. Make sure you are not one of these; there is no blessedness there. The blessedness comes only in suffering for the sake of one thing: righteousness.

This must lead to the question: Who, specifically, are these righteous? The answer is given in verses 11 and 12. Here we find a development that encompasses the whole of the beatitudes. Up to this point the entire emphasis has been upon the objective. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Blessed are the merciful." "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake." In verse 11 we have the application of the objective into the subjective. Christ states, "Blessed are ye." There are flesh and blood persons to whom these definitions—all of them—apply. They can, must, and do identify themselves according to these blessed virtues. In the way of identifying themselves, they know their blessedness. These words are spoken to the church, represented by the disciples sitting about their Master and Lord. They are addressed to you: wonder of blessing! "Blessed are ye." What must add to this application of the objective to the subjective is the parallelism of the form: the word "persecute" is repeated from verse 10 to verse 11. The words "righteousness' sake" are found in parallel to "for my sake." That is, the persecution which is truly blessed for you is only the persecution that comes because of Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

There are specifically two aspects to this persecution as identified in verse 11. The first aspect has to do with words. Persecution has a verbal aspect to it. The world


brings certain words against the citizen of the kingdom of heaven. The idea of reviling means to set one apart by means of words. By certain words, the Christian is set outside of the world and its society and culture. The world despises him and expresses its contempt. Closely related is the other word mentioned by Christ, "And say all manner of evil against you falsely." With definite words the evils that are committed by men and the general evils that fall upon the world are attributed to Christians. We think of Nero's accusation against the Christians, that they set the fires that plagued the city of Rome. The Christian must maintain in himself a good conscience, so that the word "falsely" indeed applies. "Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ" (I Pet. 3:16).

The second aspect of that persecution involves the development of such words into action. The word "persecute" carries the basic idea of pursuit, with the intent to do harm upon capture. As the world rages against the church, at-

tributing to them many ills, it must naturally follow that evil must be repaid with evil. As Christians have done so much harm, so must harm be done to them. This aspect of persecution involves the withdrawal of certain privileges afforded to members of the society in general. There is loss of position and standing in society. It next involves personal suffering and loss. One's possessions are confiscated. Another's job is taken from him. Persecution develops into bodily suffering and torture. Finally, it brings about the shedding of blood unto death.

So important is it that along each step of that way of persecution, word into deed, and the development of deed, the Christian recognize the pressure of that persecution to deny the kingdom of heaven. All along the way the world presents the easy way out: Deny Christ here and there, deny your citizenship in the kingdom of heaven in this area or that. Then, all will be well. You can have a very good place here. Where will you stand? In the blessedness of Christ and His kingdom, or in the world which has no righteousness, but only the wrath of God?

Questions for Meditation and Further Study

1. Is there persecution of believers today? What are some subtle ways in which you avoid persecution? How does that leave you unprepared for increased persecution?
2. Is the persecution of the church by the world the necessary condition of the true church? What are the more subtle ways in which the church is under persecution in the present day? How is it difficult for the church without persecution to lay hold on the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven?
3. How can you make sure that the persecution you endure is for righteousness' sake? What other "sakes" are possible? How do these other sakes draw attention away from the one true cause of the Christian? 

October 10, 11, 2000
held in South Holland, Illinois

Classis West met for a special meeting on October 10, 2000 in South Holland, Illinois. This meeting of classis was called in order to deal with ongoing struggles in one of the churches in Classis West. Rev. A. denHartog led the classis in opening devotions by giving a brief exposition of Psalm 102:12-22. Rev. M. DeVries then took his place by rotation as president of classis, with Rev. G. Eriks as vice president and Rev. A. denHartog as clerk. The classis met late into the evening of Tuesday, October 10, and for most of the next day, completing its work around 3:30 in the afternoon on Wednesday, October 11.


The entire agenda of classis

was treated in closed session. For this reason this report can only refer in general to what was decided. Classis West declared, with the concurrence of the delegates *ad examina* of Classis East, that one of the ministers of Classis West is no longer a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Classis then assisted the council of the newly vacant congregation with advice on various matters. In addition to that, Rev. R. Miersma was appointed as the moderator of this congregation. And a special committee of classis will, as needed, continue to provide help to the council of this congregation.

A classical appointment schedule was also adopted by Classis West for this congregation. The schedule is as follows: Rev. R. Smit (Nov. 19 & 26); Rev. A. Brummel

(Jan. 14 & 21); Rev. A. denHartog (Feb. 11 & 18); Rev. M. DeVries (Mar. 11 & 18). Classis also decided that at this time pulpit supply will be provided every Sunday. This will be done through the help of ministers from Classis East and from the seminary.

Many weighty matters had to be treated and decided upon by classis. This all took considerable time. However, thankfully we report that by the grace of God there was present among the delegates a spirit of unity as they labored together in the love of Christ for the welfare of the churches. We pray that the Lord may be pleased to bless the decisions of classis for the good of our churches and the glory of His name.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Daniel Kleyn, 
Stated Clerk

Book Reviews



The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, v. 3: The Medieval Church, by Hughes Oliphant Old. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999. Pp. xviii-646. \$45.00. (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

This series by Old is really a history of preaching. Undersigned has reviewed both volumes one and two, hence, this review of volume three will be brief. Volume three is as good as the first two volumes. This is an excellent series, indeed! The books are well researched and are written in a lucid and "easy-to-read" style. We certainly hope Old is able to finish this project.

Chapter I covers Byzantine preaching, beginning in the middle of the sixth century and continuing into the beginning of the elev-

enth century. In this chapter Old analyzes the preaching of John of Damascus, Andrew of Crete, Photius, and others. Chapter II is a fascinating account of the Mission preaching to the Barbarians. Readers of Dutch (Frisians especially!) will be interested in Old's study of Boniface, the missionary to the Frisians and among the Germans. Old reaches this conclusion as regards the sermons of Boniface: "These sermons may not be reported with the detail we would like or in the most elegant Latin (Old theorizes that, not Boniface, but converts won by means of his preaching put the sermons in written form, hence the less than elegant Latin), but one gets the impression that somewhere behind them was a solid Christian thinker who had some clear ideas about what evangelistic preaching en-


tailed. We may not be completely satisfied with his doctrine of grace or his understanding of soteriology, but the overall impression is most positive. There is much we can learn about the ministry of evangelism from these sermons" (p. 137).

Is the reader interested in learning about the shaping of the Roman Lectionary? Is he/she interested in the preaching of the Benedictines, the Cistercians (among them, Bernard of Clairvaux), the Franciscans, the Dominicans, or the German Mystics (Eckhart, e.g.). It's all in this volume.

Old provides brief, but well documented biographies of each of the preachers covered. There is an extensive bibliography with each chapter. The book is enhanced by a detailed index as well.

Old is a member of the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, New Jersey. He is also the author

of *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship*.

Get these three volumes. Read them. Learn from them. And enjoy them. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Minister Activities

Rev. Ken Koole, pastor of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, declined the call he had been considering to serve as minister-on-loan to our sister churches in Singapore.

Congregation Activities

The Grace PRC in Standale, MI has been looking for solutions to their overcrowding "problem." Recently they voted, at least in concept, to look at some possible future changes in their sanctuary. Plans called for their building committee to hire an architect to look at possible changes that could be made and report back to them sometime late this year or early next year with some choices and prices. Grace is looking at changes that would include a new narthex, new bathrooms, and a new nursery. It also appears that in order to enlarge their sanctuary to accommodate their growing congregation, they will have to change the seating 180 degrees, so that they will face what is now the back of the church. Part of this change will also include a change from pews to individual seating. This means that sometime next year Grace might be facing a problem of what to do with all those extra pews. If you are interested in any, you can contact Grace at 0-11225 8th Ave., Grand Rapids, MI 49544.

The October issue of "The Tulip," the monthly informational

newsletter of the First PRC in Holland, MI, reported to their congregation that their new parsonage continues to move toward completion. It appears that by the time you read this, much of the outside work on the home will be complete. Much of the future work will be inside and will not show very much, but with the cold of winter ahead, that is not all bad. Currently, it appears that some of First's members have been busy doing electrical wiring as well as wiring for the phones and computer terminals. The concrete for the driveway will be poured after the last heavy trucks are through delivering materials. The brickwork is ready to proceed, as well as insulation and dry-wall installation. No date is given when First expects their pastor and his family to move in, so any date on my part would be strictly a guess, but it sounds like early next year to me.

Some of our readers living in the West Michigan area may be familiar with the Scriptorium, the Center for Christian Antiquities, home to a collection of ancient artifacts, biblical manuscripts, and rare printed materials, located in Grand Haven, MI. Unfortunately this collection will be moving to Florida at the end of this year. Unfortunate as that may be, what it means is that many of our Michigan churches have been arranging a final walk-through tour for their congregations. The Hudsonville PRC sent two groups in September, and the First PRC in Holland, MI is planning a visit on November 18, as well as members of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL. Personally, I enjoyed the visit we made

in September. I came away with a greater appreciation for what our early church fathers went through to preserve copies of the Word of God. They often gave their lives for it. I wonder if it means that much to us?

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC made available to their congregation a video presentation of part of the "Answers in Genesis Series" by Ken Ham. Everyone junior high age and above was encouraged to attend.

The Evangelism Society of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ is currently involved in sponsoring the broadcast of "The Voice of Sovereign Grace," a radio program airing weekly on 570 WMCA. Covenant is scheduled to sponsor the program the second Friday of every month at 10:00 P.M.

In what may be a first for our churches, Saturday morning catechism classes of Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, had to contend with the running of a local marathon. Ivanrest, the street that runs in front of Southwest, was scheduled to be closed from 9 until 11 A.M. The Grandville police asked that children in the first class be at church by 8:45 so as not to conflict with the start of the race. Thereafter there should have been openings in the race to get through when picking up or dropping them off. All Southwest's parents had to do was let the officers know they were bringing children to catechism and they would let them through.

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

Mission Activities

Jack and Brenda Brands, daughter and son-in-law of missionary Rev. R. Moore, were able to show slides of their recent visit to Ghana and the mission field there after the evening worship service of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL on October 8.

Denomination Activities

This year's Fall Ladies' League Meeting, held on October 17, was hosted by the Martha Society of the Doon, IA PRC. Rev. R. Smit, pastor at Doon, spoke and gave a brief slide presentation of his trip with Rev. R. Miersma to the Phil-

ippines, entitled "On the Road to Lapalonga."

Food For Thought

"Thou hast given so much to me. Give one thing more - a grateful heart."

— George Herbert 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

On September 20, 2000, the Lord called home

MR. HIB KUIPER, Sr.

unexpectedly. We, the Men's Society of the Hudsonville PRC, express our Christian sympathy to his wife Marian, children, and grandchildren.

It is our prayer that they, along with all of God's children, will find their comfort in the words of John 10:27-29: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

Erv Kortering, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Byron Center PRC hereby express our heartfelt sympathy to Peter and Ruth Nobel, daughters Abigail, Hope, and Hannah Nobel, and daughter and son-in-law Naomi and John Chesebro and their children, in the recent death of their son, brother, and uncle,

SAMUEL NOBEL.

May God comfort them in their time of sorrow. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help" (Psalm 121:1).

Rev. Douglas Kuiper, Pres.
Mike Elzinga, clerk

RESOLUTIONS OF SYMPATHY

The Christian Fellowship Society of Hudsonville PRC express their sincere sympathy to fellow members Cornie and Edie Brummel, Brian and Lois Dykstra, and Rich and Pam Hoekstra in the loss of their mother,

GREDA HOEKSTRA.

They also convey their deepest sympathy to Jay and Judy Kuiper, Daryl and Sharon Kuiper, and Hib and Bev Kuiper in the death of their father,

HILBERT KUIPER, SR.

May they find strength and comfort in God's Word, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15:55-57).

Rev. Barry Gritters, Pres.
Shirley VanderKolk, Sec'y.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of the Men's and Ladies' Society of Southwest PRC extend their sincere sympathy to fellow member Natalie Jefferson in the recent loss of her mother,

MRS. GERTRUDE JEFFERSON.

May she experience the truth of John 14:18, "I will not leave you comfortless."

Marvin Kamps, President
Marilyn Schipper, Vice-Secretary

FORTY YEARS IN MINISTRY REV. JASON KORTERING

This Fall, Rev. J. Kortering marked the fortieth anniversary of his ministry in our churches. We are thankful for the faithful work he has done in our churches during these years, particularly for the time served as the minister-on-loan to the churches in Singapore.

"How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things" (Romans 10:15).

We pray for God's continued blessing on him and his wife as his work continues.

An open house to commemorate this milestone will be held next summer when the Korterings return from Singapore.

Council of Hope PRC (Walker, MI)

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for a
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