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Jesus: The Light of the World

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

John 8:12

The gospel of John records seven times that Jesus said, "I am." I am the Bread of Life; I am the good Shepherd; I am the way, the truth, and the life; I am the resurrection and the life....

And now here, I am the light of the world.

Jesus speaks of following Him as the light of the world. Do you follow this great light? It is extremely important that you do so! Those who follow Jesus as their light shall never walk in darkness but have the light of life. In turn, those who do not follow Jesus as their light will walk in darkness. And there are many who do so!



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

I am the light of the world!

What a claim Jesus makes for Himself. He alone can make such a claim.

Notice that Jesus claims first of all to be the light. "I am the light."

On the basis of Scripture we can distinguish three different kinds of light.

First, there is physical light. This is the light that comes from the sun. The opposite of this light is the darkness of night caused by the going down of the sun.

Secondly, there is natural light. Natural light is intellectual knowledge. The opposite is the darkness of ignorance. In keeping with this we speak of the Dark Ages, that period of history when there was widespread ignorance. We also speak of the Age of Enlightenment, that period of history characterized by a resurgence of learning and knowledge.

Finally, Scripture speaks of spiritual light. Spiritual light is spiritual perfection and goodness. Spiritual darkness is sin and evil. This aspect of light is set forth in I John 1:5: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." This means

that God is the essence of all goodness and perfection. And there is to be found no sin in Him.

Jesus claims that He is the light. Jesus is that personally. Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God in our flesh. Since He is God, Jesus is light. In fact, it is through the person and work of Jesus that the light of God's perfections and goodness are revealed to men.

Jesus is not only light. He is the light of the world.

The term "world" is used often in the inspired writings of the apostle John. The most well known is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." By "world" John means all the nations of the world, in distinction from only the Jewish nation. In the Old Testament, God's salvation was almost exclusively for the Jews. With the coming of Jesus Christ, salvation would be extended to all nations of the world. This is the emphasis of John's gospel.

In keeping with this, Jesus indicates that He is the light of the world. This means that He is the

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One who enlightens the world. He it is who gives light to the world.

As the light of the world Jesus enlightens the world intellectually by giving the world the knowledge of God. God is the one great reality of life. If you will know what is real, you must know about God — His identity, His character, His will, and His purpose to save the world in Jesus Christ. The true knowledge of God is not something that mankind has naturally or innately. If man will know God, he must be enlightened. Jesus is the light of the world in that He imparts that knowledge to mankind. He did that in the Old Testament as the Son of God through the prophets. He did that during His earthly ministry. After His death and exaltation He continued to reveal the realities of God through the apostles.

As the light of the world, Jesus has also with great care preserved that knowledge of God in Scripture by the miracle of infallible inspiration. And as the light of the world Jesus continues to make known the true knowledge of God by calling men to the office of the ministry and sending them throughout the world to proclaim the true knowledge of God as recorded in Scripture.

But Jesus is also the light of the world in that He enlightens the world spiritually. It is not enough to enlighten mankind intellectually about the realities of God and salvation. On account of the fall, spiritual darkness has taken hold of mankind so that he repudiates everything that Christ makes known to him. It is sheer nonsense to him. He hates and despises all that he knows about God. If man will believe and embrace the true knowledge of God, he must be enlightened spiritually. This Jesus does as the light of the world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and in connection with the preaching of the Word, Jesus so enlightens the hearts of men that they embrace the true knowl-

edge of God and embrace Him as the Savior of their souls. Whom does Jesus so enlighten? Jesus enlightens the whole world of men whom the Father has given Him and for whom He also gave His life on the cross.



And those whom Jesus enlightens follow Him.

To follow Jesus is to be His disciple. In Bible times a disciple literally followed a teacher from village to village, sat at his feet to learn what the master taught, and so embraced his master's teaching that it directed his whole life. Following Jesus today is much the same. It means regularly to sit at Jesus' feet to receive His word. We do that when we sit under the preaching of the gospel, when we hear the instruction in the catechism room, when we study our Bibles, and when we receive the instruction of our fellow saints. But there is more. To follow Jesus also means that we receive and embrace His teachings so that they direct our whole life.

In a certain sense, following Jesus requires that Jesus has already enlightened us. The emphasis of Jesus in this passage is that following Jesus results in our being enlightened. But there must be a work of grace to enlighten us before we can even follow Jesus. This is because we are naturally controlled by the darkness of unbelief. To follow Jesus is an act of faith, a faith that we receive only after we are enlightened by the light of the world.

How important it is to follow Jesus as the light of the world.

Many who look for a guiding light in their life neither look to Jesus nor follow Him. They follow the light of science, psychology, philosophy, the opinion of the majority, and the learning of great scholars. What a disaster to follow lights such as these! How foolish to let these lights determine your belief, goals, attitudes, and

judgments. All these lights ignore and even contradict the light that Jesus sheds on life. These lights of men are no lights at all. They have no true light to shed on your life. Follow these lights and you will remain in darkness.

As the eternal Son of God, Jesus alone is the true light of the world. He alone can show us the eternal realities of life. He alone has the truth concerning God and how to prosper under His blessing. We must follow Jesus alone as the light of the world. For that reason, we must judge everything we hear and learn in light of His teachings.



Those who follow Jesus as the light of the world shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

To walk in darkness is to live your life in ignorance and wickedness.

Those who follow the lights of this world will most definitely walk in darkness. They will be ignorant of the great realities of life as those realities center in God and His work of salvation in Jesus Christ. And in that ignorance their lives will be very sinful. They will live lives that eventually lead them to the destruction of God's eternal wrath.

Those who follow Jesus will never walk in darkness. It is impossible truly to follow Jesus and walk in darkness. If you will avoid walking in the darkness of this world, follow Jesus.

On a positive note, those who follow Jesus as the light of the world will have the light of life.

They will have light. They will have the natural light of the true knowledge of God. They will have the spiritual light of God's goodness and perfection. This is because Jesus enlightens all who follow Him.

And in that light they will have life.

Light is the key to all life.

This is true in the physical

realm. Without the light of the sun, nothing lives. That is why God created light on the first day of the creation week.

But the same is true in the natural realm. Without the natural light of knowledge and learning, we could not live and survive in God's creation.


Above all is this true in the spiritual realm. God is the living God. He is the living God in that He enjoys a wonderful life of

friendship and fellowship within Himself as the triune God. God enjoys this internal life only because He is light. Were the three persons sinful and wicked (darkness), they certainly could not live together in the one divine being. There would be endless conflict and strife among them. But because they are perfect and good (light), they can and do enjoy a blessed life together. And that is also the key for our life with God. Only when we are light can we live

a life of friendship and fellowship with the God of light.

This is the ultimate fruit of following Jesus as the light of the world. Jesus enlightens all those who follow Him in true faith. In that light they live. They live with God, eternally enjoying His friendship and fellowship.

What is your light? Who is your light?

Follow Jesus as the light of the world and live. 

Editorial

"He Shines in All That's Fair" (and Curses All That's Foul) (7)

Common Grace for Culture

W

herever common grace is defended, the main reason is "culture."

Common grace is necessary to account for culture. Common grace is necessary to explain the political, scientific, technological, medical, and artistic developments of the world of the ungodly. Common grace is necessary to justify a Christian's use of the cultural products of the ungodly world. Common grace is necessary as the power and warrant of the Christian's earthly life in the world.

Culture was the driving force behind Abraham Kuyper's (and Herman Bavinck's) elaborate development of and strong emphasis on common grace. In his *Lectures on Calvinism*, Kuyper made common grace fundamental to the believer's relation to the world.

The third fundamental relation which decides the interpretation of life is the relation which you

bear to the world. As previously stated, there are three principal elements with which you come into touch: viz., God, man and the world. The relation to God and to man into which Calvinism places you being thus reviewed, the third and last fundamental relation is in order: viz., your attitude toward the world.... In this also ... [Calvinism] has ... honored ... the world as a Divine creation, and has at once placed to the front the great principle that there is a particular grace which works Salvation, and also a common grace by which God, maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse which rests upon it, arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify Himself as Creator (*Lectures on Calvinism*, Eerdmans, 1953, pp. 28-30).

Kuyper scored opponents of his common grace theory as guilty of "turning their back on ordinary human life in spiritual one-sidedness and presumptuous pride" ("Com-

mon Grace," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt, Eerdmans, 1998, p. 190).

Similarly, Herman Bavinck presented common grace as the solution to the problem of "religion and culture." According to Bavinck, "The entirety of the rich life of nature and society exists thanks to God's common grace" ("Common Grace," tr. Raymond C. Van Leewen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 [April 1989]: 56, 60).

Culture was at the bottom of the Christian Reformed Church's adoption of the three points of common grace in 1924. The evidence was its stinging criticism of those who objected to common grace as world-fleeing Anabaptists.

Culture is also the main ground in Dr. Richard Mouw's defense of common grace, *He Shines in All That's Fair* (Eerdmans, 2001). The third, last, and most important reason why Mouw advocates common grace is culture. The subtitle of the book makes this plain: *Culture and Common Grace*.

Mouw expresses his cultural concern at the outset.

In these pages I will reflect on the notion of “common grace,” as it has been debated by thinkers in the Calvinist tradition. What is it that Christians can assume they have in common with people who have not experienced the saving grace that draws a sinner into a restored relationship with God? (p. 3).

We need to search for the proper grounds of commonness. But it is important to search carefully. On what basis do we posit a commonality between those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ and those who have not done so? This question has particular importance as we try to articulate a biblical perspective for Christian involvement in public life in our contemporary context (p. 6).

My specific focus will be on the relevance of teachings about common grace for our understanding of *culture* in our contemporary context. Is there a non-saving grace that is at work in the broader reaches of human cultural interaction, a grace that expedites a desire on God’s part to bestow certain blessings on all human beings, elect and non-elect alike—blessings that provide the basis for Christians to cooperate with, and learn from, non-Christians? (p. 14; the emphasis is Mouw’s)

“Culture,” an Unhelpful Term

The term “culture” is singularly unhelpful for the discussion that Mouw raises in *He Shines*, as it has been singularly unhelpful in the entire controversy over common grace. Culture is not a biblical term. It does not occur in the Reformed confessions. There is no single, specific, standard understanding of the term.

The term is ambiguous. It can mean the entire, distinctive way of life of a certain people, race, or nation. Thus, we speak of Dutch culture.

The word “culture” is also used to refer to everyday earthly life in the various ordinances established

by the Creator: marriage and family; labor; and civil government.

Culture often means the development, use, and enjoyment of education, art, and science. If a woman has graduated from university, preferably an Ivy League school, reads a little Shakespeare, and attends the symphony now and then, she is popularly thought to be cultured. Closely associated with this understanding of culture is the awed use of the word by many college professors, Christians among them, to refer to “the glory that was Greece.”

Although most defenders of common grace are loath to admit it, not only the Reformed tradition in the days of its strength but also the Christian tradition in the days of its purity consigned culture to the abyss. They had in mind the lawless, shameless way of life of a nation or a society that was well-developed in godlessness. Culture in this sense comes very close to the meaning of “world” in I John 2:15-17: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

What sometimes happens when the issue of common grace and culture is discussed and debated in these terms is that the defender of common grace speaks well of culture in one or all of the first three senses of the term as outlined above, whereas the opponent of common grace condemns culture in the fourth sense of the term. Or, as is more often the case, the opponent of common grace repudiates common grace as approving culture in the fourth sense—the wicked way of life of the ungodly world—whereupon the defenders of common grace make him out to be an anti-cul-

tural barbarian or, what seemingly is worse, an Anabaptist, as though he rejected culture in the first three senses.

Because the term “culture” is ambiguous and unhelpful, I want to address Dr. Mouw’s deepest concerns in his defense of common grace without using the term.

The Deepest Concerns of Richard Mouw

In general, Mouw’s concern is what Abraham Kuyper described as the Christian’s relation to the world, in distinction from his relation to God and his relation to man.

Specifically, Mouw, like Kuyper before him, has three concerns. First, we must explain the continuing existence of the earthly creation after the fall of Adam. Particularly, we must account for the existence and development of ungodly men and women, especially as regards their grand civilizations and their notable achievements in politics, science, medicine, technology, and art.

Second, we must account for the Christian’s life in society, nation as well as neighborhood. On what ground does the Christian live earthly life to the full? More pointedly still, on what ground does he freely associate and cooperate with unbelievers in all areas of everyday earthly life? What is the basis for his working with the ungodly every day on the job? On what basis does the Christian woman cooperate with her non-Christian neighbors in a garage sale, or in a neighborhood watch against kidnappers of children and burglars? With what right do Reformed citizens participate in national life with those who are members of false churches, members of other religions, and avowed atheists, by voting in elections, by serving in the armed forces, and even by running for political office?

In short, why does not, and why *may* not, the Reformed Christian physically withdraw from ungodly society as the old Anabaptists did in Munster and

the contemporary Hutterites are doing in North Dakota?

Third, we must justify the Christian's use and enjoyment of the inventions and products of the wicked. On what ground may a Christian student read, and benefit from, idolater Plato? On what ground may a Christian minister listen to, and benefit from, a lecture by a heretical theologian? On what ground may a Christian enjoy classical music written by ungodly Mozart and performed by a mostly unbelieving symphony orchestra under the direction of a worldly conductor? On what ground may Richard Mouw, when he is not hard at work occasioning editorials in the *Standard Bearer* by writing apologies for common grace, relax by watching Tiger Woods play golf, and even take pleasure in Woods' putting ability?

Can We Live Rightly in the World Without Common Grace?

In every case, the explanation is common grace, says Richard Mouw, and most Reformed and Presbyterian churches agree. Common grace accounts for the continuing existence of the fallen earthly creation, especially the development of the ungodly world in history. Common grace is the warrant and power of the Christian's earthly life in society. Common grace justifies the Christian's use of the world's (and here I allow

myself the use of the term I have banned) "cultural products."

Further, charge the champions of common grace, whoever has the audacity to deny common grace cannot explain the continuing existence of creation. Neither can the one who denies common grace account for the grand civilizations of ungodly nations with their remarkable achievements in politics, art, and science.

Most serious of all, to deny common grace is to shut oneself up to recommending that Christians withdraw as much as possible from life in society, avoiding contact with unbelievers and renouncing the music, art, literature, medicine, science, and technology of the wicked world. At the very least, one who denies common grace has no positive, principled ground for full, active life in this world. If he must work with unbelievers in the factory or office, he tries not to talk with them. If a Christian student reads Shakespeare or T. S. Eliot, he does so in secret and with a guilty conscience. If a Reformed woman attends the symphony, she skulks, hoping that no one sees her there.

The alternative to common grace, as regards this vitally important aspect of the doctrine, is Anabaptist world-flight.

It was Abraham Kuyper who first attempted to crush all opposition to his theory of common grace by this demeaning, damning indictment.

The Christian Reformed Church enthusiastically followed Kuyper's lead in its calculated campaign against the foes of common grace in 1924 and the years that followed as it drummed Herman Hoeksema out of the Church and the Protestant Reformed Churches out of the realm of Reformed orthodoxy.

Richard Mouw publicly dissents from this unjust condemnation of the Protestant Reformed objection against common grace. Bless him! He declares that the Protestant Reformed stance toward the world, which is basically that of the antithesis, is biblically, confessionally, and historically defensible. He finds puzzling on the face of it the passion "with which many of the defenders of common grace have rejected the views of Hoeksema and other critics of their position" (p. 20).

But Dr. Mouw himself does think, and argue, that common grace is the best, if not the only, explanation and ground of the Christian's involvement in (let me use the dubious term once more) culture.

In the next installment of this series of editorials on a subject whose importance cannot be over-emphasized, I will propose and explain another ground for the Christian's life in the world.

The alternatives are not common grace and world-flight.

— DJE 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ Zero Tolerance for Sex Abuse

The Roman Catholic Church is troubled by the very bad publicity of a number of its priests who are or have been involved with sexual abuse of children, of women, and of men. All of this makes for titillating reading in the

press and for constant repetition on television and radio news. There is no doubt but this is a very bad situation—especially because for years the Roman Catholic Church deliberately sought to cover this up and reassign the priests involved to different parishes.

The Roman Catholic Church had almost to be forced to take action—now called "zero-tolerance for sex-abuse." A number of

priests have since been removed from their positions.

Of special interest, however, is the report found in the *Grand Rapids Press*, June 14, 2002, on action taken by the Christian Reformed synod in June. The headline states, "CRC Synod adopts zero-tolerance sex-abuse policy." It states:

Prompted in part by the Catholic Church's sexual-abuse crisis,

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leaders of the Christian Reformed Church on Thursday took a zero-tolerance stand against abuse in their churches.

On the same day U.S. Catholic bishops were fashioning stronger abuse policies, delegates to the CRC Synod unanimously urged congregations to remove ministers and other church leaders for any instances of sexual abuse.

They also called on the CRC Board of Trustees to push churches to develop abuse policies and response teams.

"God has a zero-tolerance policy with respect to sin," asserted the Rev. Perry Tinklenberg, a minister from Spokane, Wash.

The head of the CRC's abuse prevention office called it an important step that puts clergy and church leaders on notice.

"It says 'You may not do it,'" said Beth Swagman, who has been pushing for stronger policies since her position was created in 1994. "Don't even think about it. If you do it, steps will be taken."

Though stern in tone, the policy leaves it up to local churches to investigate and take action against abusive leaders.

Delegates also issued a statement of sympathy to the Catholic Church and its struggles to stem a crisis that has forced the resignation or suspension of nearly 250 accused priests.

Expressing "empathy to our brothers and sisters in Christ," the resolution prays for leaders, victims and perpetrators "that the Lord of the Church universal will send the reconciling power of the Holy Spirit in this time of special need."

On the last day of the weeklong Synod at Calvin College, delegates said the Catholic scandal called for "a decisive response" from the CRC's top ruling body.

They also noted that despite years of abuse prevention efforts, fewer than 25 percent of the CRC's 1,000 churches have adopted policies. They urged churches to educate themselves about preventing and reporting abuse.

Swagman said she gets about a dozen abuse allegations against pastors each year, and that two or

three have been removed in the past two years. She also deals with emotional and spiritual abuse....

The CRC decision appears somewhat strange. Do they not already have a "zero-tolerance" policy set forth in their Church Order? Why now and at this time take a decision such as this? Their decision is surely no stronger than what their Church Order must state. Or do they want others to see that they are ready and willing to stand side by side with their "brothers and sisters in Christ," that is, those whom the Heidelberg Catechism labels as idolaters in Lord's Day 30?

I do not have their revised Church Order before me at this moment. However, the Church Order which we have, and which formerly was held also by the CRC, states:

Art. 79 When Ministers of the Divine Word, Elders or Deacons, have committed any public, gross sin, which is a disgrace to the Church, or worthy of punishment by the Authorities, the Elders and Deacons shall immediately by preceding sentence of the Consistory thereof and of the nearest Church, be suspended or expelled from their office, but the Ministers shall only be suspended. Whether these shall be entirely deposed from office, shall be subject to the judgment of the Classis, with the advice of the Delegates of the (Particular) Synod mentioned in Article 11.

Art. 80 Furthermore among the gross sins, which are worthy of being punished with suspension or deposition from office, these are the principal ones: false doctrine or heresy, public schism, public blasphemy, simony, faithless desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, filthy lucre; in short, all sins and gross offenses, as render the perpetrators infamous before the world, and which in any private

member of the Church would be considered worthy of excommunication.

■ First CRC Woman Pastor Ousted

Because it is a matter of interest, I present the following from the *Grand Rapids Press*, July 11, 2002. I do so without comment.

The split between a local congregation and the first woman ordained as a minister in the Christian Reformed Church is official. Citing a difference in their view of the church's mission, local church leaders from the Grand Rapids Classis East on Wednesday approved a separation agreement between Grace CRC and its co-pastors, the Revs. Ruth Hofman and her husband, Steven Venhuizen.

The Grace CRC council in May voted to dismiss the co-pastors, citing a persistent refusal to work with church leaders. Elders charged Wednesday that Hofman and Venhuizen failed to compromise with the council on worship style and preaching methods, and said the co-pastors focused time and energy on neighborhood outreach at the expense of church members.

"Our pastors had a very different mission at Grace than much of the congregation," elder Ron Steenwyk said. "This spring it became clear that our pastors were not interested in any form of meaningful compromise. We were met again and again with total uncooperation."

...Some neighborhood residents said church members looking to dismiss Hofman and Venhuizen were prejudiced against the people whom the co-pastors invited to church. They were uncomfortable with prostitutes and drug dealers giving testimony at worship, said Melshunn Everette, a nearby resident and church-goer....

I had intended no comment. I will, however, make a short one nevertheless. When one's Church

Order forbids women serving in the office, and the CRC synod (without changing this rule) arbitrarily authorizes the various Classes to suspend it if they wish, is it any wonder that something such as the above takes place? And when a woman is placed in position of authority and rule, contrary to Scripture, which clearly states that she is to be silent in the church, is it surprising that there is no respect for the Scriptural mandate for elders to rule?

One can only be saddened by these developments.

■ New Strategies to Rebuild Membership

Churches have sought to build membership by having “contemporary” services, puppets, movies, liturgical dances, and more. Yet membership in the mainline denominations continues to decline. One is tempted to ask, “Is this because of these innovations, which after a time fail to satisfy many in the churches? Is it because the preached Word is often no longer a central part of worship?”

Well, to the rescue comes a commission of members of various denominations. These propose new strategies which will help to establish new congregations and rebuild old ones. The *Grand Rapids Press* presents this report:

After a steady drop in membership over the years, leaders of seven predominantly white Protestant denominations — including several with a strong West Michigan base — have joined forces to try to reverse the trend.

They commissioned a survey on the kind of leaders they should recruit to start new churches, and found that hiring innovative ministers and reaching out to minorities will be critical to rebuilding.

“We’ve had this Western dominance and this Eurocentric approach,” said the Rev. Allen Likkel, a church development specialist with the Grand Rapids-

based Christian Reformed Church. “We are moving away from that, and are looking at some very different styles and models of leadership.”

Both liberal and conservative denominations joined the study: CRC, Reformed Church in America, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and United Church of Christ.

Together, they represent about 15 million American Protestants. All have seen their memberships decline in the past 20 years. The CRC has dropped from 299,000 to 278,000 members during that time, while the RCA dipped from 352,000 to 291,000 members. Other denominations saw an even more dramatic fall.

“The demographics are shifting,” said the Rev. Robert Scudieri, head of church development in North America for the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. “If local churches continue to only see white, English-speaking people as their market, that market is drying up.”

Scudieri said the Missouri Synod has come to recognize that “we are not starting churches for Lutherans anymore.” Instead, his denomination views North America as an “unchurched” culture, where basic structures of Christianity and church life are unfamiliar to many people....

...Successful church developers have been willing to take risks, and tenaciously have pursued their goals, Wood said. They also tend to be charismatic leaders who clearly communicate their vision, delegate tasks and recruit good assistants....

...The CRC runs potential pastors through an assessment center. The RCA contracts with Gallup to conduct telephone interviews of candidates. The research could fine-tune those screening methods to improve the success rate of planting new churches, Likkel said....

...However, not everyone is embracing this new approach.

The innovations have raised some uncomfortable questions

about how to maintain the culture of Protestant denominations and, specifically for Lutherans, what the essential elements of worship are, Scudieri said.

Still, the churches believe they must change in order to survive.

“Lutherans in the old days thought it was necessary to teach the Indians German before they evangelized them,” Scudieri said. Now the church has realized “we need to reach people in their own language and culture.”

One can but wonder how the apostle Paul or the apostle Peter would have made out under these new and innovative proposals!!

■ “God Bless America!”

Patriotism has been running at a fever-pitch since September 11, although it appears to be waning a bit lately. Yet a tremendous outcry arises when a judge declares that “under God” is constitutionally wrong. And one is almost considered unpatriotic when he might not cry with the multitude, “God bless America!”


● “God bless America,” where a million and a half abortions are done each year?

● “God bless America,” where the states encourage and promote gambling—aware even that a number of bank robberies have occurred by those who sought to pay off their gambling debts?

● “God bless America,” where materialism is the god of the citizens?

● “God bless America,” whose laws may not be posted in public buildings?

● “God bless America,” where entertainment, sports, pornography, and murder are the order of the day?

Perhaps it were better to say, “Pray for America that she may repent of her horrific sins against God and His laws!” Unless there is proper repentance, how dare we ask God’s blessing on America? 

Philip Melanchthon and Synergism (1)

Introduction

Anyone interested in the great Reformation of the sixteenth century readily acknowledges that Martin Luther was the outstanding reformer, of all those who engaged in this great work. Followers of John Calvin, while recognizing that Calvin's theological writings were more thoroughly biblical (in his theological approach to the truth in distinction from Luther's soteriological emphasis, and in the doctrine of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper), nevertheless recognize that Luther was used by God not only to begin the Reformation, but to assail and demolish the bulwarks of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice with roaring cannon shots from Scripture that shook Europe to its foundations. On the fundamental doctrines of Scripture, Luther and Calvin, not to mention the other reformers, were agreed.

This agreement was especially evident in the doctrines of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. All the reformers hated Romish Pelagianism with a passion, and all, with great power, set forth the doctrines of the sovereignty of God in salvation. If one has any notion that Luther was weak on these doctrines, all he has to do is read *The Bondage of the Will*, of which Luther himself said, shortly before he died, that only in that book (and in his commentary

on Galatians) could be found the whole truth. Double predestination, sovereign hardening, irresistible grace — all the doctrines are there, sharply and with emphasis.

How is it then that Lutheranism, worldwide, no longer holds to these teachings of the great man after whom their churches are named? Is the case the same in Lutheran circles as in Reformed circles, that the churches that are heirs of the Reformation have simply departed from the teachings of their spiritual fathers? In part this is, of course, true. A denomination, in matters of the truth, must move. And there are only two directions in which it can move: backward or forward. A church either develops the truth or loses it. There is never any standing still. The tendency is usually backward.

But there is more to the story. The departure from Luther's teachings took place very shortly after Luther died. In fact, it can be proved that departure began already, in spite of Luther's best efforts, before the great reformer breathed his last. The evidence of such departure is, furthermore, embodied in the official creed of worldwide Lutheranism, the Augsburg Confession. The departure is known as "synergism." It was introduced into Lutheran theology by Luther's respected colleague and fellow reformer, Phillip Melanchthon. One reads the story and weeps.

Melanchthon's Life

From a certain point of view, Melanchthon was the greatest of all the reformers. His intellectual gifts exceeded those of Luther. He was,

from the viewpoint of his theological accomplishments, nearly the equal of John Calvin. He shone with greater light than Knox, Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Farel, Bucer, or any other reformer of the first and second generation. Nor were Melanchthon's powers strictly intellectual; he was a man known throughout all Europe for his Christian piety, his humility, his utter disregard for the comforts of life, his devotion to his wife and family, his total commitment to the cause of Christ, and his unceasing labor on behalf of the gospel. He worked so hard and such long hours that in exasperation Luther himself (no slouch when it came to unbelievable amounts of work and long hours) bellowed at Melanchthon that if he did not quit working so hard, he, Luther, would excommunicate him.

Melanchthon was born in Bretten, in the lower Palatinate, on February 16, 1497. This was just over thirteen years after Luther's birth, and about twelve years before John Calvin's. His surname was Schwarzerd, or Blackearth. "Melanchthon" is the Latinization of his German name. While Luther was born of peasant stock, Melanchthon was born in better circumstances: his father was such a skilled maker of armor that his work was sought by the princes and knights of the surrounding country.

The Palatinate is, geographically, all that Wittenberg is not. Wittenberg, at the time of the Reformation, was little more than a cluster of hovels and a monastery built on a huge sand pile with little to commend it other than the uni-

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versity which Frederick the Wise had erected there. Melanchthon often complained that he could not even get a decent meal in the town, and he frequently expressed a longing for the beauties of his homeland. The Palatinate, on the other hand, boasted a nicer climate, was filled with forests rich in game, had fertile fields and lush meadows, and its peaceful and beautiful valleys followed the meandering Neckar River.

Melanchthon's great uncle was the famous and influential Reuchlin, the outstanding Hebrew scholar of his day. Reuchlin was a humanist, on the order of Erasmus, who, while working for reform in the Romish church, was not interested in doctrinal reform, and, consequently, remained a member of Rome's church to the end. But his work in Hebrew enabled the reformers to work with the Old Testament Scriptures in their original language. And his grammar was used in most of Europe's universities for centuries after it was written. Reuchlin took responsibility for Melanchthon's education.

Melanchthon's intellectual gifts are astounding, even by the reckoning of that great age when there were giants in the earth.

By 1514, when only 17 years old, Melanchthon had already earned his master's degree. He was knowledgeable in almost every subject known throughout Europe: philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy, jurisprudence, mathematics, Greek grammar, classical writings, medicine, and dialectics. Some of these subjects he may have mastered by his own studies. He studied in Pforghum in 1507, the University of Heidelberg in 1509, Tübingen in 1513. In the latter university, at the tender age of 18, he began to teach. In 1516 he concentrated his studies on theology. He wrote and spoke Latin and Greek better and more fluently than his native German.

In 1518 he accepted an appointment to the University of

Wittenberg, even though many prestigious universities throughout Europe sought him. His salary was 100 guilders, a sum doubled after the first year, but an increase which he would accept only after Luther's most strenuous efforts to persuade him to take it. He was appointed to the chair of Greek, but soon took over the chair of theology. When the professors and students then present in Wittenberg saw him for the first time, they were uneasy. Melanchthon was short, thin, unimposing, youthful and seemingly altogether unsuited to and too young for the work. It was like calling a junior in high school to occupy a prestigious chair in Yale University.

But at his inauguration, he spoke on "Reforming the Studies of Youth." His speech was a masterpiece. Not only was it delivered in impeccable Latin; not only was it scholarly and thorough, but it also broke such new ground in the field of higher education, that it set the tone for Europe's universities for centuries to come. Luther himself was so pleased that he could not speak highly enough of his new colleague.

Melanchthon's Work

Upon assuming his post in the university, Melanchthon literally hurled himself into the work of the Reformation.

The list of his labors and achievements is long and impressive. His teaching abilities were so great that he attracted students from all over Europe. He himself said that, at one time, eleven different languages were spoken in his classroom. The lecture hall in which he taught was filled, sometimes with as many as 1500 - 2000 students crammed into one place.

His writing was extensive and influential. He wrote books on almost every subject, although his books on theology were the most popular. He was the first of the reformers to write a systematic theology. It was called *Loci Communes*

and had an influence on systematic theologies for many years after he died.

Melanchthon was frequently the representative of Luther and the Lutheran Reformation at meetings, colloquies, conferences, and assemblies of various kinds. Considering that travel was difficult and time-consuming in those days, and considering that these meetings were held in many different places in Germany, vast quantities of time were consumed simply in traveling. He was present with Luther in Leipzig when Luther debated with the great John Eck in 1518 and where Luther came to the realization that Scripture alone is authoritative for faith and life. Melanchthon provided him with arguments and quotations from the fathers to the annoyance of Eck, who finally told him to shut up. Melanchthon was present with Luther at the great Colloquy of Marburg, where representatives from the Lutheran and the Swiss Reformation met in an effort to come to agreement on the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. He was also present at some of the great meetings of Protestant princes and rulers who met to defend themselves against the armies summoned against Lutheranism by the pope. He played major roles in meetings with the Roman Catholics when efforts were made to heal the breach struck by the Reformation. The story of these meetings, too lengthy to tell, is filled with heroism, excitement, danger, and just plain hard work.

Melanchthon played a greater role in the writing of confessions arising out of the Reformation than any other single man. He was the competent and superbly qualified linguist who could give his invaluable assistance to Luther (and a few others) in the preparation of the German translation of the Bible.


In addition to all these labors, he was a faithful and busy husband and father. At the urging of

Luther, Melanchthon married Katherine Krapp on November 25, 1520. It was a tranquil marriage, blessed with four children, although often filled with sorrow (the parents lost two children early in life). Melanchthon, scholar that he was, could often be found in the cozy kitchen rocking the cradle — although inevitably with one hand

on the cradle and the other holding a book.

Probably no two men have ever been closer to each other in the work of the church than Luther and Melanchthon. Luther relied heavily on Melanchthon and frequently praised his work. Publicly he said that his colleague's writings were better than his own. But they complemented each other.

Luther was rough, blunt, fierce, forceful, and unafraid of devils, kings, or the pope. Melanchthon was mild, timid, scholarly, irenic, and altogether too willing to compromise.

But some of these things we treat in the next article because they have to do with Melanchthon's synergism. 

The Election and Installation of Deacons (2) The Congregation's Role

In our last article we noted three biblical principles that govern the election and installation of officebearers. First, the church as a whole, not only her rulers, ought to be involved in the selection process. Second, those who are in office must supervise the calling and installation process. Third, officebearers should be installed in a solemn ceremony in the presence of the church.

In this article we will expand on the first principle, showing what role the congregation plays in the nomination and election of deacons.

What this role is, the Church Order of Dordrecht sets forth in Article 22. Article 22 actually speaks to the nomination and election of *elders*. However, as article 24 makes clear, it pertains also to the nomination and election of *deacons*: "The deacons shall be chosen, approved, and installed in the same manner as was stated con-

cerning the elders." Article 22 reads:

The elders shall be chosen by the judgment of the consistory and the deacons according to the regulations for that purpose established by the consistory. In pursuance of these regulations, every church shall be at liberty, according to its circumstances, to give the members an opportunity to direct attention to suitable persons, in order that the consistory may thereupon either present to the congregation for election as many elders as are needed, that they may, after they are approved by it, unless any obstacle arise, be installed with public prayers and stipulations; or present a double number to the congregation and thereupon install the one-half chosen by it, in the aforesaid manner, agreeably to the form for this purpose.



The first role listed is that of suggesting names of suitable men to the council, if the council gives the congregation this opportunity.¹

Notice that councils are not *required* to give this opportunity to the congregation, but are *permitted* to do so: "every church shall be at

liberty, according to its circumstances" (emphasis mine, DJK). This means that the opportunity to suggest names of suitable men for office is not an inherent *right* of the congregation, but a *privilege* which may be given it.

Why is the council permitted, but not required, to give the congregation this opportunity? It is permitted because the church of Jesus Christ is made up of saints who hold the office of all believers. Because the office of all believers functions through the special offices, the congregation must have a say in the process of choosing officebearers. Permitting the members to suggest names of suitable men is one way in which the council gives them this say.

However, it is not required, because circumstances might arise which render this privilege either

1. The words "council" and "consistory" are often used interchangeably. "Council" technically refers to the joint meeting of all officebearers of the church, the body which oversees the nomination and election process. "Consistory" technically refers to the elders.

pointless, or unwise. It might be pointless, due to the small size of the church. VanDellen and Monsma write: "It may be less necessary to do so in our smaller Churches inasmuch as the Consistories of these smaller Churches will know the membership of their Churches sufficiently well to nominate without this activity on the part of the Church, but in larger Churches it is doubtless very desirable."² It is possible that the members of a larger church do not know each other as well as those of a smaller church. Also the officebearers of a larger church might not always know who are the most suitable men to serve in office. Other circumstances which might make a council decide not to give the congregation this opportunity include trouble in the congregation, which would make it unwise to solicit names; or a small number of truly qualified men in the congregation, with the officebearers being aware of who they are.

Should, then, a council not give the congregation the opportunity to suggest names of suitable men, does that council violate the principle requiring the congregation's involvement in the election of officebearers? Evidently our Reformed fathers did not think so. Had they thought so, they would not have permitted, but required, councils to give the church this opportunity. And the reason why the principle is not violated when this privilege is not given to the congregation is that there are other ways, other *required* ways, other *fundamental* ways, in which the congregation plays a role in the nomination and election process. Presently we will see what these fundamental ways are. For now, we must understand that, because there are other ways in which the congregation does and must play a role in electing officebearers, the congregation must not think their role has been ignored when a council does not give the opportunity

to suggest the names of suitable men.

When such opportunity is given, the members of the congregation should understand two things.

First, the congregation may submit the names only of "suitable persons." "Suitable persons" are those who are qualified according to God's requirements in I Timothy 3. No member should suggest the name of someone just because he wants that person to be in office. Each person who suggests a name should, prior to suggesting the name, examine carefully the qualifications for office, to be sure the person meets them. "Suitable" also implies that the person whose name is suggested would be capable of serving the church well. Even though a man may be spiritually qualified, he is not capable of serving the church well if he is physically unable to do the work of the church due to health, work, or family situation.

Members of the congregation, by all means suggest names when that opportunity is given. But at the same time, be sure the men are suitable! To take care in this regard will manifest your own true love for the church.

Second, when one has suggested the name of a person, one ought not think that this person will certainly be nominated to office. Nor should one think that the reason he was not nominated is that the council did not like him, or did not consider him to be qualified. Prof. William Heyns correctly writes, "The intention is not that the Consistory shall in any way consider itself bound to make its nomination conform to the result (i.e., to the list of those men suggested by the congregation, DJK), for then it would actually be an election by the people, and that by free ballot."³

The congregation should understand that, just like the elections at the congregational meeting, also the nominations in the council meeting

are done by secret ballot. In the meeting at which officebearers are nominated, the council makes a list of suitable men. This list consists of names suggested by council members themselves, as well as by the congregation, if that opportunity has been given. The council then frankly discusses the qualifications of each suggested person, and his ability to serve, while being sure to avoid sin against the ninth commandment. The names of any men who, in the council's judgment, are unqualified to serve or unable to serve, are removed. The members of the council then vote by secret ballot for nominees, with those nominees who receive the highest number of majority votes being officially nominated for office. This could mean that, out of ten men deemed qualified, four are selected. Why were these four, and not any of the other six, selected? Simply this: such was the outcome of the vote. And then we believe, "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD" (Prov. 16:33). Just as there is ultimately no other reason why two certain men out of four nominees are finally elected at a congregational meeting, so there is ultimately no other reason why these certain four men appeared as nominees.

I explain this process to show that the men of the council do not merely collaborate to get those men elected whom they like. Sometimes members of the congregation might accuse the council of this, when they see which men have been nominated. It would be wrong of the council to nominate men merely because the men of the council like them; the council must be governed in making nominations by God's Word in

2. VanDellen, Idzerd, and Martin Monsma. *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1941), p. 104.

3. Heyns, Prof. William. *Handbook for Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1928), p. 124.

I Timothy 3. But such collaboration would be very difficult, when the procedure mentioned above is followed. Each man is one vote – and the majority rules.

Members of the council, be sure to nominate decently and in good order!

And members of the congregation, do not consider yourselves free to criticize the selection offered you when the council presents a list of nominees for office. Of course, if you believe it necessary, you may and must bring lawful objections against a nominee. But do not say, if the nominees are qualified, “Why is it that group of men? Why is not so-and-so on the list?” The whole disposing of the lot is of the Lord. Do not grumble at what He has done.



The second aspect of the role of the congregation in electing deacons is that of approving those nominated for office.

It matters not whether the council has chosen to present as many men as are needed for office, or double that number with half to be elected by the congregation. Either way, it is the duty of the congregation to approve the list of nominees. Article 22 of our Church Order does not give the council liberty to elect and install any officebearer without the congregation’s approval of their election and installation. The introduction to the Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons shows that such approval is necessary:

Beloved Christians, you know that we have several times published unto you the names of our brethren here present who are chosen to the office of elders and deacons in this Church, to the end that we might know whether any person had aught to allege why they should not be ordained in their respective offices; and whereas no one hath appeared before us who hath alleged anything lawful against them, we shall therefore

at present, in the name of the Lord, proceed to their ordination.

In order that the congregation be given this opportunity, councils of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America have decided to announce nominations on two successive Sundays before election at the congregational meeting (cf. the decision pertaining to Article 22 in the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches). Then after the election, they announce the names of those elected on two successive Sundays prior to installation. This latter is the decisive period of approbation.

How does the congregation show its approval? The practice generally followed in Reformed churches is that of *tacit* approbation – that is, silent or unspoken approval. Peter Y. DeJong writes, “When the proper announcements have been made and no one has appeared at the consistory to allege anything against the elected brethren, the consistory may rightly assume that the congregation is fully satisfied with the choice which has been made. Thus the way is officially open to proceed with the installation.”⁴

This implies that if there is any objection to the nominations, it must be expressed. These objections must be brought carefully and properly. Carefully, because the objection is against one who, even if not fit for office, is a brother in the Lord. His reputation must be safeguarded. And properly, that God be glorified, His Word honored, and all things be done decently and in order.

What does bringing such an objection properly imply? First, one must bring his objection to the council. One with an objection must not speak to others outside the council about it. To do so would open oneself up to charges of sin against the ninth commandment. Secondly, one must base his objection on the Word of God as found in I Timothy 3 – that is, one

must work to show the council that the nominee is unqualified in God’s sight. The objector should state specifically which qualification he considers the nominee to lack, and must show why he thinks so. Furthermore, if he alleges that the nominee is unqualified because of impenitence in sin, the objector must assure the council that he is also following the procedure set forth in Matthew 18:15ff. and in the Church Order, to bring the brother to repentance. Thirdly, the objector must be willing to abide by the decision of the council, or be prepared to appeal that decision to the classis, and if necessary, the synod. Councils do well to heed two cautions: “First of all, the consistory may never neglect or ignore substantiated objections, no matter how trivial they may seem at first glance.... On the other hand, the consistory must not lend a ready ear to all kinds of personal prejudices.”⁵



The third aspect of the congregation’s role in electing deacons is that of the election itself. This takes place at the time and place determined by the council.

All confessing male members of the congregation who are in good standing have the right and privilege to vote, and ought to exercise that right. If one is not able to be bodily present at the meeting, he should still exercise the rights of his office by giving the clerk of the council an absentee ballot. On this ballot should be written the names of the men whom he desires to be in office. The ballot should be sealed in an envelope so that the names are not seen by any and all, and the envelope should be signed on the outside, as a seal

4. DeJong, Peter Y. *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), p. 122.

5. DeJong, *ibid*, pp. 121-122.

that the man who signed truly cast his vote.


All Reformed believers should remember that at such meetings, those receiving majority votes have been elected by the whole congregation. It may be I voted for a man who did not receive the majority of votes; yet I must leave the meeting knowing that I, along with the

congregation, elected that man to office who did receive the majority. The reason, once more, is that the Lord directed the vote.



Congregation of believers, your rights as members of Christ's church have been spelled out above. But these rights are also privileges, for Christ gives this

right only to those for whom He died and who are incorporated into His church by a true and living faith. Take these rights and privileges seriously, and exercise them as servants of the Lord Himself!

Then receive your officebearers, as those whom the Lord has given you, and as those whom you yourself have approved and chosen. 

Feature Article

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

A Profitable Trip to Australia

From America's Midwest to its west coast. From Los Angeles across the equator, across the International Date Line, with a stopover in New Zealand, finally to Brisbane International Airport in Queensland, Australia. After some twenty hours of flying time, and thirty hours after they set out from Grand Rapids, Prof. Robert Decker and his wife, Marilyn, and the undersigned and his wife, Rhonda, were greeted by brothers and sisters of the Brisbane Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

We had left on Monday, July 1 and arrived on Wednesday, July 3. Along the way we lost Tuesday, July 2. We were weary from our long journey, but glad finally to arrive at the destination of a trip that we had been planning for over a year.

We arrived in the middle of winter! July is winter in the Southern Hemisphere. But what a beau-

tiful winter it was in Queensland. Daily temperatures were in the 70s, the sun shone down out of a blue, cloudless sky, and we were comfortable walking about in our shirtsleeves.

We had come under the auspices of our denominational Committee for Contact with Other Churches. Although we were able to do some sightseeing in beautiful Australia, known for its unique animal and plant life, as well as its beautiful ocean beaches, the main purpose of our trip was to attend the "Reformed Faith Conference" sponsored by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPC). The Brisbane congregation of the EPC, of which Rev. David Higgs is the pastor, hosted the conference.

Most readers of the *Standard Bearer* are undoubtedly familiar with this denomination. For many years now the Protestant Reformed Churches have maintained a very close relationship with the EPC, a relationship that is precious to the PRC. In recent years a number of young men from the EPC have taken their seminary training at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.

Along with our sister churches, the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore (ERCS), we were invited to take part in this conference. The ERCS delegation consisted of Rev. Lau Chin Kwee and elder Siew. The purpose of the conference was to strengthen the ties between our denominations and mutually to encourage one another to stand faithfully for the great truths of the gospel of God's sovereign grace in the different countries in which God has established us. Besides taking part in the conference, Prof. Decker and Rev. Cammenga spoke at other public meetings, preached in various churches, attended the EPC annual Presbytery meeting, and had many meetings and enjoyed fellowship with the saints and officebearers of the EPC.

On Friday of the week that we arrived, Rev. Cammenga flew by himself from Brisbane to Melbourne in the very south of Australia. The purpose of this visit was to speak and preach in the Frankston Presbyterian Church. Frankston is the southern most suburb of Melbourne. Mr. Robert Burford greeted him at the airport. Mr. Burford is an elder in the ses-

Rev. Cammenga, pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan, is the secretary of the Contact Committee of the PRC.

sion of the Frankston Presbyterian Church, as well as a Christian schoolteacher. Over the past several years brother Burford, his fellow elders, and his pastor, the Rev. David Kumnick, have become familiar with the PRC. They find themselves very much in agreement with the PRC doctrinally and practically. The Frankston congregation, numbering some twenty families, is part of the Presbyterian Church of Australia (PCA). Because of serious departures from the Reformed faith, pastor and elders find themselves more and more in disagreement with the direction in which their denomination is going.

That Friday evening, Rev. Cammenga spoke at a public meeting in the Frankston church on "The Aim of Christian Education." This meeting was held in connection with the endeavor of the members of the congregation to establish a parentally controlled Christian school that is faithful in its teaching to the Reformed faith. The meeting was well advertised and, besides a goodly number of the members of the congregation, a number of visitors were also in attendance, including some students from Geelong Reformed Theological College. On Sunday, July 6, Rev. Cammenga preached twice in the Frankston church. The preaching was well received and it is plain that this congregation is wholeheartedly committed to the truths of sovereign grace and the doctrine of God's everlasting and gracious covenant. In his visits with the members and the officebearers, Rev. Cammenga encouraged them in their stand for the truth and also encouraged them to seek contact with the EPC. It is our hope and prayer that they may be of mutual help to each other as they seek to maintain a

bold and faithful witness in Australia. On Monday, July 8, Rev. Cammenga took his leave of the saints in Frankston and returned to Brisbane.

On the same Friday evening that Rev. Cammenga was speaking on Christian education in Frankston, Prof. Decker gave the first of two public lectures in Brisbane. These lectures were rather widely advertised by the Brisbane congregation. The result of this advertising was that there were a number of visitors at each of the lectures. Prof. Decker's first lecture was entitled, "A Reformed Critique of the World's Religions." A second lecture was delivered on Wednesday, July 10, on "Islam." Prof. Decker also preached at the morning worship service of the Brisbane EPC on Sunday, July 7.

The two-day "Reformed Faith Conference" was held on Friday, July 11, and Saturday, July 12. Six papers were presented during the course of the conference, with a question and answer session after each presentation. The papers presented were: "The Presbyterian View of Covenant Children," and "In the Space of Six Days," by Rev. Mark Shand; "Union to Christ in Reformed

Soteriology," by Rev. Chris Connors; "The Serious Call of the Gospel," by Rev. Lau Chin Kwee; "The Real Presence of Christ in the Preaching," by Prof. Robert Decker; and "Preaching Christ from Old Testament Historical Narrative Texts," by Rev. Ron Cammenga. Saturday evening the conference was concluded by a banquet. Servers for the banquet were the young people from the Brisbane congregation. The evening ended with a very thought-provoking speech by Rev. Chris Coleborn dealing with the contact between the leading reformers from the various branches of the Reformation and the lessons that we may learn from this contact.

The conference papers were well received and there was always lively discussion following their presentation. The papers are

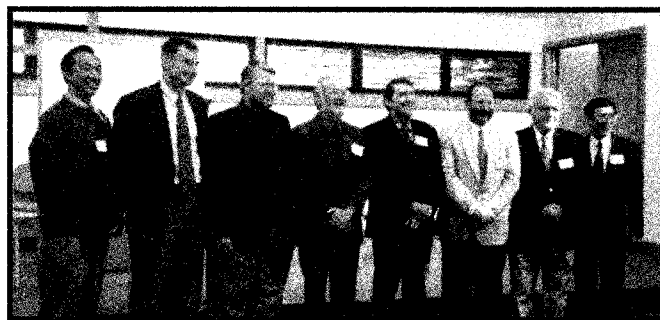


Reformed Faith Conference

worthy of wider circulation. Perhaps they can be made available to the readers of the *Standard Bearer* in the near future. The interaction and fellowship enjoyed by those who attended the conference were a rich blessing. It was

the consensus of those who attended that there ought to be future conferences, perhaps every two or three years, with a rotating venue that would include Singapore and the United States.

On Sunday, July 14, Rev. Cammenga led the morning worship service of the Brisbane congregation. In addition to the members of the congregation, members of Presbytery and some of the conference visitors



l. to r.: Elder Siew, Rev. Chris Connors, Rev. Mark Shand, Rev. R.A. Fisk, Rev. Chris Coleborn, Rev. Ronald Cammenga, Prof. Robert Decker, Rev. Lau Chin Kwee.



Rev. Chris
Connors


were also in attendance. Rev. Chris Connors led the evening worship service. Rev. Connors is the moderator of the EPC Presbytery this year, and so it fell to him to preach the sermon before the

convening of the Presbytery.

On Monday, July 15, we attended the EPC Presbytery meeting. After handling some preliminary business, Presbytery went into closed committee in order to dis-

cuss the matter of contact with the PRC. We were given the opportunity to address the presbytery on behalf of our churches. Several matters of mutual concern were discussed, as well as possible ways in which the relationship between our two denominations could be strengthened. Great appreciation was expressed by the brothers from the EPC for contact with and assistance of the PRC. We, on our part, conveyed to them the love of the PRC for the saints in the EPC and our earnest desire to be of mutual help and encouragement.

After a busy but very profitable time in Australia, we returned to the states on Tuesday, July 16.

The trip home was exhausting and we are still recovering from "jet lag." Nevertheless, we had a most enjoyable time among the saints in the EPC and count it a highlight of our ministries that we might have represented our churches at their conference. Our earnest prayer is that God will bless the work that we did, for the furtherance of the gospel and for the strengthening of the ties between the PRC and the EPC. We stand very much alone in the ecclesiastical worlds of our respective countries. May we stand together — closer together than ever before, as a fruit of this trip. 

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. James Laning

The Quickening of a Dead Will

To understand salvation by grace alone one needs to understand what God does to the will of man when He saves him. Martin Luther came to see the central importance of this subject in his debate with Desiderius Erasmus. In fact, he was thankful that God had made use of Erasmus to bring the central importance of this truth to his attention. He spoke of this in the conclusion of his work entitled *The Bondage of the Will*:

Moreover, I give you hearty praise and commendation on this further

account — that you alone, in contrast with all others, have attacked the real thing, that is, the essential issue. You have not wearied me with those extraneous issues about the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences and such like — trifles, rather than real issues — in respect of which almost all to date have sought my blood (though without success); you, and you alone, have seen the hinge on which all turns, and aimed for the vital spot. For that I heartily thank you; for it is more gratifying to me to deal with this issue, insofar as time and leisure permit me to do so.

"The vital spot" Luther calls the truth concerning what man's will is like by nature, and what God does to man's will when He saves him.

It is common for us to speak, with Luther, of man by nature hav-

ing a will that is in bondage to sin. Our creeds go on to say that this means that the will of the natural man is dead, and that God quickens it when He saves us, and thus enables and causes us willingly to do good works (Canons of Dordt, Heads III/IV, Article 11).

This central truth is denied today by many who claim to hold to the Three Forms of Unity. Understanding this truth not only helps us to refute those who deny it, but also causes us to stand more amazed at the wondrous work God performs within us.

The Dead Will of the Natural Man

Many who say they are Reformed hold to the error that the natural man still maintains the image of God. When they teach this they often make a distinction between the image of God in a

Rev. Laning is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

broader and in a narrower sense. The distinction can be illustrated as follows:

Narrower sense = True knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness

Broader sense = Man's mind and will

The image is said to be like a two-story building. The second story refers to the image of God in the narrower sense, and consists of a true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. This, it is sometimes admitted, was lost when man fell it sin. But the first story, which refers to the image of God in the broader sense and consists of man's mind and will, was retained by man after he fell. Thus it is said that fallen man, in this broader and more basic sense, still maintains the image of God.

It is worth mentioning, just in passing, that there are a number of things wrong with this view of the image of God. First, nowhere in Scripture is man's mind and will said to constitute the image of God in man. If it did constitute the image of God, then the devil also would have to be said to bear the image of our heavenly Father. Secondly, to bear the image of God is to be a child of God. A child bears the image of his parents. Adam is said to have begotten a son "in his own likeness, after his image" (Gen. 5:3). So if every man bears the image of God, then every man must be a child of God – something which Scripture clearly says is not the case.

But let us leave the subject of the image of God in man, to consider the fact that the natural man does indeed still have a will. Although he has a will, that will is not good, but evil. It is not living, but dead. The will of man belongs to the very nature of man, so that when man fell into sin and died, his will died.

One who has such a dead will cannot be persuaded to believe the Word of God. It is not even possible for him to desire the salva-

tion set forth in the preaching of the gospel. His will is dead. It is separated from God, the source of life, and will always choose the ways of death. He is completely unable and unwilling to choose life.

The Quickening of This Will

According to the Canons of Dordt, when God saves us He quickens our dead will. When He saves one of His elect people, He

pervades the inmost recesses of the man; He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, *which, though heretofore dead, He quickens*; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree it may bring forth the fruits of good actions (Canons of Dordt, Heads III/IV, Article 11).

Interestingly, our fathers at Dordrecht proved that salvation involves the quickening of the will of man by referring to passages such as Jeremiah 31:33 and Romans 5:5, which speak of God putting His law and His love, not into our wills, but into our hearts (Canons, III/IV, B, 6). But our fathers concluded that when God quickens our heart, placing His law and His love within it, He quickens our will, causing it to become good and obedient.

Luther was right when he said that the issue concerning the will of the natural man is a central issue. Although there are many varieties of false gospels, one of the teachings that is found in virtually all of them is that the natural man must fulfill some condition to be saved. Whether they say that man must do good works, simply believe, or perform the act of "accepting Christ," they always teach that man has to do his part in the work of salvation. But for a man to fulfill some condition, even the act of seeking the grace of salvation, he


must have a will that is living. And that the natural man does not have.

The Free Ones: Those Whose Will Is Alive

But the fact that our wills have been quickened means that in the new man we delight to do what is pleasing to our heavenly Father. Although we know well that in our old man we still desire only to sin, in the new man we delight to do what is pleasing to our God. In fact, in the new man with a new, quickened will, we are not able to sin. Our old man is dead, and can only sin. But our new man has been begotten by God, and thus is perfect. In the new man we cannot sin, because we have been born of God. This is explicitly the teaching of I John 3:9, which says,

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

In the new man, being born of God with a new, living will, we are not able to sin. It is true that in this life we are not able to do even one work that is completely free from sin. But that is because in our old man we only sin, and this sin defiles even our best works.

But as those whose wills have been quickened, and who have thus been liberated from the bondage of sin, we are able to begin to keep all of God's commandments. This is what it means to be born of God – to have a will that is in harmony with the will of God. As those who bear the image of our Father in heaven, we are free to pursue the riches of the knowledge of God, free to speak and think well of our brothers and sisters in Christ, free to be faithful to the spouse God has given us, free to use all our gifts in the service of God and for the well-being of His people. This is the joy, the freedom, that we have as children of God. 

U.S. Supreme Court Approves Vouchers for Private Schools

"In sum, the Ohio voucher program is entirely neutral with respect to religion. It provides [tuition aid] directly to a wide spectrum of individuals.... It permits such individuals to exercise genuine choice among options public and private, secular and religious. The program is therefore a program of true private choice. In keeping with an unbroken line of decisions rejecting challenges to similar programs, we hold the program does not offend the Establishment Clause."

Zelman v. Simmons-Harris, U.S. Supreme Court
(June 27, 2002) (majority opinion)

"The [tuition voucher] money will thus pay for eligible students' instruction not only in secular subjects but in religion as well, in schools that can fairly be characterized as founded to teach ... all subjects with a religious dimension. Public tax money will pay at a systemic level for teaching the covenant with Israel and Mosaic law in Jewish schools, the primacy of the Apostle Peter and the papacy in Catholic schools, the truth of Reformed Christianity in Protestant Schools, and the revelation to the Prophet in Muslim schools.... *** Establishment Clause ... doctrinal bankruptcy has been reached today."

Zelman v. Simmons-Harris, U.S. Supreme Court
(June 27, 2002) (dissenting opinion)

Voucher Victory

In what constitutional scholars are now describing as the Court's most significant church/state decision in fifty years, a bitterly divided U.S. Supreme Court recently approved the constitutionality of state funded tuition vouchers paid to religious schools. Opponents of tuition vouchers had successfully argued for decades in state and federal courts that the receipt of state funds by private reli-

gious schools violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment ("Congress shall pass no law respecting an establishment of religion..."). After a decade of intentional silence on the contentious voucher programs operating in Wisconsin, Florida, and other states, the Court finally decided to adjudicate the constitutionality of Ohio's Pilot Project Scholarship Program. In a 5-4 decision, the Court held that because the Ohio program was "neutral with respect to religion" and since the voucher funds were not paid directly to the schools but rather to the parents who then made a "private choice" for religious education, the Ohio

program passed constitutional muster.

Ohio's Voucher Program

Ohio's Pilot Project Scholarship Program provides tuition aid for certain students in the troubled Cleveland City School District to attend participating public or private schools of their parent's choosing and tutorial aid for students who choose to remain enrolled in public schools. Both religious and non-religious schools in the district may participate, as well as public schools in adjacent school districts. Tuition aid is distributed to parents according to financial need, and where the aid is spent depends

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solely upon where parents choose to enroll their children. In the 1999-2000 school year, 82% of the participating private schools had a religious affiliation, none of the adjacent public schools participated, and 96% of the 3,700 students participating in the scholarship program were enrolled in religiously affiliated schools.

Tuition aid is distributed to parents according to financial need. Families with incomes below 200% of the poverty line are given priority and are eligible to receive 90% of private school tuition up to \$2,250. For all other families, the program pays 75% of tuition costs, up to \$2,875, with no co-payment cap. If parents choose a private school, checks are made payable to the parents who then endorse the checks over to the chosen school.

Ohio's Scholarship Program also included the funding of "community" or charter schools, which are funded under state law but are run by independent boards enjoying the academic independence to hire their own teachers and determine their own curriculum. These community schools can have no religious affiliation and are required to accept students by lottery. Such community schools received state funding of \$4,518 per student, twice the funding received by a participating private school.

Finally, the Ohio Scholarship Program also established "magnet" schools operated by a local school board that emphasize a particular subject area, teaching method, or service to students. Such schools receive state funds of \$7,746 per student. Some 13,000 students were enrolled in the Cleveland magnet schools created by the Ohio Scholarship Program.

True Private Choice

A majority of the Supreme Court held that the Ohio Scholarship Program did not offend the Establishment Clause because it was a program of "true private choice." The parents residing in

the beleaguered Cleveland school district had the option of sending their children to a public school, community schools, magnet schools, or a religious or nonreligious private school. Because the Ohio program was "neutral with respect to religion" and because the program entailed a private choice by parents, the Court ruled that the scholarship program does not result in an establishment of religion by the government, notwithstanding the fact that substantial state funds are indirectly received by private religious schools:

... where a government aid program is neutral with respect to religion, and provides assistance directly to a broad class of citizens who, in turn, direct government aid to religious schools wholly as a result of their own genuine and independent private choice, the program is not readily subject to challenge under the Establishment Clause....*** The incidental advancement of a religious mission, or the perceived endorsement of a religious message, is reasonably attributable to the individual recipient, not to the government, whose role ends with the disbursement of the benefits.

Other Government Aid to Religious Institutions

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, filing a concurring opinion supporting the majority's approval of the Ohio program, noted that Ohio's Scholarship Program, resulting in some \$8.2 million paid to private schools in Cleveland, "pales in comparison to the amount of funds that federal, state, and local government already provide to religious institutions." She pointed out that churches enjoy real estate tax exemptions; clergy qualify for federal tax breaks on income used for housing expenses; Christian colleges receive student loans, Pell Grants, and G.I. Bill funds; religiously affiliated hospitals receive some \$45 billion in Medicare and

Medicaid benefits; individuals receive tax deductions for charitable contributions to churches. And she catalogued many other legislative schemes where state funds are received or benefits enjoyed by churches and other religious organizations. Justice O'Connor concluded that the state scholarship money flowing to private religious schools in the Ohio program "is neither substantial nor atypical of existing government programs" that benefit many religious organizations.

The Dissent

Justices Souter, Stevens, Ginsburg, and Breyer filed a vigorous dissent, arguing that the Ohio voucher program is unconstitutional since it is essentially "a scheme that systematically provides tax money to support schools' religious missions." This result, the minority opinion contended, is a violation of the First Amendment, which prohibits government establishment of religion. Citing a 1947 Supreme Court school aid opinion, the dissent insisted that:

No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institution, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion.

The dissent contended that the "majority's twin standards of neutrality and free choice" are contrary to decades of case precedent, are all about "jettisoning substance entirely in favor of form," and stand "in defiance of every objective supposed to be served by the bar against establishment."

Governmental Regulation of Private Schools?

But in addition to its contention that the Ohio voucher scheme violated traditional Establishment Clause jurisprudence, the dissent also raised the ominous spectre of

the inevitable corollary to governmental aid — governmental regulation:


...governmental largesse brings government regulation. The risk is already being realized. In Ohio, for example, a condition of receiving government money under the program is that participating schools may not “discriminate on the basis of ... religion,” which means the school may not give admission preferences to children who are members of the patron faith; children of a parish are generally consigned to the same admission lotteries as non-believers. Indeed, a separate condition in the Ohio program that “the school ... not ... teach hatred of any person or group on the basis of religion,” could be understood to prohibit religions from teaching traditionally legitimate articles of faith as to the error, sinfulness, or ignorance of others if they want government money for their schools.

*** When government aid goes up,

so does reliance on it; the only thing likely to go down is independence. A day will come when religious schools [receiving state funds] will learn what political leverage can do, just as Ohio’s politicians are now getting a lesson in the leverage exercised by religion.

The Future for Choice

Constitutional scholars have opined that in terms of practical impact, “nothing else compares” with this decision on vouchers because school choice has the potential for affecting the education of tens of millions of American children. The Supreme Court’s ruling sends the educational choice debate back to the states, where its opponents have vowed to fight in the legislatures and state courts. Voucher opponents have also threatened to sponsor state legislation that will closely regulate and monitor all private schools participating in the various voucher programs.

Accordingly, although the Court’s voucher decision earlier this summer will give needed impetus to the charter and magnet school movement, it remains fairly certain that, like the Ohio program, private religious schools that participate in these government voucher programs will be threatened with forfeiture of their autonomy and independence in such areas as admission criteria, curriculum content, teacher certification, and other such fundamental issues. Thus, although the voucher decision clearly reflects an encouraging recent trend on the Court toward more equal treatment of religion, the decision has little promise for parental Christian schools which are understandably wary of losing their independence by submitting to loathsome governmental regulation which inevitably accompanies the receipt of government funds. 

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Martin VanderWal

Cheeks, Cloaks, and Miles

Matthew 5:38-42

Said by Them of Old

Jesus Christ, the King of the kingdom of heaven, draws out of the Old Testament another law of which He is the fulfillment: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.”

Rev. VanderWal is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

This law is out of Exodus 21:24. This passage, along with verse 23, gives more examples. “And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” This “mischief” addresses specifically the harm done to a woman with child. However, Christ makes the matter far more broad than that specific instance. The principle ex-

pressed with these particular words is equity, a just balance between the harm committed and the retribution exacted.

The words of this Old Testament law were to prevent injustice in retribution. In the punishment meted out to evildoers, there are two wrong tendencies toward injustice. The first tendency is the exaction of more than was due. A man would commit some harm against his neighbor.

A judge would receive the victim of such violence and hear his complaint. His wrath would be aroused against the offender. Out of that anger he would pronounce his sentence. That sentence would require greater punishment than was proper. The intent of this law was to prevent that. Not an eye for a tooth, but a tooth for a tooth.

The opposite tendency might arise in another case. The same act of violence may have been committed. This time, however, the offender might be a man of some influence or means. The judge who heard this particular case would have the inclination either to dismiss the case altogether, or to require only a token punishment. The intent of this law, again, was to prevent such a lapse in justice. The punishment must be equal to the crime. Not a tooth for an eye, but an eye for an eye.

The Word of the King

Against the background of this Old Testament law, the words of Christ that follow are weighty. "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."

As with the law that Christ quoted from the Old Testament, His words here are also addressed toward the same tendency: injustice. There has been damage done. The question is how the citizen of the kingdom of Christ shall answer that injustice. How moderate must he be? How exact must he be? The words of Christ are so striking here because they require the very opposite of exacting any vengeance. They demand a giving: the offering of the right cheek, the offering

of one's cloak, the offering of another mile beyond the one demanded.

These different commands of Christ are concrete examples of the principle demanded in the words that precede: "that ye resist not evil." The word "evil" refers to some wrong brought to bear upon the Christian, something that causes him pain or injury. It is contrary to his nature. Thus, it is evil unto him. This evil he is called not to resist. He is called instead to suffer it. He must submit wholly to it, showing the completeness of that submission by giving even more.

Weighty words indeed! They expose a wicked tendency we have within ourselves. By these words, our King teaches us that, when suffering some evil, our first reaction is to make that person to feel in himself the pain he has inflicted upon us. That pain may be physical, regarding the cheek. That pain may be the loss of personal property, a coat. That pain may be the forced loss of time and energy, a mile. Whatever it is, when we feel it inflicted upon ourselves by another, we want to inflict it back, and that always in a greater measure. In the first moment of suffering this injury, we have no thought of justice, whether justice among men, or justice with God.

That reaction, brought out in the first moment of injury, is a great evil. It is the evil of pride. Out of that pride, we give more weight to injury inflicted upon us by others than any like harm done to the neighbor. We give it more weight than any transgression of God's commandments. Compare some personal injustice done to you with the profaning of God's holy name. Which is more likely to arouse your anger?

Rather than the taking of vengeance, we are called to give place.

There are two illustrations that show these words of Christ in their application. The first is from the reign of King David. Absalom's treachery forced him to leave the city of Jerusalem, and cross over Jordan into safety. As David went, Shimei cast stones and dust at him and cursed him. David had just borne the loss of his kingdom by means of a rebellious son. Yet, he did not take vengeance upon this "dead dog," as Abishai called him. Rather than seek revenge, David committed the matter into God's hands. He did not make it his business to render an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth. Instead, he looked for the vindication of God. Knowing that the hand of God was in all these things, He meekly submitted to this awful treatment.

The Fulfillment of the Law

The second illustration is our Lord Jesus Christ. Speaking of His bearing of evil, Peter wrote, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (I Pet. 2:23). We must think upon the unjust treatment He received. He was smitten on the cheek. He had

His coat taken from Him. He was compelled to carry His cross to the hill of Calvary. Instead of exacting vengeance, calling down more than twelve legions of angels, He meekly submitted to this unjust treatment. By His actions, He showed full compliance with His own law. The

King Himself submits to His own law!

Even more, He gave. He is the fulfillment of the law. In that suffering He gave Himself. He not only endured the contradiction of sinners. He also made atonement

... we give more weight to injury inflicted upon us by others than any like harm done to the neighbor.

for them, even while they contradicted Him. They compelled Him to be crucified. He suffered and died in their stead. He did not even pray for God's vengeance to be executed upon them. Instead He prayed for their forgiveness: "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do." They would take His coat. He gave them His cloak also.

At the cross of our King we also find the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures that He quoted, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." By this very death, He made full satisfaction to the justice of God. God required an eye from the sinner. Jesus Christ gave that eye in the sinner's behalf. God required a tooth from the sinner. Jesus Christ gave that tooth in the sinner's behalf. For every offense committed by every elect sinner, Jesus Christ gave payment in full by His suffering and death.

At the cross, we find the only power also to fulfill this law of our Lord. There are times we find it so very hard to let go of our vain pride. Often we want to exact personal vengeance in the worst way. In such cases, we must remember the work of our Lord for us. We were the guilty, the violators of this law. Yet, He died in our stead, despite the worst treatment. So grateful must we be, therefore, that we are ready to give up all things that belong to self, that Christ might be magnified. And, in that way, Christ is glorified. His people show forth the glory of their great King.

The Proper Balance

The citizen of the kingdom of Christ, walking in this way of self-denial, must understand that the words of Christ here give a balance. His words do not destroy the law, but fulfill it. Self-denial, and the calling to "turn the other cheek," does not entirely abrogate the administration of justice in every sense. In some respect the

teaching must still apply: eye for eye, tooth for tooth.

The application of justice must be conducted in the realm of the church. Those appointed to positions of government in the church of Jesus Christ are called to rule with equity. Those doing evil in the church, maintaining doctrines and practices against the Word of God, are punished by means of the key of Christian discipline. Justice is observed in the communion and fellowship of the saints. Where one wrongs another, apology and forgiveness must be the result. This principle must live in the covenant home. Wherever evil is found in the children of the home, that evil must be resisted through discipline.

The administration of justice against evil has its proper, God-given place also in the civil realm. A magistrate's responsibility is to punish evildoers. It would be clearly wrong for him not to resist the evil. Even in such a pagan system of justice as Rome's, the sheer administration of justice can be summarized by the words of the Old Testament law, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Rom. 13:2-4).

There is also a proper place for the Christian within the system of law and government. "Resist not evil" does not prohibit the Christian from taking up arms in defense of his country. Nor does it bar the Christian from law-enforcement or the administration of justice in a courtroom. There is also a proper place for the Christian within the court itself. He may bring charges against those who attempted to take or who have actually taken his rightful property. He may request that the civil court take vengeance upon his adversary. We think of Paul pleading for his rights before the audience of Felix and Agrippa and his appeal to Caesar.

However, even in these cases, the Christian must repudiate all self-interest and self-motivation. Before any pursuit at law, the Christian does well to ask himself what motivates him in that pursuit. If His motive is anger, or desire of revenge, he enters such a pursuit to his own detriment. It is better for him to offer the other cheek, to give up his cloak also, and to go two miles. In that way, he should learn self-denial, a far greater virtue than any victory at law.

Questions for Meditation and Further Study

1. How are these words of Christ sometimes used to promote pacifism, the belief that war is forbidden to Christians? Is this correct? Prove from other Scriptures.

2. Are there circumstances in which a Christian is specifically forbidden from suing others? When and how? What Scriptures specifically address this?

3. To what degree is desire of revenge given exposure in today's society and culture? Is it present as a theme in modern media? Must the Christian avoid and shun such media?

4. Are we required literally to carry out the injunctions of this passage? Would such a thing go too far in some cases? How might it not go far enough in others?

Young Adult Activities

In late June, the 24th through the 28th to be exact, the young adults of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada, along with help from their congregation, hosted a Young Adults Retreat at the Deer Valley Meadows Christian Center. There were forty-six young adults registered to attend this retreat. Many of them arrived the weekend before the retreat officially began, so they were able to visit with and enjoy a picnic supper with church members on Saturday and worship with them as well on Sunday. On Monday all the young adults had opportunity to enjoy a day trip to the mountains. Tuesday the Retreat officially got underway with registration and breakfast at the church, travel to the Center, and an evening speech given by Rev. M. DeVries, pastor of neighboring First PRC in Edmonton, AB. The theme of the retreat was, "Standing Fast and Holding the Traditions," based on II Thessalonians 2:13-17. Rev. DeVries spoke on "Standing Fast and Holding the Traditions — Scripturally." Wednesday featured discussion groups in the A.M., followed by various activities after lunch and a P.M. debate. Rev. R. Miersma, pastor of the Immanuel PRC, spoke Thursday evening on "Standing Fast and Holding the Traditions — Confessionally." The congregations of First and Immanuel were invited to join the young adults at the Center for these two speeches.

All too soon Friday came, with the usual time set aside for necessary cleanup and the always difficult good-byes to friends, new and

old alike, followed by trips to Edmonton International and Calgary for flights home. As churches we can be thankful for Immanuel's willingness to host this retreat. Doing so is no small undertaking. Immanuel was planning this event at least two years ago. But what an opportunity for fellowship with young adults from many of our churches. All we have heard since late June about this Retreat has been very positive. So, on behalf of the forty-six young adults who attended, and those of us who wish we could have, we extend a thank-you to Immanuel.

Sister-Church Activities

July 1st Prof. and Mrs. Robert Decker and Rev. and Mrs. Ron Cammenga left West Michigan for a two-week trip to Australia to attend a conference with our fellow saints in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. Also present at this conference were representatives from our sister churches in Singapore. Interesting papers on such topics as "The Presbyterian View of Covenant Children," "The Real Presence of Christ in the Preaching," "The Offer of the Gospel," "Preaching Christ from the Old Testament," and "Union to Christ in Reformed Soteriology" were scheduled to be given and discussed.

Congregation Activities

Rev. C. Terpstra, pastor of the First PRC in Holland, MI, has been teaching a class this summer on practical Christianity, for his congregation and any other interested persons. Each Wednesday this class has been looking at the subject of self-denial, using W. Chantry's book, *The Shadow of the Cross*.

Rev. R. Hanko was installed

Sunday, July 21, as the sixth pastor of the Lynden, WA PRC. We rejoice with their congregation in our heavenly Father's providing an undershepherd for them after they were vacant for two years. If our records are correct, Lynden called eleven times before Rev. Hanko accepted their call. Lynden organized a committee to plan two events to welcome the Hanko family. The first event was a time of fellowship and a short program after the evening service of July 21. The second was a picnic/potluck on Saturday afternoon, July 27.

In mid-June the members of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI met at a congregational meeting and approved proposals to replace the carpeting in their lower level and the upper narthex and to renovate their restrooms.

Mission Activities

We read of two developments in Ghana recently that we want to pass along. First, a Steering Committee has been organized to conduct better the day-to-day affairs of the mission. Rev. W. Bekkering is president, and he is joined by four men from the mission. Secondly, the calling church for Ghana, the Hull, IA PRC, has given the mission permission to begin a young adult society. Members between the ages of 18 and 30 and single were encouraged to attend.

Delegates from the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI visited the Pittsburgh mission field July 19-22. They planned to meet with Rev. J. Mahtani Friday evening and the Steering Committee on Saturday, and to worship with the Mission on Sunday.

This July Rev. W. Bruinsma was able to bring lively preaching to the "Fellowship" in Fayetteville, NC. In addition to that, he brought along

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

with him the youth group, all seventeen of them, from his church in Kalamazoo, MI. As you can imagine, these visitors were made most welcome, and an entire week of activities was planned for them. Rev. Bruinsma also gave two speeches that week, one on Tuesday entitled "God's Covenant," and another on Thursday on "God's Covenant in Our Generations."

Minister Activities

From a trio of the Revs. Bruinsma, Dick, and Kleyn, the Hull, IA PRC extended a call to

Rev. M. Dick to serve as second missionary for Ghana. With the decline of Rev. J. Slopsema, the congregation of the Grandville, MI PRC extended a call to Rev. R. VanOverloop to serve as their next pastor. Along with Rev. VanOverloop, the trio also had Prof. D. Engelsma and Candidate R. Kleyn on it. Rev. J. Slopsema also declined the call he had received from the Byron Center, MI PRC. Since that time Byron Center has made a new trio, consisting of the Revs. A. Brummel, M. DeVries, and C. Terpstra. Byron was to call a

pastor on August 11.

Our newest congregation, the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI, extended a call to Candidate R. Kleyn to serve as their first pastor. Candidate D. Overway and Rev. R. VanOverloop were also on that trio. On August 4, Candidate Kleyn accepted that call. Rev. D. Kleyn declined the call from the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ. Since then Covenant has extended a call to Candidate D. Overway to serve them as pastor. Also on their trio were Rev. Dick and Rev. Eriks.



Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to God, the children of

CLARENCE and JANICE KUIPER announce their 35th wedding anniversary on September 8, 2002. We thank God for preserving them bodily and spiritually during their life together. We thank them for the instruction and love they have given us. We also pray God's continued care of them in the future. "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- ✿ Debra and Nicholas Kleyn
 - ✿ Rev. Douglas and Teresa Kuiper
 - ✿ Brian and Karen Kuiper
 - ✿ Marc and Rebekah Kuiper
 - ✿ Cara Kuiper
 - ✿ Kevin Kuiper
 - ✿ Rachel Kuiper
 - ✿ Randall Kuiper
- 11 grandchildren

Grand Rapids, Michigan

NOTICE

Rev. Jai Mahtani's twelve-part series of messages entitled "Preparing To Die Willingly" has recently been aired over the Reformed Witness Hour radio broadcast. This series is available in an attractive album. The cost for the six-tape set is \$15.00, which includes postage. Send requests and payment to: Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, Evangelism Committee, 4875 Ivanrest Avenue, Grandville, MI 49418.

NOTICE

The annual meeting of the RFPA will be held on September 26, in Southwest PRC at 7:30 p.m. Prof. Hanko will speak on the history associated with the book *Sin and Grace*. Everyone is welcome to attend.

NOTICE

Please change the name and address of Byron Center's clerk to:

Leroy DeVries
2090 72nd St.
Byron Center, MI 49315
(616) 878-0075
(ldevries@henrymast.com)

REMINDER

Young people in the PRC who live away from home while attending college may, on request, receive the SB free of charge at their college residence. Don't forget to notify the SB business office at the beginning of the school year.

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for September

Date	Topic	Text
September 1	"Conviction for Christian Education"	Ephesians 6:4
September 8	"Walk Before Me"	Genesis 17:1
September 15	"Biblical Manhood"	Numbers 25:9-11
September 22	"Covenant Husband (1)"	Colossians 3:19
September 28	"Covenant Husband (2)"	Colossians 3:19