

THE *September 1, 2001* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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Committing Ourselves to a Faithful Creator

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

I Peter 4:19

These words were addressed to churches suffering severe persecution.

Persecution is not the only suffering that the saints of God must endure. Sickness, loneliness, physical infirmities, poverty, marital problems, family problems, and many more evils are often the lot of the saint.

Every child of God suffers affliction of one kind or another.

What is your affliction? How severe is it?

We are told what to do in our affliction. Commit the keeping of your soul to God in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.



The churches to whom Peter was writing were being reproached

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

for the name of Christ (v. 14). This means that the world heaped upon the saints ridicule, mockery, shame, and verbal abuse on account of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Peter calls this a "fiery trial" (v. 12). This means that this persecution constituted a trial of their faith. Their faith in Jesus Christ was being severely tested. We can well imagine this. As the saints suffered under the reproach of the world they began to doubt God's promises. If God's promises to keep and provide for His own are true, how can these things be? They questioned God's faithfulness to them. If God loves His people, why did He allow this to happen? Very easily the saints became dissatisfied with God and even angry. Their faith in God was put to the test.

All suffering constitutes a trial of our faith. Our faith is tested also when there is lingering illness, when we lose our loved ones in death, when there is poverty, when we face marital or family problems. How quickly we begin to doubt the wonderful promises of God. How quickly we question God's faithfulness. How easily we become dis-

satisfied with God. Our life of faith is severely tried.

Peter indicates that this suffering and the trials it brings are according to the will of God. That's quite striking, isn't it? God wills the suffering of His people. God wants His people to suffer.

Why would God want this? Doesn't He love us? Hasn't He demonstrated the greatness of that love for us by sending His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to the cruel cross to secure our salvation? Why then does God will our suffering?

God wills our suffering because it is good for us. Suffering serves to strengthen our faith. There is a principle here. The more we exercise our faith, the stronger our faith becomes. This is true in the physical realm. Take, for example, the muscles of our physical body. The more we use and exercise our muscles, the stronger they become. Likewise, the more we use our mental capacities, the more they are enlarged. So too is it with faith. The more our faith is put to the test, the more we are required to use it. And the more we use our faith in the face of trials, the more our faith

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

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SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.


Website for RPPA: www.rppa.org
Website for PRCA: www.prca.org

How important contentment is to continue in well doing!

It is through well doing, not

evildoing, that we enter into glory.

How this is threatened in the face affliction.

Commit therefore the keeping of your soul unto God in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. 

Editorial

The Kingdom of God (6)

"Who ... hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

Colossians 1:13

Identifying the church as the kingdom of God adds something to our understanding of the church. Knowing herself as the Messianic kingdom of God, the church will conduct herself accordingly. Viewing the church of which they are members as Christ's kingdom, believers and their children will think of themselves as citizens and will behave themselves in a way that befits this kingdom.

The church is not only the body of Christ, living from its head and growing up into its head.

The church is not only the bride of Christ, knowing the love of her husband, giving herself to Him, and submitting to His will.

The church is also a kingdom in the world. The church is the kingdom of God. The church is the Messianic kingdom of God, the fulfillment of Old Testament Israel, the realization of Psalm 72, Amos 9, and all the other Old Testament prophecies of the coming glorious, powerful, prosperous, and peaceful reign of God in the Messiah.

Kingly Government

What light this sheds on ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church), how this affects the church's own life and work, and how this forms the life of each member of the church are subjects that need development among us. This is not to say that nothing has been done by the Reformed churches to

work out the implications of the truth that the church is the kingdom. Especially in the area of church government, the Presbyterian and Reformed churches have applied the reality of kingdom to the life of the church. The church takes form as an organization. This organization has a government. The church does not simply function as a living body by the secret workings of the indwelling Spirit. She does not simply live by the ardent love that a bride feels for her beloved husband. Christ is king of the church. He rules the church by His Word. His Word is law for the church. He exercises His kingship through a body of elders, whom He calls into holy office. These men are rulers in the church. They administer the Word of the king.

King Jesus also governs the necessary federated (covenant) life and shared work of the congregations in a denomination. He rules through the stated assemblies (classis and synod, or presbytery and general assembly), which are bound to an adopted church order—a kind of "constitution" of the kingdom (and, therefore, not to be tinkered with continually, or changed every few decades!)—that regulates the life and work of the denomination according to Holy Scripture. Christ is king of the denomination of faithful churches. The Messianic kingdom extends to the denomination of faithful churches.

Presbyterian and Reformed churches have taken the kingship of Christ in the matter of church government with utmost serious-

ness. They have been convinced that at stake in controversies over right church government is the kingdom of God. The Reformed conviction that, as regards church government, the church is the kingdom of God has produced martyrs. At the time of the Reformation, scores of thousands of Reformed Christians died at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church and its political allies, in the Netherlands, France, and other countries, for refusing to submit to the hierarchical authority of the pope. In the seventeenth century, many Scottish Presbyterians died because they would not allow the king of England and his archbishop to intrude upon the presbyterial government of the Presbyterian church in Scotland.

The issue for these saints was, as the Scottish Presbyterians put it, the "crown rights of king Jesus." The issue was the crown rights of king Jesus *in the church*. The issue was the church as the kingdom of God.

The importance that church government has as an aspect of the kingdom of God in the thinking of Reformed churches is apparent in Article 28 of the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). Although the article recognizes that the consistory may claim the protection of the authorities for the possession of their property and the peace and order of their meetings, it warns that the consistory "may never suffer the royal government of Christ over His church to be in the least infringed upon."

This warning is timely. Anti-Christian, totalitarian states regard the church as the last and most dangerous threat to their absolute power. They try to bring the church to heel, and thus absorb her into the kingdom of Satan, by tempting or terrorizing her to subject herself to the lordly will of the state rather than to the will of the Lord Jesus. The day is not far off in the nominally Christian West that civil government will demand that the church give “equal rights” to women by decreeing their ordination to special office and that the church cease her “hate crime” of condemning homosexuality and disciplining impenitent homosexuals. The penalty, as Article 28 of the Church Order of the PRC indicates, will be the seizure of the church’s property and the disruption of the peace and order of the church’s meetings.

The issue will be the kingdom of God.

The church is a nation, or kingdom (I Pet. 2:9). She is a sovereign nation. She permits no meddling in her government by any other kingdom, or nation. For a consistory or a synod to allow the authority of some earthly prince to override the authority of Christ in the congregation or denomination is treason. The German churches were guilty of this in the 1930s and 1940s when they cravenly permitted Hitler to rule in the churches. They lowered the banner of the kingdom of God and ran up the flag of the Third Reich. The churches in the World Council of Churches similarly capitulated to the Communist tyrannies.

Viewing the Church as Kingdom

But the truth that the church is the kingdom of God has application to far more than only the government of the church. The whole doctrine of the church can and must be seen in light of the kingdom of God. That the church is the kingdom has implications for every aspect of the life and work

of the church. To my mind, this has not been sufficiently developed among us. We have developed the doctrine of the church as the body and bride of Christ. We have developed the truth of the covenant and its relation to the church. But as regards the kingdom of God, particularly the relation of the kingdom and the church, we are lacking.

Reformed theologians have proved that the church is the fulfillment—the New Testament reality—of Old Testament Israel. The work by O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, comes immediately to mind. Thus, the theologians have proved that the church is the kingdom. And Reformed people understand this. They are not dreaming the “Jewish dream” of a future carnal kingdom of converted Jews in Palestine (premillennial dispensationalism), or of a future earthly kingdom of Presbyterians holding and wielding absolute political power in North America and even over all the world (postmillennial Christian Reconstruction).

But Reformed theologians have not thoroughly worked out, in light of Holy Scripture, what the church looks like as the millennial kingdom of God. They have not shined the light of the kingdom upon every aspect of the church’s existence and every detail of her activity and work. The result is that to some extent the church itself does not live in the consciousness that it is the kingdom of God—the glorious, powerful, prosperous, peaceful kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, the kingdom of Psalm 72. To some extent, the church itself does not work in the lively consciousness that its work is the aggressive maintenance and extension of itself in the world by the kingdom of the Father of Jesus Christ—the coming of the kingdom of the second petition of the model prayer. To some extent, the church does not fight its battles in the consciousness that it is the host of God Almighty, “terrible as an army with banners”

(Song of Solomon 6:4)—the reality of David’s army with its mighty men.

Our ministers should make such a study of the church as the kingdom. One way to do this is to preach the Heidelberg Catechism from the viewpoint of the kingdom of God with special emphasis on the kingdom-nature of the church.

It may well be that the popularity of the millennial errors that have been troubling Protestant churches for the past 200 years is due in part to the weakness of the church on the doctrine of the kingdom. Both forms of millennialism, postmillennialism as well as premillennialism, are not so much a false teaching of the last things as they are a false teaching of the Messianic kingdom of God. Often, the arising of doctrinal error in the church is indicative of the church’s failure to grasp or do justice to the truth that is at issue.

Whatever may be the cause of the popular millennial errors, God’s purpose with them as serious doctrinal errors—false doctrines—is that they cause His church to examine more thoroughly, develop more fully, and confess more clearly the truth that these errors subvert, that is, the truth of the kingdom.

Aspects of the Church as Kingdom

Without trying to be exhaustive, I suggest that conceiving and presenting the church as the kingdom will be fruitful in teachings that are both grand in themselves and urgently needed by the Reformed churches today. If the church is the kingdom, Jesus Christ is the absolute sovereign of the church. The head of the church is *king*. As sovereign, He alone establishes, maintains, and perfects the kingdom. As sovereign, He alone makes and preserves the citizens. As sovereign, He alone determines the life and behavior of both the church and the individual member. In a good, old-fashioned

monarchy, the life of the realm and the life of each citizen are simply a matter of *being ruled*. What the realm might like and what the citizen might want are irrelevant. The will of the king is all. And the king of the church is eternal God in the flesh. "Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?" (Eccles. 8:4)

If the church is the kingdom, there is and must be discipline. The flagrantly and impenitently rebellious and disobedient must be excommunicated. There is no place in the kingdom for them. To let them remain would be to jeopardize the kingdom. But there must also be order; prescribed, right worship; one faith; a definite way of life for all the citizens; co-operation among the citizens; regard for the customs and traditions; and the training of the young to revere the king, love the kingdom, and live the life of the kingdom.

What a disorderly business is the life of many churches today. Gross, public sinners are leading citizens. The members believe and do as they please. Many do not even regularly and diligently attend the services of worship on the Lord's Day. And the church tolerates it! Some kingdom! Churches resemble Israel in the time of the judges, when everyone did what was right in his own eyes, because there was no king in Israel.

If the church is the kingdom, the church must be driven with the urge to expand the territory, to press the claims of the king still more widely, indeed to raise the banners of the kingdom of God over all the nations. This is missions and all the witness of the church, but it is *kingdom-missions*. This makes a difference. For one thing, it keeps missions from being a sentimental effort to save souls for Jesus, which invariably corrupts the message in the interests of more souls and thus results in no souls at all. A church that knows itself as the kingdom of God will be motivated to glorify God in missions. This church will not water down the message of the gospel of the glory of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, much less concoct a new message that is more to the liking of the time and culture.

For another thing, kingdom-missions will not overlook that aspect of the Great Commission that is widely ignored today: "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Entrance into the kingdom must be followed by a life in the kingdom of obeying all of Christ's commands.

If the church is the kingdom, the church must know itself as a fighting force, an army that confronts enemies, demolishes fortresses, and even destroys people.

Kingdoms are at war in history. As much as in the Old Testament, the kingdom of Christ in the time of the new covenant is commissioned by God to do battle against the hordes of devils, the apostate churches, and the world of reprobate, ungodly men and women. "The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries" (Ps. 110:5, 6).

How this is deplored and rejected in most of the churches today! How this is in danger of being lost today even in the most faithful of churches! Love, tolerance, friendliness, sweetness, and niceness are the only attributes of the church! The result is that the kingdom of darkness—"the gates of hell"—is rolling over these defenseless churches with a spiritual blitzkrieg.

But what if the church is the kingdom of God, really the New Testament reality of David's warring kingdom, the kingdom whose king is the king of kings of Revelation 19:11ff.? How will this make a difference in the pulpit, in the decisions of the consistory and the synod, in the lectures and writing of the professors of theology, and in the witness of the members?

— DJE 

Letters

■ Detesting Errors of the Anabaptists

With reference to the contribution from Jonathan Moore, "John Calvin's Assessment of Antipaedo-baptism" (*SB*, Feb. 1, 2001), which afforded some degree of encouragement and subsequent reply to a letter (*SB*, April 15, 2001), I am writing to thank you for having made the research available.


It would seem that the answer to

the question, "Do We Detest the Error of the Anabaptists? Ought We?" is, Rather more than the singular!

The literature, *God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace* by Herman Hanko and "The Biblical Mode of Baptism" by Rev. Robert C. Harbach, appears to leave little room for doubt but that there are a number of errors to be opposed. Surely, the leading of the holy Paraclete remains as ever it was at the time of the Reformation.

Any proposed synthesis between two such mutually exclusive concepts as Baptist and Reformed is bound to prove disastrous to the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

Accordingly, it is of paramount importance that totally depraved sinners with whom God has sovereignly established His covenant faithfully continue to detest all the errors of the Baptists.

(Rev.) Arthur Strike
Gwent, Wales 

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August 1, 2001

*To: The Protestant Reformed Churches and friends and supporters of the
Protestant Reformed Seminary*

Dear brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus,

Greetings in the love of Christ!

As the new seminary year approaches, we thought it good to give you a few "snapshots" of the people in the seminary. Students and faculty alike are grateful that the same friendly staff continues to serve the seminary. Don Doezema is the seminary registrar and the general "go-to guy," and his wife Judi is the secretary. Both give invaluable service to the seminary, not to mention the denomination. Brenda Brands assists the Doezemas in many ways, and in a short amount of time made herself almost as indispensable as the Doezemas, especially because of her ability to save computer files and programs from devastation.

The one question most often asked of professors (and we welcome such interest in the seminary) is "How many students are there in seminary?" This letter intends not only to relate how many students, but also to introduce them and their families.

First of all, we report with gratitude to God that two students graduated this past spring. One graduate was Pastor Lau Chin Kwee of the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore. Pastor Lau had taken his initial training in the Protestant Reformed Seminary in the years 1980-1982. This condensed, two-year course enabled him and his wife, Foong Ngee, to go back to Singapore, be ordained into the office of minister, and begin to help with the work in the young churches. However, both he and the ERCS desired that he obtain the full seminary training. To that end, he returned for the fall semester in 2000, and for the spring semester of 2001, finished the required courses, and received his diploma. Thereupon, he returned to his charge as pastor in the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore.

The second graduate was Angus Stewart. Mr. Stewart came to the seminary from the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland (a sister church of the PRC) and completed the full four-year course, including an internship in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church. During his time in the USA Mr. Stewart began dating, and subsequently married, Mary Hanko. At the conclusion of his studies, Mr. Stewart sustained an examination by the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches. This exam, not required for graduation, was performed at the request of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of NI, who sent two elders to witness the exam. The Stewarts have now moved to his native land, and the congregation in Ballymena called Mr. Stewart to be their pastor. After accepting the call, he was ordained into the office of minister of the Word and Sacraments. Rev. and Mrs. Stewart's address is the old address of Rev. and Mrs. Hanko in NI, since the Stewarts have moved into the manse where the Hankos lived.

The two senior students, Rodney Kleyn and David Overway, entered their six-month internships in July. Introduced into the seminary curriculum in 1994, the internship has proved to be a valuable component in the training of men for the ministry of the Word.

Mr. Kleyn's internship is in Faith PRC, under Rev. Koole. Mr. Rodney Kleyn and his wife Elizabeth were blessed with their fourth child this past year. They are members of Southwest PRC.

Another happy event of some consequence for the Kleyns was the immigration of his father and mother and several siblings. After years of waiting, the Kleyn family arrived from Tasmania in June of this year.

Mr. David Overway and his wife, Rebecca, and their young son have taken leave of the Hope PRC where they are members, and made their way to Hull, Iowa for his internship under Rev. Key. This is new ground for minister, congregation, and seminarian, and all were excited about it. The Overways have been warmly welcomed to NW Iowa, and, by this time, no doubt, have been introduced to the rural "smell of money" (as the farmers there always remind anyone who mentions it).

Messrs. Overway and Kleyn are scheduled to return to the seminary for their final semester, the Lord willing, in January of 2002.

We have five other full-time seminary students, two of whom are returning for their third year. Mr. Paul Goh and his wife, Suet Yin, spent this past summer in Singapore, their homeland. Mr. Goh intends to take the full course of seminary and then return to the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore, which churches have sent him to the seminary. Mrs. Goh's almost daily activity on behalf of the Reformed Free Publishing Association is most appreciated. The Gohs are members of Georgetown PRC.

Also in his third year is Mr. Bill Langerak. Mr. Langerak is the "experienced" seminarian in that he returned to school after some years spent in the business world. He and his wife, Karen, and their five children live down the street from Hope PRC, where they are members. Mr. Langerak has made the adjustment well from business to the life of studying theology.

First-year students include one from the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore and two from the Protestant Reformed Churches. In July of this year, the seminary and the Grand Rapids churches welcomed Mr. Dennis Lee, his wife Foong Ling, and their two young sons. Mr. Lee worked a number of years as an engineer before committing to the study for the ministry and returning to the university for pre-seminary courses. His intent, the Lord willing, is to take the regular (four-year) course in the seminary and return to the ERCS.

Also in his first year is Mr. Bruce Koole of the Faith PRC. Mr. Koole has the distinction at this point of being the lone unmarried student in seminary. He certainly knows more than the average student about the ministry, being the second child in a minister's family, and having lived all his life in a parsonage. Mr. Koole has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Grand Valley State University.

Mr. John Marcus is the third of the first-year students in seminary. He, his wife Amy, and their four daughters are members of the Byron Center PRC. The Marcus family is known also to many in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Australia, having been members of the EPC in Brisbane for three years while he was engaged in research at the University of Queensland. Mr. Marcus' past studies earned him a PhD in biochemistry, and he does equally well in philosophy and Greek.

Those are the full-time students for the current year. A few other men from the Puritan Reformed Seminary are taking a course or two for credit in their seminary. In addition, we have three pre-seminary students taking some language classes (Greek and Hebrew) in the seminary.

One notable feature of the student body in the Protestant Reformed Seminary is the "foreign element." In the past six years, the Protestant Reformed Seminary has been blessed with the privilege of training six men who came from outside the USA – one from Northern Ireland, three from Singapore, one from the Netherlands, and one from Australia (Mark Shand, EPCA). (Concerning Mark Shand, we rejoice with him and his wife Susan in the fact that he sustained his exams before the Presbytery and received the call to labor in the congregation in Winnaleah, Tasmania, AU. Plans are for Mr. Shand to be ordained in that congregation on September 29.)

These students from outside the PRC and the country (we really do not look at them as being "foreign") make a positive contribution to the seminary life and instruction. They bring with them


different and varied experiences, backgrounds, and traditions, but the same love for the truth. This results in good questions, excellent discussions, and, sometimes, instruction in areas that might not otherwise be developed. It is not only a joy to have these students, but we also count it a great privilege. We are grateful to God that He brings these men to our theological school. The faculty is well aware of the responsibility and privilege as instruments in God's hand to teach many the precious Reformed truths as maintained in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

At the same time, the review of the student body indicates that there is not an overwhelming number of students from the Protestant Reformed Churches. As anyone in the PRC knows, there are six calls issuing forth from Protestant Reformed congregations for ministers, missionaries, and a minister-on-loan. All the graduates in the next four years will not fill the existing needs in the PRC, and it is easy to see that more openings are on the horizon.

The situation calls attention to the pressing need for students, the concern of all who love the cause of the gospel. We urge you to hold before your sons the high calling of the ministry of the gospel. The Lord has given the Protestant Reformed Churches much work. Faithful, spiritually minded, committed young men are needed to preach the glorious truth God has given the Protestant Reformed Churches. Join us, then, in unceasing prayer to the Lord of the harvest that He send laborers.

If you are in the Grand Rapids area on September 5, you are welcome, even urged, to join the seminary at the annual convocation. Students and professors alike appreciate the indication of support from those who attend these gatherings. It has been the custom that the professors speak at the convocations by rotation. This year it will be my privilege to bring the message. The convocation is to be held in the Faith PRC, beginning at 7:45, the Lord willing.

Finally, in thankful humility we point out that, by the grace of God, the Protestant Reformed Seminary has remained faithful to the historic Reformed faith for over 75 years. We hope that you, with us, recognize that this preservation is a gracious gift of God to His church. In these days of appalling apostasy, do continue to pray that God keep this seminary faithful to His truth.

Yours in Christ,
Prof. Russell J. Dykstra, Rector 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. MaryBeth Lubbers

The Reformed Family: Work

"...yea, the work of our hands, establish thou it."

Psalm 90

Ordinarily a man must work for a living. In order to eat the bread, he must plant the wheat, harvest it, haul it to the mill, grind it into flour, and bake it as every young

child knows from *The Little Red Hen*. And although there seems to be more and more instances of families inheriting old money, nevertheless, in the beginning someone had to have worked, and worked hard, for that money.

God has ordained that man work to provide for his daily needs and wants, usually by the sweat of his brow. The principle of working to achieve a desired end is a creation ordinance. In the beginning, God worked. In six days, He hung the universe in place and

filled it with His desired creatures. Adam, as the head of that created work, worked in the Garden of Eden prior to the Fall as well. His work was sheer delight during those days in which he loved God perfectly, turning over every spade of dirt to the honor and glory of his Creator. In the cool of the evening, Adam walked in the Garden with his God and communed with Him. Some of that conversation must have included talk of the work that Adam had accomplished that day. Man still enjoys doing

Mrs. Lubbers is a wife and mother in the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois.

that today: talking of his work—its frustration and successes—with his wife or friend.

After the Fall, Adam continued to work to provide for himself and his family. That was no surprise to him. He and Eve must eat, and they required a home, just as they did in Paradise; in addition, they now needed clothes to wear. The horrible realization of his disobedience came when Adam began to experience the difficulty and grinding routine of his work. Where he once had but to reach up his hand to pluck plump and succulent fruit from readily available trees, harvesting crops was now back-breaking labor. Where once the ground had eagerly yielded up herbs and grasses, Adam now had to battle the ground for productivity. Thorns and thistles troubled his work. He discovered immediately that the once rich and loamy soil had indeed become cursed at the judgment of God. Adam, of all men, realized most pointedly the extent of the curse. He alone, until the second Adam appeared, had tasted the sweetness of work in Paradise and could compare it with the unrequited labor outside Eden's gates. He of all men knew the satisfaction of work done perfectly and could contrast that work with the oftentimes unrewarding work after the Fall.

Nor was Eve excluded from the consequences of her actions. She experienced not only the pain of childbirth, but also the added sorrow of rearing thankless and disobedient children. God exacted a just judgment for her daughters to this very day. How does the old adage for women go? "A man's work is from sun to sun, But a woman's work is never done." Her work in the home for which she receives no paycheck, no pension plan, no profit-sharing is often mundane, repetitive, and bone-wearying. The laundry pile is seldom diminished, the children are always hungry, the housecleaning stands as a monument of guilt. The responsibility for making sure that the home runs as efficiently as a

Swiss watch, and that her husband is honored in the gates (Prov. 31), is hers as well.

This, then, is the lot of mankind as long as the earth continues: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19). Man must work. He must work until the day he dies. He has no other recourse.

Many different kinds of work make up man's daily labor. The variety of work which is at man's fingertips is of wide-ranging breadth and scope. For this command was also laid down in Eden: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it..." (Gen. 1:28). The whole creation, every facet of it, from the heights of heaven to the depths of the sea, is man's to explore, develop, ascertain, subject, and conquer. The work is out there, lots of it, but the search to find meaning in his work is man's lament today just as it was for the Preacher: "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun" (Eccl. 2:11).

"You load sixteen tons—
And what do you get?

Another day older

And deeper in debt," as the old coal miner's folk song goes.

Work as an end in itself, whether that be drudge work or highly creative work, has all been done before and is found to have no lasting reward says the Preacher. Solomon addressed this as well when he groaned: "...there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it many be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us" (Eccl. 1:9, 10). Later, in the same chapter, Solomon tells, as did Job, that the laboring man shall take nothing of his labor with him in his hand when he dies (Eccl. 5:15). A man spends

his entire life bent over from the burden of his work, only to lose the profits of his labor at death.

Although it is true that there must be financial remuneration for working—the laborer is worthy of his hire (Matt. 20:8) — Christ warns us: "Labour not for the meat that perisheth..." (John 6:27). In the parable of the man who built bigger barns, Jesus clearly laid out the end of one who lays up treasures for himself, and is not rich towards God (Luke 12).

Work done for its own sake, for financial gain—for the purpose of laying up treasures for the here and now—work divorced from the honor and glory of God, work without an eye to the rest that awaits us is empty, vain, and wearisome. It weighs down the soul, it sullies the spirit, it is a source of despair.

Only work which is done out of love for God and His law has worth and value. When I labor to love my God and to promote the advantage of my neighbor, then my work is productive and satisfying. It brings enjoyment and a feeling of accomplishment. God will see to it. God will bless the labors of my hands although that work be ever so humble. Menial forms of work or those which are more sophisticated, scrubbing floors or painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, patching overalls or designing architectural wonders, then become worthwhile, God-glorifying labors. John Calvin says:

It must not be imagined that a life of labour is dishonorable. Those who teach the superiority of a 'contemplative life' to a life of toil teach falsely....we were created by God for the purpose of being strenuously employed in a form of labour while on this earth. Therefore to labour is to fulfil the gracious order of nature, which is planned according to the image of God. Moreover, in our earthly toil not only does the call of God reach us so that toil becomes a divine vocation directed by Him, but also the hand of God is stretched out

to us assuring us that our labour will bear fruit. We must not believe the lie that the Devil tells us when he seeks to persuade that labouring and housework are secular affairs that do not concern God...God accepts honest upright work as a service agreeable to Himself. If the chambermaid and the manservant go about their domestic tasks offering themselves in their work as sacrifice to God, then what they do is accepted by God as a holy and pure sacrifice pleasing in His sight" (*Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, Ronald S. Wallace, p.155).

Nor is a man's work finished when he retires at sixty-five. He continues to work until the day he dies. I am reminded of my recently-departed father-in-law. Where once Rev. Lubbers traveled extensively preaching the gospel even to those who inhabited the "islands of the sea," now he was

confined to a Rest Home. Where once he had something of a continental flavor about him, speaking with equal ease to princes or peasants of the hope that was in him, now one could observe him tying bibs around the necks of other old people at mealtimes. He was not ashamed to do this. It gave him opportunity to instruct and continue testifying of the Christ he loved to preach. Eventually, even this simple (some would say "demeaning") task was too much for him. We found him sitting alone in his room in a wheelchair, most of his well-thumbed books having been removed by this time. My husband asked him, "Dad, do you have any work you can still do?" To which the old man thoughtfully replied, "Son, this is my work now."


Suffering and dying by degrees had become the focus of his work,

and he set his face towards it, worthy laborer to the very end.

In the hope of eternal reward, each one of us echoes, however faintly, the words of our faithful Savior: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me..." (John 4:34).

This month we remember Labor Day in America, one token holiday initiated by the Labor Unions in this country to remember her working men and women.

Jehovah has instituted fifty-two "holy-days" each year to encourage the working man and woman for his six-day stint. He has reserved eternal rest for each of His diligent, weary workers. "Come unto me, all ye that labour...and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

Wherever I am, in whatever circumstances God has placed me, working without wavering in the particular work to which He has led me, I labor to enjoy His rest. 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ Gambling

Gambling is a growing evil in the country. What began in Nevada years ago as a legal enterprise has spread across the country. Many of the states promote their own games of gambling. It is increasingly becoming the vice of the internet. But also, the native Indians appear to have the "right" to establish their own casinos almost wherever they wish. Some huge complexes have been built in Michigan and other states as well. And, of course, the amount of money a casino brings into a community makes these establishments something to be desired, in the minds of many.

Now there are plans for a casino in West Michigan. And there is much opposition to it. Signs appear in many places which simply state: "casiNO."

The Grand Rapids *Press* had a report in its religion section on Saturday, July 7, 2001. It prominently displayed the opposition of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church and one of its members, Abigail Nobel:

Abigail Nobel has opposed casinos in West Michigan since she first heard talk that one might be built near her Dorr Township home.

She helped organize the West Michigan Gambling Opposition and has been busy passing out yard signs, buttons and petitions.

Now she has her church in her corner.

Byron Center Protestant Reformed church in a recent church assembly (a lecture—GVB) took a stand against all forms of gambling.

Many members of the congregation consider it their duty to condemn gambling and oppose plans by the Gun Lake Band of Potawatomi Indians to build an 180,000-square-foot casino and en-

tertainment resort in Wayland Township near U.S. 131.

At Byron Center Protestant Reformed, members' sentiments are clear. Nobel and fellow anti-casino protesters are buoyed by their church's stance.

"It gives us a solid biblical foundation for the position we've taken," Nobel said.

Casino gambling – as well as sports betting, playing the state lottery and even church bingo – is sinful because it seeks wealth in personal treasures rather than wealth in God, the Rev. Doug Kuiper said. These and other risky behaviors can never be good because they are based on immoral principles, he said.

In an hour-long lecture, Kuiper pointed to greed and covetousness as the sinful motivations to wager money on games of chance. He called gambling consensual stealing, poor stewardship of kingdom funds and a denial of the power of God in favor of luck....

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The State claims to use the money that is obtained through gambling for the education of precious children. The native Indians likewise claim that they use the profits from these games for providing for the physical and educational needs of their tribe. Though studies have shown the devastating effect gambling has on (usually) the poorer citizenry, little emphasis is placed on this. And, as Pastor Doug Kuiper pointed out, there are, more importantly, moral issues involved. The Christian ought to have no part in all of this gambling—and rightly condemns it for the evils evident.

■ United Reformed Synod

Various Synods (Assemblies) of Reformed and Presbyterian churches have met this summer. The *Christian Renewal* (June 2001) presents a report of the Synod of the United Reformed Churches which met at Escondido, CA. This Synod took various significant decisions. It decided to move to "Step 2" in the process of joining with the Canadian (American) Reformed Churches. (Earlier, the Canadian Reformed Churches approved this same "step.") The *Christian Renewal* outlines this:

What it means for the two church bodies according to the formula adopted by both federations – a formula which outlines the process of three steps whose end is full integrated unity – is that both federations now recognize each other as "true churches." The practical result is that this opens the way for pulpit exchanges, table communion fellowship, joint discussion of doctrinal matters, and inclusion as advisors at each other's church assemblies. Although adopted by both synods, the local churches will have opportunity to ratify or reject the decision by majority vote, and to inform the stated clerk of the URCs of such by January of 2002.

And it means, as Step 3 follows Step 2, that the two ecclesiastical

bodies may one day be one, under one name.

There is, of course, the issue of the "covenant" which must be resolved. Questions were raised about the understanding of their contact committee concerning the covenant. This might prove a rather thorny issue which was left unresolved.

Another issue of great importance for this young denomination is that of the creation account. Over the period of many years, this question of creation has been dealt with in Presbyterian and Reformed churches. These gradually have come to reject a literal creation account, and many have now progressed to a denial of the scriptural miracles and even the exclusiveness of salvation through the cross of Christ alone. The Christian Reformed Church has also changed its views. Whereas most maintained a literal creation account (6 days of 24 hours each) some fifty years ago, the general and prevailing view today appears to be a belief in "theistic evolution" or in a form of "framework hypothesis." (One wonders: where is Dr. Howard Van Till now, who was called "on the carpet" because of his views on creation—and vindicated after writing his book, *The Fourth Day*?) There appears to be a division of opinion in the United Reformed Churches as well. How would this knotty issue be resolved? *Christian Renewal* reports:

After debate and some tinkering on the synod floor, a majority of delegates adopted the following as synod's response, both to the OCRC (Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches) communication, and to the three overtures:

1. Synod affirms that Scripture teaches, as summarized by the Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity, the following:

- ♦ The authority and perspicuity of Scripture (B.C.; H.C. VII).
- ♦ Necessity and sufficiency of Scripture (B.C. VII and H.C. VII).
- ♦ God the Father almighty created the heavens and the earth and all

things visible and invisible (Apostles' and Nicene Creed).

♦ The Father created the heavens and the earth out of nothing (H.C., LD IX).

♦ God gave every creature its shape and being (B.C. XXII).

♦ The creation and fall of man, "God made man of the dust of the earth; man gave ear to the devil" (B.C. XIV)

♦ The historicity of Adam (L.D. VII.20; C.O.D. III/IV.1).

♦ Man was created good, in a garden, and tempted by the devil, committed reckless disobedience (H.C. III and IV).

♦ God's words to the serpent in Paradise are noted as the first revelation of the Gospel (H.C. L.D. VI).

♦ Adam plunged himself and his offspring by his first transgression into perdition (B.C. XVI)

♦ Adam's fall into sin and our connection to it (C.O.D. 1.1).

♦ God came seeking man when he, trembling, fled from him (B.C. XVII).

♦ God created all things good in six days defined as evenings and mornings (Genesis 1 & 2 and Exodus 20:11). This means that we reject any evolutionary teaching, including theistic evolution, concerning the origin of the earth and all creatures (L.D.IX).

2. Synod affirms our commitment as churches to discipline those who teach anything that stands in conflict with the Bible as summarized in the Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity.

3. Synod affirms our commitment as churches to Church Order procedure in dealing with matters of discipline of those whose teaching stands in conflict with the Bible as summarized in the Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity.

Grounds:

1. the above is consistent with the basis of our federative unity, which we declare is in the Bible as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. We have said together in the introduction to our Church Order:

We as a federation of churches declare complete subjection and obedience to the Word of God delivered to us in the inspired, infallible and inerrant book of Holy Scripture. We believe and are

fully persuaded that the Reformed Creeds do fully agree with this Word of God and therefore do subscribe to the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort.... The churches of the federation, although distinct, voluntarily display their unity by means of a common confession and church order.

2. The Three Forms of Unity adequately contain the parameters within which the interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 can responsibly take place.

3. The above will provide the context in which we are able to protect the churches from heresy and spur one another on to faithful and vigilant discipline in order to protect our confessional unity. There is no specific case before this Synod in which someone has been charged with violating the Three Forms of Unity regarding matters put forward by any of the overtures.

4. This provides a brotherly way to address the concerns raised by the OCRC and to give pastoral response for the members of our federation.

The article continues by explaining, briefly, some of the "compromises" made in order to have this decision adopted.


Key for delegates and what became the center of discussion was the originally proposed first recommendation from the advisory committee which read, "That

synod affirm that the Bible teaches that God created all things good in six historical days defined as evenings and mornings (Genesis 1 & 2 and Exodus 20:11)."

During debate the word "historical" was dropped via an amendment – to avoid extra-confessional language – and the statement was also moved from its slot as committee recommendation 1 and instead inserted as another in a shopping list of the biblical/confessional statements concerning creation.

During discussion at least one delegate wondered what synod would be saying by adopting advisory committee recommendation. "Are we by this motion saying anything more than the passages say? If yes, then what? If not, then are we simply affirming what these passages say?" asked Rev. Ray Sikkema of Aylmer, Ontario. "What is it that we are saying by referring to these passages?"

Reporter for the committee, Rev. Mark Vander Hart, explained the committee's thinking. "The overtures raised a different number of concerns. During our discussions we came to understand that there are different versions of the framework hypothesis. Obviously we are not exhaustive, but the committee wanted to say that the days in Genesis 1 are real days, real historical days. We're not trying to say more than Scripture says. We understand them to be real days in history."

Though many of the statements in the lengthy quote above are fine statements, there are troubling things which appear nevertheless. Why was the word "historical" removed? The stated reason was that it is "extra-confessional language." One might ask, "So what?" If it is indeed accurate, and probably eliminates any misunderstanding, why not keep it? Synodical decisions seldom use only the words of the confessions. Nor need they. Is the word "historical" extra-confessional? One might rather ask whether the word "historical" accurately reflects what the confessions teach concerning the creation days? What does the statement made by the reporter of the study committee mean, "During our discussions we came to understand that there are different versions of the framework hypothesis." Sadly, these different versions are not identified in the report. And is it true that there is a version of the framework hypothesis according to which the days of creation are six days of 24 hours and limited by a literal morning or evening? Is all of this a "play on words," a "smokescreen," which allows different views on creation within the URC while giving the appearance of maintaining the literal, 6-day, 24-hour, creation? 

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Jason Kortering

Discipline and Missions



About three months ago, I had a pleasant surprise.

A man, unknown to me, phoned and asked if he could come to talk with me. I consented and he shared with me his story.

He was a counselor in one of

the many drug rehab centers in Singapore. There he was involved in counseling a member of the ERCS who was struggling with the sin of drunkenness. Almost the entire organization was judgmental over what the church had done to

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this member. They had excommunicated him from the fellowship of the church. Many thought it was cruel to treat a member in this manner. Others said that it would drive him away from Christ, rather than draw him nearer. How could a church, which preached the love of God, actually cast out a member from her midst? Still others were perplexed, since they had not heard of such a thing being done before.

He came to me to share his observation about this act of Christian discipline.

He, too, had never heard of a Christian church doing such a thing. It was all new to him. In his counseling with this former member, he learned from him what the church really meant to him and how deeply he was affected by the thought that he was no longer a member of Christ's church on earth. He feared life. How could he deal with drunkenness without the support of his fellow Christians? How could he face death without the assurance of being right with God? This brother told me later that it was this Christian discipline, even the act of excommunication, more than anything else, that contributed to his repentance and reconciliation with Christ and His church.

That impressed this counselor, and he learned something new. Christian discipline by the church was very effective to lead sinners to repentance. He wanted to discuss this with me.

The former member was readmitted into the fellowship of the church and gratefully received and forgiven. It was his testimony only a few weeks ago that he has not touched any liquor for over three years. The thing that helped him see how serious his sin of drunkenness really was, was his separation from Christ and the church.

The testimony of this "stranger" was significant to me for two reasons.

First, Christian discipline is so

contrary to the culture in which we live. Most of you know that in the Asian context we speak often of "face" or "face-saving" or "losing face." That refers simply to some form of public humiliation or wounded pride. This is not limited to Asia, of course; such is the pride of all of us. Rather, it is just more prominent here. There are staring incidents, in which a person really stares at a stranger, which lead to fist fights or worse. The same is true for blowing the horn of the auto at another driver; it is humiliating and often ends in confrontation. The legal system dishes out heavy sentences as "deterrents," and that must be duly published in the newspaper to get its greatest effect. The real deterrent is to lose face. This carries over into the church. Any form of Christian discipline is abhorred and interpreted as "losing face." The result is that erring members stop coming to church very quickly or leave the church entirely.

Second, for this reason and others, the churches here do not practice Christian discipline. I fully realize that this is not peculiar to Singapore; the church in many places does not practice it. In this social setting, it is viewed as defeatist, and I have to admit there were times when I struggled to reconcile the activity of Christian discipline with the ineffectiveness I was observing.

The observation of this "stranger" was helpful, even though I had worked through the issues by the time he made his appearance.

The Marks of the True Church

Christian discipline by the church is not for us an option; it is a divine mandate. The words of the Lord Jesus to Peter teach us this, "I give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"

(Matt. 16:19). This is confirmed two chapters later, "And if he neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church (the elders): but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:17).

Our Reformed fathers summarized this in our Netherlands Confession, Article 29, under the heading of the Marks of the True Church. Let me quote just the pertinent part:

The marks by which the true church is known are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein, if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ, if church discipline is exercised in punishing sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, and all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the church.

Christian discipline is treated in more detail in Article 32. These marks of the true church apply to the church which is newly organized under the blessing of mission work as well as to the church which has been instituted for many years.

Marks of the True Christian

Less referred to, but no less important, is the mention in the same article of the Netherlands Confession of the marks of the true Christian.

With respect to those who are members of the church, they may be known by the marks of Christians, namely, by faith; and when they have received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof.

These marks form the foundation upon which the mark of Christian discipline is properly laid. Why is

it proper to discipline new converts who either err in their doctrine (beliefs) or practices (walk of life)? The answer is that Christ expects them, as well as all Christians, to grow in their faith and manifest themselves as godly. These marks as above described are based upon the teaching of the Bible.

Think for example of the exalted teaching of II Timothy 3:16 and 17: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." How humbling is the word of I Peter 1:15, 16: "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation: because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."

Such personal piety is expressed in our intimate walk with God. We love God and seek Him with our whole heart. We walk with him, even as Enoch of old. The sweetness of covenant fellowship is to meditate on His Word, worship Him, pray to Him, and thus to *enjoy* Him all the days of our life. Out of this quiet fellowship arises our public and daily confession of our faith. We are not ashamed to call Him our God. Obviously, it is not limited to such personal acts. As we are told in Philippians 2:12, 13: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." This challenge means that we must take our faith into every relationship we have with others. Chief among all of these is our worship of our great God on the Lord's day with our fellow saints. Then our daily walk in the midst of this world follows it. If we are single, we must work out our salvation as single, whether in school or in the market place. If we are married,

we must work it out in our marriage and in our parenting. Wherever we go and in all we do, we have the calling to let our light shine as Christians.

It is this balance that is so necessary in mission situations. Since the time of the Reformation the Christian church has seen the pendulum swing to one extreme or the other. Fundamentalists have laid such emphasis on saving people that they failed to teach them to work out that salvation. The extreme liberal part of the church reacted against this and promptly went in the other direction, stressing social life and the Christian social gospel at the expense of true salvation. The faithful church has always maintained that the Christian is saved to serve his Lord and Master and that if we fail in this, we sin greatly.

The marks of a true Christian set forth the biblical teaching by describing what God calls good and evil, faithfulness and failure. Sin must always be rooted out of the life of every Christian, no matter whether he is a first generation Christian or mature in His faith and practice. Failure to do this properly necessitates Christian discipline.

The Areas of Discipline

There are three such areas of Christian discipline.

First, there must be *self-discipline*. This is first and basic to all aspects of discipline. A Christian has the duty so to exercise his own faith that he examines himself personally and daily in order that he may confess to God his sins and seek forgiveness. The King James Version uses a word translated "temperance," which can better be translated "self-control." This is what self-discipline is all about. We must resist the devil and he will flee from us, and the strength to do that is to draw near to God (James 4:7, 8). The words of the inspired apostle ring true, we must put off the old man and its deeds

of lust and put on the new man, which is created after God in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:22-24).

Second, there must be *mutual-discipline*. Jesus described this effectively when He instructed us to pull out the beam that is in our own eye prior to our dealing with possible motes in our brother's eye (Matt. 7:1-5). Similarly, Jesus said that if we have something against our brother who has sinned against us, we must go to him and follow a procedure He specified as the proper way to resolve sins between us (Matt. 18:15-18). We must practice this in our homes as husbands and wives, parents and children, even extended family. We must be sure to follow these guidelines of mutual discipline within the local congregation of the church. We must extend this practice to all fellow Christians whom God places upon our pathway.

Thirdly, there must also be *church-discipline*. This is what we have described above. It is the work of the ruling elders (and the teaching elder, insofar as he is one of them) to deal with formal acts of instruction, warning of evil ways, calling to repentance fallen sinners, and even removing them from the church if their sin is offensive and their impenitence persistent.

Role of Missions and Christian Discipline

The preaching of the gospel, whether in the established congregation or in the mission field among people who are not yet instituted as a church, will always have a twofold effect. God will work faith in His children by the gospel and He will harden those whom He will (see II Cor. 2:14-17). Jesus expressed it graphically by the parable of the different kinds of soil upon which seed falls. Some will fall on the way side, on stony places, among thorns, and on good ground (Matt. 13). So it is with the preaching of the gospel. Some hearers may show faith tempo-

rarily, even for some time, but in the end prove that such response is not of the Holy Spirit. It is this fact that necessitates discipline within the church and in newly established congregations, especially when the membership is made up of newly converted people.

The Reformed churches practice the biblical truth of infant baptism. Those who differ with us often accuse us of filling the church with hypocrites. The same can be said of those who bring the gospel to the lost. They could be accused of filling the church with hypocrites. The answer to both such accusations is Christian discipline. Children who are born to Christian parents but manifest themselves as infidels must be cast out of the church by

her discipline. So also, new converts who prove themselves insincere must be put out of the church by that same discipline. This is Christ's order of preserving the church in purity of doctrine and life.


I am thankful that the gospel permeates all cultures. It is God's power of salvation to all who believe. Pride is the same all over the world. Fallen man does not want to bend the knee before a sovereign God and exalted Lord. Sinful man will make all sorts of excuses for his evil walk and justify his continuing in sin. But grace is greater than all our sins. God is able to save and to preserve those whom He saves.

He not only speaks, He also acts. He warns, but also disciplines. The preaching of the gospel and

exercise of Christian discipline are the means of grace to open and close the kingdom of heaven.

In this way the sacrament of holy baptism truly expresses the cleansing from sin as the way into God's presence, and the table of the Lord is the sign and seal of the nourishment that enables us to continue in sweet communion with God. By word and sacrament God works and strengthens us so that all those for whom Christ shed His precious blood and who are subsequently saved by sovereign grace will arrive safely in glory and be with Him forever.

Christian discipline is an important part of this word of salvation.

May God keep us faithful. 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Thomas à Kempis and Medieval Mysticism (4)

Introduction

In the previous article I described the ladder which mystics defined as necessary to climb to attain union with God. In this article I take a look at criticisms of mysticism which must be made.

Criticisms of Mysticism

There are various criticisms of mysticism that can be made which, as serious as they are, do not come to the heart of the matter. We mention these first. Some have said that in the quest for union with God and absorption into the divine

being, the mystic bypasses Christ. There is an element of truth in this, although it is not true of all mystics. However, when one reads the mystics one cannot help but think that the union with God which the mystic holds up as the ideal religion is such complete absorption into the divine essence that Christ is no longer the only way to the Father. One goes directly to God and hurls himself into the brilliantly shining ocean of the divine being without coming to Christ.

In the interests of a genuinely godly life, devotional exercises, meditations, solitude, and a life of prayer are held high as the ideal for one who would be saintly. It is, so the mystic says, better for a mother to read Augustine's *Confessions* than to wash the dirty dishes.

It is better for a father to spend the day on his knees than to pick up his lunch pail and punch the time clock at Steelcase.

It all brings to mind an incident from my youth. It was in grade school where we often had chapel speakers who were missionaries or missionary helpers. This particular chapel speaker whose speech I recall (I cannot even remember whether the speaker was male or female, although I think the latter) warned us with unmistakable premillennial emphases (which I did not recognize) that, because of the fact that Christ could come back at any time we ought to spend our time reading our Bibles so that Christ would find us doing this when He returned. Being a bit puzzled by the ques-

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tion of how I could spend my time reading my Bible and get my Arithmetic finished in time to please my teacher, I questioned my father about it. "Well," he said, "I'll tell you. You ought really to hoe the corn in the garden this afternoon. And even if you and I knew with absolute certainty that the Lord was coming back this afternoon, you ought still to go out and hoe the corn and keep right on hoeing until you saw Christ and He took the hoe out of your hands."

The point is that, while indeed the contemplative life of prayer and meditation is to be a part of our daily existence, the fact remains that we are given tasks to perform. The position taken by mystics often led to monasteries and cubicles far removed from life — as happened to Thomas à Kempis. We have work to do. We must do our work to God's glory, that is true. But we had better do the work for all that.

The Greatest Evil

But there is one evil in mysticism which is greater than all others. It is this. It divorces Christian experience from the objective Word of God. It speaks of communion with God through contemplation of the godhead itself. Often, when mystics speak of meditation or a life of contemplation, they do not refer to meditating on Scripture or contemplating God's revelation in Holy Writ; they mean direct, immediate contemplation of God Himself without any intervening mediating means. They just sit and think about God. They do not think about various propositions concerning God, and by means of these, think about God. They do not pay attention to any objective truth which God has revealed. They just think, vaguely, ethereally, wordlessly, thoughtlessly, of God, much in the same way one would think about a bright light — not thinking about why the light is bright, where it gets its energy to give light, how it is able to be so

bright, what the nature of the light is which it emits, but just thinking about light, so that the light floods one's mind simply as light. (That, someone once told me, is a good way to go to sleep.)

The mystic tips his hand when he describes his experience of God as so high, so other-worldly, so exalted that it is pure experience, beyond description in human words, ineffable (which word means indescribable), of the sort that lies beyond thought, beyond our senses, beyond cognitive powers and the rational operation of the mind. Pure experience — that is what it is.

That experience can easily embrace trances, visions, dreams, special revelations, direct speech of God to the consciousness, etc. In both cases, the Word of God is abandoned.

To set aside the Word of God is always very wicked. Some claim, and, in my judgment, with considerable justice, that Luther adopted the theory of consubstantiation (Christ's bodily presence in, with, and under the elements of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper), because he was so desperately afraid of the Zwickau prophets and their dreams, visions, and special revelations. In the view of consubstantiation, Luther gave an *objectivity* to the Word of God which, Luther believed, kept one from the subjectivism of mysticism.

As a side light, this is extremely interesting because Luther himself was influenced in his formative years by German mysticism. He was able, however, to throw it off completely and do fierce battle with the right wing of the Reformation, the mystical Anabaptists.

We must insist on an important truth which is being sacrificed on the altar of today's versions of mysticism. The only way we are able to know God is through His revelation to us. He is the transcendent One, so highly exalted above us that we can never climb any ladder, not even the ladder of the mystics, to contemplate Him as He is.

He must first speak. He must speak in a language which we are able to understand. Calvin talked about God speaking to us in baby talk because we are so small. God speaks of Himself in His speech. He speaks of who He is, what kind of God He is, what He does, how He works, etc., etc. He also tells us that, because He is the kind of God He is, we are to be the kind of people He demands. He is holy, we must be holy. We can know this only because God speaks in such a way that He tells us these things in words we understand.

So true is this that, on the one hand, God's speech is always a miracle, whether that speech be in creation or in Scripture. And, by the way, these two speeches of God are not really two speeches, as the theistic evolutionist insists; they are one speech saying the same thing about Christ and salvation as the great work of God. Only, we are able to hear His speech in creation only when God gives us the "hearing aids" of His Word in Scripture. On the other hand, God's speech to us is always limited, finite, only a part of the whole, only a dribbling of God's infinite depths. We can never know everything in the Scriptures and in creation. But, even if we could, we would still possess less than a thimble full of knowledge in comparison with all the oceans of this world.

That Word of God is the *only* way to know God. There is no short cut. There is no direct path. There is no speech of God directly to the soul — not even the assurance of our salvation. The Spirit indeed witnesses with our spirit that we are the sons of God, but the Spirit speaks of our sonship only through the Scriptures. The Spirit chains Himself to the Scriptures. The Spirit confines all His work to the Holy Word of God in the Bible. Where no Bible is, there is no Spirit.

Thus we know God before we can "feel" Him. What kind of nonsense is it to say, as some do, "I

felt the closeness of God?" How does one do that apart from Scripture? We must *know*, with our heads and in our minds, definite intellectual propositions found in Scripture to know Him. And, indeed, it is true that the more I know of Reformed dogmatics the better I know God — not simply know about Him, but know Him!

This is not intended to imply, of course, that the mere knowledge of Scripture in itself guarantees the delightful experience of God. The devil knows more about God than you and I. Hell is populated with learned theologians who have ThD and DD behind their names. But, although it is true that not all who know about God actually experience God, it is as true as it can be that those who experience God know Him first of all. And the knowledge of Him is intellectual, cognitive knowledge.

Earlier in these articles I made mention of the fact that God saves the whole man, body and soul, mind and will and emotions. But the emotions are part of the mind and will and not a power in themselves. When religion becomes an emotional matter, as it ought to become, it is so only because we appropriate its truths with the mind, and desire its truths with the will.

This amazing work of the transformation of our minds takes place by means of the work of the Spirit (consult Canons, 3 & 4, Arts. 12 - 14). The Spirit causes the truth of the Scriptures to be indelibly impressed upon our consciousness in such a way that these truths are reflected in our conscious experience. This is an amazing work, but it is part of God's way of saving us so that we know our salvation and can praise Him for it.

All the religious life is rooted in, based upon, empowered by, and in conformity with God's Word in Scripture. Do we desire to make confession of faith in our church? It is not enough to feel one is a Christian and to have some sense of Christ in one's heart. One had

better be able to give an account of the Reformed faith as contained in Scripture and the confessions. Do we want to have the sweet consciousness of fellowship with God? Then we had better pore over His Word and meditate upon its truths. There is no other way. Do we want such fellowship that God speaks to us and we to Him? His speech comes only and always through the Bible. Is God speaking to me? Yes, He is — because Psalm 27:1 says, Jehovah is my light and my salvation. And that is all that God says to me at the moment I am pondering that text. He may and does say that to me when I am surrounded by enemies who seek to destroy me with threats and fierce hatred. He says it to me when I need to know it and when my response is also His Word to me: Whom shall I fear? But it is there in the Bible, and sitting down and reading it is the only way I hear Him speak.

Do I have problems which need the solutions which divine guidance alone can provide? Then, foolishly and wickedly I do not say, "God put it on my heart to do this or that." I do not ask for the prayers of others so that I may know the will of God. (Maybe I ask for the prayers of others, but then it is only that others may pray that I put my nose more deeply into the Bible and receive a willingness to do what the Bible says.) I do not wait for some direct word of God, subjectively heard, spoken in my soul, to do this or that. That is nonsense and results only in doing, after all, what I had wanted to do all the time regardless of what the Bible says.

If you object and say, Yes, but my particular problem is not mentioned in the Bible because I want to know whether God wants me to build a new house, and I want to do the will of God; then the answer is: God tells you in the Bible. He tells you that a critical and important aspect of the Christian's life is to be a good steward of the earthly possessions which He gives and to seek the kingdom of God

and His righteousness first. And if you find that you do not have the wisdom to know how stewardship applies in this case, then ask of God who gives wisdom to all liberally and upbraids not, and it will be given you. Just ask in faith and do not be like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed. For wisdom is that spiritual, God-given gift by means of which we are able to apply the Word of God to every aspect of our lives.

The Holy Spirit binds Himself in all His work to the Word. We must do nothing less. To separate ourselves from the Word, or to separate the Spirit's work from the Word, is to get trapped in the quick sands of subjectivism. If anyone claims that the Holy Spirit speaks directly to him apart from the Word, he can make the Holy Spirit say anything that he wants the Spirit to say; and, indeed, this is precisely what he does. The Holy Spirit, in these subjective revelations, is always in full agreement with anything the receiver wants or thinks. There is never any dissent from above.


Our subjective assurance of our salvation is also inseparably tied to the Word. The Spirit speaks to us through the Word, and never apart from it. The Spirit does not use experiences, dreams, visions, inner voices, or anything of the like. The Word speaks. The Spirit speaks through that Word, also in our own consciousness.

The close inner communion of the soul with God in which we are caught up in the rapture of union with the divine may seem the ideal of the Christian life. But it is the siren call of Satan who would lead us away from the Word in which alone our souls ought to be anchored. Every child of God has times of great spiritual drought, when God is very distant and the inner life of the soul seems barren. The same thing happens to churches where zeal has been lost, love has grown cold, and piety seems a distant dream. The solution to the

problem is not to pray for revival with special outpourings of the Spirit apart from the Word, outpourings resulting in bizarre behavior reminiscent of medieval mysticism. The solution is not to seek

revival through some mystical contemplation of the divine. The solution for the church is the lively and faithful preaching of the Word. And the solution for the child of

God wandering in a wasteland is to tie himself to the Word and await times of spiritual refreshing.

Mysticism is wrong. In every form it takes. Let us cling to the Word. 

Grace Life

Rev. Mitchell Dick

On Getting a Life (1)

Get a life!" All over the place. Hear it? From somewhere near San Andreas' fault to wherever will shake: "Get a life!" On the ball diamond: "Get a life!" From one raging driver to another: "Get a life!" On the talk show and the sit-com, at the party. In nothing but fun, or in disgust and scorn. Because people want to make a point, or because they have run out of points to make. There's this exhortation: "Get a life!" In the hopes, one would surmise, of raising many a poor chap from the dead.

Surely you young adults have been called to such a life? Remember? You had just gotten your driver's license. And wheels. On I-96 going downtown. Doing mighty fine. Cruising. Freedom. At least one other person not so impressed. Maybe because you were in the left lane ... doing, you thought, an exciting 56. "Get a life!" you heard, from his passing Ferrari to your chugging Ford Escort.

But "Get a life!" shouts at us in so many different words and ways. Last Friday night at River-town (or maybe it was Sunday in Church?) you saw the legs and the cleavage. She was saying "Get a life!" That is: "Get a body like mine, get *somebody* like me ... and

live!" Every day and increasingly (soon from Standale?) Casinos call. "Go gaming with us! Roll, and win, and *live!*" Tommy says "Wear me!" Ringo says (OK: *said!*) "Listen to me!" Bud says "Drink me!" Simon says "Do this, do this, do this!" And all are saying: "Get a life!" Get this, go with us, try this, hip-hop with us and then and only then you will live! If you do not have what we tell you is vital, if you do not dream the dreams we dream, if you do not chew or go with girls that do(!), then you are missing ... *a life!* Not hankering to know Victoria's Secret? You are definitely weird. Not interested in having a good time (while you are losing all your money) at the slot machines? How pathetic! Don't watch Survivor? It must be you are dead.

So ... Get a life!



Well ... should we?

Dear young (or if you know one) readers, you know the answer! There is really only one proper response to this "Get a life!" thing. The response is "No!"

For, after all, Lifers are really saying just this: come get a life ... *without God!* Get things. Get a lot of them. Get the whole world. Especially get, do, wear, have tattooed, vote for the popular things and the things the beautiful, darling, darlings of Hollywood get, do, wear, have tattooed, and vote for.

Get them all! Get the best! And especially get what is forbidden. Just don't get God! Don't get religion. Don't get Jesus. Don't get intolerant. Don't start thinking about heaven, and especially hell. Don't spoil the fun of life on this earth without God.

Therefore, when the ads, and the philosophies, and the music, and the politicians, and the stars themselves call us to "Get a life!" it is no time for dialogue, debate, or dumb statements like "I'll get back to you later." Christians say "No!" And our one word to these pro-life people is not because we prefer to remain dead, as they say we are, to rest in uncultured, starched shirt, purityrannical, prudish peace. Rather, we say "No!" to the world's call to get a life because, thank God, *we already have a life!*

That is the truth. As believers in Christ we have, indeed, a marvelous life. It is nothing less or different than the life *with* God, and the life *of* God in our soul. Hear how one nineteenth century writer describes this:

The believer in Jesus is a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). He is "born of the Spirit"; Christ dwelleth in him by faith; and this constitutes his new and spiritual life. A single but emphatic expression of the apostle unfolds the doctrine and confirms the fact, "Christ in you" (Colossians 1:27). It is not so much that the *believer lives*, as that *Christ lives in him*.

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Thus the apostle expresses it: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me...." And this forms the high and holy life of every child of God; — "Christ who is our life" (Colossians 3:4). To him, as the covenant head and mediator of his people, it was given to have life in himself, that he might give eternal life to as many as the Father had given him. Christ possesses this life (John 5:26); Christ communicates it (John 5:25); Christ sustains it (John 6:57); and Christ crowns it with eternal glory (John 17:24). (Octavius Winslow, *Personal Declension*)

Now that is *the life we by the grace of God have!* It is the real and blessed and grace life — the life of God with us and us with God in and through the Christ of God. Yes, the Christian life, the *eternal* life, the *soul* life quickened in us by the Spirit of God, is *the* life. There is no other life that is true

life. There is no other life that is the great life. For Christian life is the "abundant" life, the "preeminent" the "extraordinary" the "superior," and the "excellent" life of which Jesus speaks when He says *I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly* (John 10:10).

Yes, friends, it is a bit of heaven, this Christian life. Has to be. It is given freely from the Fount of life through the Mediator who is *the* life. A bit of glory. For through faith we happen to be *risen* with Christ (Col. 3:1), reigning in glory with Him (Eph. 2:6), hoping with a living, substantive (Heb. 11:1) hope, for the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us (I Pet. 1:3, 4).

This life ... we *have!*




So "No!" to "Get a life!" is the

obvious Christian response. Having the life of Christ, what other life could we need? If, as the Word of God says, Christ's *grace* is sufficient for us (II Cor. 12:9), then surely His *grace life* is enough.

But just saying "No!" is not always easy, and never is natural. In fact, and to my shame, I myself, for a long time, said the easy "Yes!" to the world's call to get a life, and even called others to it. Even now saying "No!" to "Get a life!" (a life without God!) can be a real challenge. And I suspect it is the same with all of us, and a special challenge for youth.

Why is this? How can we better resist devils hissing "Get a life!"?

Next time. Until then, read and reread the paragraphs nine through thirteen of this article and the texts mentioned there. Think about the truth presented there of your life with God. *Grace Life for you!*

Get it? 

In His Fear

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

Praying for Jerusalem's Peace

At times we can be rather self-centered in the requests we bring to God in prayer. This is the case when our petitions are mostly for things we want or need for ourselves. As a result, we fail to pray for certain things that ought also to be included in our prayers.

One of the petitions we perhaps fail to include is the one mentioned in Psalm 122:6. In this text we are commanded, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!" We ought regularly to do that. We should not be so caught up in our own problems and needs that we forget to ask God for this.



To pray for the peace of Jerusalem is to pray for peace in the church of Christ. Jerusalem is the church as the gathering of believers and their seed within a congregation and within a denomination. However, she is not just anything and everything that calls itself church. Jerusalem is the church where Christ is present. And Christ is present where His truth is confessed and His Word is preached. There Christ lives with and in His people through His Word and Spirit. It is for the peace of that church that we must pray.

But what is this peace for which we pray? It is not a petition for earthly peace, as is sought by

those who hold to an erroneous view of the millennium of Revelation 20. Nor is it a petition for peace between the church and the world. Rather, it is a petition for peace "within the walls" of Jerusalem. We are praying that unity and harmony may exist in the church of Christ as a whole, as well as among the members of that church mutually.

This peace, it must be remembered, is a reality. It is something that our Lord Jesus Christ, by His saving work, has established between us and God, as well as among us as believers. Since this peace exists, it ought to characterize the church of Christ.

Through this petition we ask God to bestow upon His church

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that blessing of peace that Christ has earned for her. Our prayer is, "Lord, may those who are at peace with Thee through Christ live in peace with each other. May all strife and hatred be gone. May those who enjoy blessed fellowship with Thee also enjoy such fellowship with each other."

We ought to pray for this peace. We ought to pray for it within the congregation of which we are members. We ought to pray for it within our Protestant Reformed Churches. And we ought to pray for it on behalf of the church of Christ wherever she is present in this world.

Do we do so? Do we pray for the peace of Jerusalem when synods and classes meet? Or do we instead criticize the work of such assemblies? Do we pray for the peace of Jerusalem when there is strife within a congregation? Or do we rather sit back and condemn that congregation and its members? Do we pray for the peace of Jerusalem when we hear of God's saints being persecuted and killed for their faith? Or are they simply forgotten by us?



There is an urgent need to pray for Jerusalem's peace.

We need to do so, first of all, because of the attacks that come upon the church from without. The devil and his many cohorts, the enemies of the church of Christ, relentlessly attack her. They seek to drive her into extinction. Harsh and cruel are their attacks. Sometimes those attacks are bold and obvious, as through physical persecution. At other times the devil uses more subtle means to attack the church. But whatever the means, these attacks threaten seriously the peace of the church of Christ.

Another reason for the urgent need to pray for Jerusalem's peace is because of the troubles within the church. The members of the church, though saved, are still sin-

ners. As a result, congregations or denominations are often characterized by strife and disagreement, discord and disunity. Some members think too highly of themselves and have no time for others. Other members are not willing to forgive those who sin against them. Still others refuse to see and confess their faults to God and to one another. All of this greatly disturbs, and in some cases even destroys, the peace of the church.

The church urgently needs the prayer for her peace.



To pray for peace implies that we seek peace.

This means we are those who keep our tongues from evil, and our lips from speaking guile; we depart from evil and do good; we seek peace and pursue it (Ps. 34:13, 14). We put aside all that might disturb peace between us and a fellow believer. We put off the old man of pride and envy. We refrain from all gossip and slander concerning others. We love our fellow saints, even if they are difficult to love. We speak good and kind words to them and about them, even though we might find it much easier and much more enjoyable to speak evil. We are peacemakers in the church of Christ.

Seeking peace involves realizing that it is always sin that creates a lack of peace. Sin causes separation and strife. Sin takes away the possibility of God's people dwelling together in unity. When that sin remains unconfessed and unforgiven, it creates enmity and hatred between those who, in Christ, ought to be friends and ought to be at peace with one another.

That sin does this is not something we would deny. But the problem is that we are very quick to think or say that the sin that

does it is not our own sin, but the sin of others. We convince ourselves that the lack of peace is always someone else's fault. If only that particular person (or group of people) would stop being so stubborn and difficult, all the problems of the church would soon be resolved.

However, if we understand and believe that sin is the cause of disunity in the church, we ought first of all to examine ourselves. We are all sinners. It is very well possible that our own sin is also contributing to the lack of peace. In fact, it is highly unlikely that this is not the case. If nothing else, our sin of pride is a contributing factor — our sin of esteeming ourselves better than others. Those who seek peace are quick to see and confess their own sins.



There is a crucially important reason why we ought to pray for Jerusalem's peace, and why we ought to be diligently seeking her peace. It is this, our love for God's church.

God Himself loves His church. Eternally He chose it and every member of it in Christ. In time He has purchased that church to Himself with the blood of His own dear Son. The church is as precious to Him as His own Son. He loves His Son, and He loves His Son's body and bride. He loves her as His glorious work in Christ. Understanding God's

great love for His church as the gathering of the great multitude of the elect, we love her too.

That body of Christ, we realize, comes to manifestation on this earth in the institution of the church. The gathering of believers and their seed in the church on earth is a visible manifestation of Christ's body. We therefore love the church as institute as well.

... if we understand and believe that sin is the cause of disunity in the church, we ought first of all to examine ourselves.

We love her as such because of what she is and means for us. We are members of that church. She is our "spiritual mother." Within her walls we have been raised. Through her we have been taught the precious truths and riches of the gospel. As living members, we are continually nourished and fed by her with food for our souls. Within her we experience blessed fellowship with God and with fellow believers. We love the church and our blessed membership in her, and therefore desire and seek her peace.

Many today do not love the church. They are apathetic toward her. They believe there is no need to have a church or to be a member of one. They convince themselves they can worship God anywhere, apart from the church. For that reason they do not attend church, do not confess their faith, and do not participate in the life of the church. They do not value the church for what she is as the means God uses to nourish our souls unto life eternal.

May that never be true of us! Let us, young and old alike, love the church. May the cause of the kingdom of Christ be dear to our hearts and uppermost in our minds. May we be concerned, not for our own success in this world, or even in the church, but for the advancement of God's kingdom and covenant. May church-life be central in our lives, and Sunday the day we enjoy most of all the days of the week.

Our love for the church, however, may not be a selfish and narrow-minded love. It is easy to have that kind of love. Then we think only of the particular congregation of which we are members. And we think very little, or not at all, of the other churches within our denomination. We are selfish and narrow-minded. We consider only our own needs and leave other churches to fend for themselves. We give generously to our own general and building funds, but grudgingly to

other collections. And if another church has strife, we judge and condemn her instead of praying for and seeking her peace.

It should not be that way. Our love must be a love for the denomination. We are to be mindful of every congregation. And, beyond our own denomination, we must remember and pray for the church of Christ universal.



Another reason why we must pray for and seek peace in the church is because we realize the church's need for peace so that in and through her God's people can be blessed. It is a fact that when there is lack of peace it is practically impossible to worship. The minister finds it difficult to preach. The members find it difficult to listen. And if this strife exists on a personal level between two members, neither of them is able truly to worship. That is exactly why Christ commands us to resolve such differences before we enter God's house in order to worship (Matt. 5:21-24).

We pray for and seek peace, therefore, so that we are able to worship and to be blessed through the Word and sacraments in worship. We need peace so that God might provide us, within the walls of Jerusalem, the nourishment necessary for our souls.

That is a desire we have not just for ourselves personally, but for all the members of the body of Christ. Psalm 122 speaks of that, too. We pray for the peace of the church, not just for our own sakes, but also for our "brethren and companions'" sakes. We have a concern for all of God's people. We love God's saints. They are our companions and brethren. We want them, too, to be fed by the Word that brings peace and comfort to our souls.

... when there is lack of peace it is practically impossible to worship.

What a blessing it is when there is peace in the church of Christ. Then worship is a joy. Then fellowship with God's people is something we look forward to. Then we are eager to gather with them so that together we may praise our God.

But what an awful thing when that peace is lacking. What an awful thing when, on account of our sins, we create an atmosphere in the church which makes true worship of God all but impossible. What an awful thing when, as a direct result of our hatred and pride, church is a place where we would rather not be, and fellowship with God's people is something we prefer to avoid.

Pray for Jerusalem's peace, but also seek and pursue it!



The prayer for Jerusalem's peace is a prayer, finally, for the coming of the day of Christ. In this world we will not have perfect peace in the church. Sin still exists. It disrupts peace again and again. The church is far from perfect.

But true peace is coming. Then there will be no more fighting or strife, not even among those who now in this life cannot agree. In the new Jerusalem, none will hurt or destroy another. The church, as gathered from all nations of the world

and throughout all ages of history, will be a perfectly united whole and will lift up one harmonious voice of praise to God. Amazing peace! Wonderful peace!

The prayer for Jerusalem's peace is therefore also this prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Come to deliver us from all strife! Give us soon that eternal peace!" Is that our prayer?

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!



Congregation Activities

On July 18 a sister congregation was organized by Classis East through the consistory of the Hudsonville, MI PRC. Forty-four families and thirteen individuals became charter members of Trinity PRC. Of that total, 34 families and 10 individuals came from the Hudsonville congregation and 10 families plus 3 individuals from other of our PR churches. Those charter members can be broken down even further by noting that the group totals 177 souls, with 99 being confessing members and 78 baptized members. Rev. B. Gritters, pastor at Hudsonville and appointed moderator for Trinity, officiated at the organization, preaching from Psalm 122:6 under the theme, "Love For God's Church." Four elders and three deacons were elected. The organization was held in the building that the new congregation is purchasing from Hudsonville Reformed Church for about \$750,000, which includes a sanctuary that seats about 400 and an education wing, two cadet-type out-buildings, and a parsonage.

With the unanimous approval of its congregation, the Grace PRC in Standale, MI is moving ahead with expansion plans for their sanctuary. Approved plans call for expansion to begin as soon as possible, with Grace's current Building Committee serving as the general contractor for the project. The congregation also decided to fund the project by using the current balance in their New Building Fund, with the remainder of the funds coming from a financial drive and interest bearing notes, with the balance, if required, coming from a bank.

Mission Activities

Rev. and Mrs. R. Moore arrived safely back in Ghana — and went right back to work. Rev. Moore stopped off at the radio station

on his way from the airport on Thursday night, to take charge of the regular weekly call-in radio program. Then he went home to greet those who had gathered there to welcome them back. Rev. Moore writes, "Thus we are back in the harness and it feels good. We had an enjoyable time in the States, but for now are glad to be back in Ghana."

Sister-Church Activities

Although the summer of 2002 may seem like a long way off, it will be here quicker than we all would like to think. With that in mind we take this opportunity to let you know that the British Reformed Fellowship is sponsoring a conference at Castlewellan Castle in County Down, Northern Ireland from July 20-27, 2002. This is the same place where the conference was held in 1998. Here's an opportunity for you to stay in a real castle for a week, enjoy beautiful grounds, which include a lake and an arboretum, and fellowship with saints from the British Isles and elsewhere. If you like to make plans well in advance, we urge you to consider this worthwhile event. More information will undoubtedly follow in the coming months.

School Activities

This month many of us will send our children off to our own Christian schools. Perhaps we often forget that not all our children have that wonderful privilege. One group dedicated to organizing their own Christian school is the Association for the Heidelberg PR Christian School. This association is made up of parents from the Bethel PRC in the Chicago area whose desire is to establish their own Christian school. Presently their children are either home-schooled or attend Baptist, Presbyterian, or Christian Reformed schools. This association also recently hosted a conference entitled, "Creation, Science, and Scripture," with Mr. Dave D'Armond, a geologist and Regional Representative for the Institute for

Creation Research, as quest speaker. Please remember in your prayers these like-minded believers who understand the importance of Christian covenant education as it is realized in our own Protestant Reformed schools.

The annual Midwest Secondary Education Society meeting was held this summer in Iowa. Of note we read that the Society approved the proposal to implement a time-line for opening a school in August 2005.

We also pass along our heartfelt congratulations to the Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN, which on July 27 celebrated their 50th anniversary. Former teachers, principals, and students joined together for an evening of praise, singing, and reminiscing, all with gratitude to our heavenly Father.

Minister Activities

The Hull, IA PRC made a trio from which to call a second missionary to Ghana: Rev. W. Bekkering, Rev. M. DeVries, and Rev. R. Miersma. Rev. Bekkering was elected.

Rev. A. denHartog received the call from the Hope PRC in Walker, MI to be minister-on-loan to Singapore.

After Rev. A. Brummel declined their call, the congregation of Randolph, WI PRC extended a call to Rev. C. Haak. With him on that trio were the Revs. M. DeVries and R. Hanko.

A program to commemorate Rev. J. Kortering's 40 years in the ministry was held at the Hope PRC in Walker, MI on July 13.

Congratulations are in order for Rev. R. Smit and his wife, Tricia, who were blessed with the birth of a baby daughter, Irene Ruth, on June 30.

Food For Thought:

"The bait is not put into the trap to feed the mouse, but to catch him."

— Charles Spurgeon 

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

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 26, 2001 our parents and grandparents,

JOHN and JUDY KALSBECK,
celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary. We are grateful to our heavenly Father for the years He has given them together. We are blessed through the covenant instruction they have given us and their continued support through prayers and example. We wish them God's blessing and all our love as they continue their lives together.

"For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: Thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name" (Psalm 61:5).

- ✿ Joel and Jordana Mulder
Kylie, Collin, Dana, Brooke
- ✿ Jay and Lora Kalsbeek
Tristan
- ✿ Tim and Gwennan Engen
Olivia, Charlie
- ✿ Chad and Erika Stuit
- ✿ Dan and Tamara Kalsbeek
Allen, Brett
- ✿ David and Kristin Korhorn
- ✿ Trevor and Sara Kalsbeek
- ✿ Alex Kalsbeek
- ✿ Kenton Kalsbeek
- ✿ Ethan Kalsbeek

Grandville, Michigan

REMINDER TO PARENTS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On July 21, our parents,
ARVIN and ROSE BLEYENBERG,
celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. We are thankful for God's greatness given to us through them. Their covenantal instruction, guidance, and godly example have been and continue to be a blessing for us.

Our prayer is that the Lord will continue to uphold them and bless them in the years to come. "The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:5, 6).

- ✿ Ivan Bleyenbergh
- ✿ Gerard and Lila Vaca Guzman
Daniel, Carmen, Nicole
- ✿ Rick and Sharon Corson
Kyle, Kody, Kayla
- ✿ Kevin and Arlys Vink
Monica, Travis, Mitchell
- ✿ Verlyn and Jennifer Bleyenbergh
- ✿ Vonda Bleyenbergh
- ✿ Mark Bleyenbergh & Kristin Wassink
- ✿ David Bleyenbergh
- ✿ Rodney Bleyenbergh

Edgerton, Minnesota

NOTICE

Grace PRC in Standale, MI, is offering 5-year and 10-year notes to finance their sanctuary expansion. The interest rates for the 5-year note is 6.75% and 7.25% for the 10-year note. For additional information, contact Dave Moelker at (616) 538-2550, 1 (800) 421-3518, or Michael Kortering at (616) 667-1154.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On July 21, 2001, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. WILLIAM SMIT,
celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. We express our thanksgiving to our heavenly Father for the many blessings He has given to them and to us through them. May the Lord's abundant blessings continue to rest upon them from above for Christ's sake alone.

"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1a).

- ✿ Peter and Linda Smit
William, David, Lanae, Lorraine, Suzanna
- ✿ Fred and Cathy Hanko
Mandy, Kyle, Brent, Eric
- ✿ Brian and Dorothy VanKoughnett
- ✿ Rev. Richard and Tricia Smit
John, Rebekah, Jay, Irene
- ✿ William Smit

Lacombe, Alberta, Canada

IMPORTANT MEETING

The annual meeting of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA), publisher of the *Standard Bearer* and of many Reformed books, will be held on Thursday, September 27, at 8 p.m. in Hudsonville PRC, Hudsonville, MI. Prof. David J. Engelsma, editor of the *Standard Bearer*, will speak on "Herman Hoeksema's Romans sermons." The topic concerns a series of 97 sermons by Herman Hoeksema on the book of Romans that have never been published, but are now being published by the RFPA as a devotional commentary. The story of the existence of this valuable exposition of Romans is fascinating. All are welcome to attend the meeting. Show your support for the work of the RFPA by attending. Refreshments will be served after the meeting.

UPCOMING LECTURES

Biblical Worship in a Modern Era

September 14, 2001

Friday 8:00 P.M.

The Regulative Principle of Worship
Professor David Engelsma

Southeast PR Church
1535 Cambridge Ave. S.E.
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506

September 15, 2001

Saturday 9:30 A.M.

Shall We Dance, Rock, or Play
Rev. Barry Gritters

Saturday 11:00 A.M.

The Believer's Role in Worship
(Passive Spectator or Active Participant)
Rev. Charles Terpstra

Refreshments will be provided.

If you have questions or need directions, please call (616) 458-8577.