

# THE *April 15, 2003* STANDARD BEARER

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# Prayer That We Know Christ's Vast Love

*That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*

Ephesians 3:17b-19

**P**aul delights in telling his fellow-saints that he prays for them (v. 14). For the second time in this epistle Paul tells them that he is praying for them (cf. 1:15ff.). What a beautiful expression of his love. Let us be reminded to express our love for one another by praying for each other!

The content of the two petitions in this prayer is an inspired description of spiritual maturity. The first petition is that God would strengthen the saints in the inner man so that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." (We treated this petition in the March 1, 2003

issue of this magazine.) The second petition also includes the plea that God, by His Spirit, will strengthen them in their inner man. They also need the inner spiritual strength to be able to comprehend the love of Christ. Paul prays that they may know just how great is Christ's love for them. He prayerfully desires that they consider not only *that* Christ loves them, but also *how much* Christ loves them! What a glorious thought for all saints to contemplate!

Just think — in heaven all the saints will spend an eternity thinking about and being astounded by Christ's love. This is one of the glories of heaven. Paul desires that God's children at Ephesus begin on earth to do what they will be doing forever in heaven.

If only we would meditate more on the love of Christ, our way in this weary world would certainly be easier and our burdens lighter. It is when we abide in God's love that we have joy and peace! To know His pardoning grace and saving love is to be constrained to sing of them. Paul prays that they may know that God

is full of compassion, is plenteous in love, and has a grace which is boundless and endless as the heavens above.

There are two reasons why God's saints on earth need to be strengthened by the Spirit in their inner man in order to contemplate the love of Christ. The first is that the concept of the love of Christ is so glorious! The second is that the weaknesses of all saints on earth are so great. We need to be strengthened in order to be "able to comprehend." This ability to comprehend is the strength to lay hold mentally on something. The love of God in Christ is so profound a truth that we need strength from God before we can learn of it, before we can intellectually appropriate it. Anything of God is infinite, and we are so earthly, carnal, and finite. Besides that, God's love "passeth knowledge," that is, it is endless and inexhaustible. Christ's love is not unknowable. It can be *known*. But it cannot be *measured*. There is no limit to Christ's love for His people. It goes on and on. It is limitless, so that we can never know the end of it.

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Though it is impossible for us to know the full extent of God's love in Christ, we do not stop considering it or wanting to learn more of it. The love of Christ has been revealed to us and we must never stop trying to know more and more of it. We must keep learning as much as we can, even though we learn that it is always beyond us. God's child is humbled by the knowledge of the love with which he is loved. We do not stop enjoying Christ's love just because we cannot take it all in. Our joy is not lessened by our inability to see it all. Rather, our joy is greater because of the wonder of its greatness.

The apostle's prayer is more than that the Ephesians may know Christ's love. His prayer is that they may know the vastness or expansiveness of God's love in Christ for His children. He uses four expressive words to describe just how vast this love is.

The "breadth" of God's love refers to the great number who are the objects of that love. We, like Elijah, can easily become discouraged because we see only a little flock or think that we are the only ones who are saved. However, we must remember that the objects of God's love are the proverbial seven thousand. The "number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" (Rev. 5:11). They are as many as the stars in heaven and as the sand on the seashore. In addition to the large number, the breadth of God's love comprehends the redeemed "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). The redeemed are not limited by race or skin color, by wealth, gender, or freedom — male and female, rich and poor, slave and free. God's great love comprehends the innumerable elect from all nations. What great love!

The "length" of God's love speaks of its endless character — that it is an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3). In eternity past we find God's love for His chosen children.

Already then He wrote our names in the Lamb's book of life. God's love continues in time, and it continues without the slightest interruption. God's love for us in Christ never lets us go, so that nothing can separate us from His love (Rom. 8:39)! And this love continues into all eternity to come. It reaches to the uttermost. How great is God's love!

The "depth" of God's love in Christ is manifested in the depths to which Jesus was willing to go in order to save His people — a people who were so undeserving. While we were yet sinners, Christ gave up His life for us (Rom. 5:8). He who was "in the form of God ... took upon him the form of a servant," enduring, *for our sakes*, a lowly birth, a life of suffering, and the agony of hell in death (Phil. 2:5-8). How great is this love!

The "height" of His love indicates what is the ultimate purpose of God's love for us, namely, the height to which God's love raises its objects. The natural children of the devil are made, by God's love, to be God's children. They become no less than joint-heirs with Christ and heirs of God Himself. The love of Christ for His own even desires that we will be with Him in glory (confer John 17:24). What great love!



The ability to know the expansiveness of Christ's love is not just for *some* saints. "All saints" have the ability to know the limitless love of Christ. It may be that we do not *exercise* that God-given ability, and that is our sin. But even the most intellectually slow Christian can grasp it — and often does. Remember that some in the Christian church at Ephesus were slaves, and some of them were likely illiterate. But they, being rooted and grounded in love, were able to comprehend the love of Christ.

The way (in fact, the *only* way) God is pleased to enable the saints on earth to comprehend the love

of God is by "being rooted and grounded in love," i.e., in the way of our loving God and one another.

The expressions "rooted" and "grounded" speak of the root system and of the foundation which gives to a tree and to a building its strength, durability, and solidity — especially in the face of fierce wind storms. The tree or building which is rooted and grounded is our knowledge of Christ's love. The soil in which saints are to be rooted and grounded is that of love. Love is the soil in which the Christian's knowledge of the expansiveness of God's love is set and in which it grows.

We might be inclined to disagree and say that the ability to know the greatness of Christ's love is by studying Scripture or by learning theology or such like. But God teaches us that it is not the intellect, but it is love that knows love. God has chosen to enable His saints to know the vast greatness of Christ's love in the way of their exercising and developing that fruit of the Spirit called "love."

Let us be careful not to conclude that the intellect is unnecessary or unimportant. To the contrary, we are to *comprehend* (v. 18) and to *know* the love of Christ (v. 19). However, true knowledge of God and of Christ and of their work of saving is never only of the mind. Such knowledge, to be real, must move one to love God and Christ. "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth" (I Cor. 8:1). I can understand all mysteries, and have all knowledge, and even have the faith to move mountains, but I will remain nothing more than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal if the knowledge of Christ does not move me to love Him. True knowledge (remember that the devil also has knowledge) leads to loving God and Christ. That is because true knowledge of God and Christ is a knowledge of their love for us. The knowledge of the love of Christ constrains us to love Him.

We would summarize it this way. First, Christ loves us, and He



reveals that love to us by His Word and Spirit. Always His love is first. Then, we love Him, because He first loved us (I John 4:19). The power of His love is that it works in us a love for Him. Third, we love one another (I John 3:14, 15, 23; 4:7, 8, 11, 12, 20, 21). The power of His love is such that we not only love Him, but also one another. Fourth, we learn the expansive nature of Christ's love by exercising ourselves in loving God and one another. We will never know the love which passes knowledge if we are hating! It is only in the way of our loving God and one another that we know the love of Christ that passes knowledge — its breadth, length, depth, and height.

In the way of our loving God, especially in the midst of trials and troubles, we learn the vastness of Christ's love. And it is in the way of our loving fellow-saints, especially those who are difficult to love, that we learn the vast greatness of the love of Christ. In the way of loving saints from a different culture and with different skin color, in the way of loving the otherwise unlovable, we see and appreciate the greatness of God's love. It is also a matter of degree, so that as we grow in loving God and our brethren, we grow in knowing the greatness of His love for us.

May God strengthen us in our inner man by His Spirit so that we, being rooted and grounded in the exercise of loving God and one another, will be able to comprehend with all saints the greatness of Christ's love for us!



There is still more to Paul's prayer for the saints at Ephesus (and for us!). The absolutely amazing and gracious gift of being able to know the vastness of Christ's love is not just for us, for our sake. It does not end in us. God's end and purpose for all His works, including His work of enabling us to know Christ's great love, is His glory — a

glory that comes to Him as we experience the amazing wonder of fellowship with the living God. We are strengthened in our inner man by His Spirit so that we can know the vastness of Christ's love unto this end: that we "might be filled with all the fullness of God."


Our being filled (in the sense of *quality* instead of *quantity*) with all the fullness of God is the end and purpose of both petitions of this prayer. That Christ dwell in our hearts by faith and that we comprehend the vastness of Christ's love is unto the end that we be filled with the fullness of God.

To get an idea of what is meant by our being filled with the fullness of God, consider the fact that Jesus Christ is described as the One in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 1:19; 2:9). And then consider that it is this Jesus who works His fullness in the members of His body (John 1:16; Eph. 4:13). The intimate, vital union of all the saints with Christ is such that "we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones" (Eph. 5:30). So, God in Christ fills us. As the life of the vine is in every branch (John 15) and as the fullness (not part) of my life is in each one of the members of my physical body, so the fullness of God fills the saints.

God's fullness fills us (when we grasp the vastness of Christ's amazing love) in such a way as to control us. Our thinking is renewed and transformed by the mind of God (Eph. 4:23; Rom. 12:1, 2). Being filled with the fullness

of God we have the mind of Christ so that we esteem each other better than ourselves (Phil. 2:2-5). Also our emotions and feelings are brought under the control of the love of Christ. "The love of Christ constraineth us" (II Cor. 5:14). When we know the vastness of Christ's love, then the Spirit moves us to be holy as He is holy, to strive to glorify Him in thought, word, and deed. Instead of living filled with this world and giving up our minds, wills, and emotions to the vanities of deceitful lusts, we are moved by His Spirit to give ourselves up to the service of His will. This is because when God's fullness fills us we are drawn into intimate fellowship with God. Then we are walking and talking with Him. Then we long to love as we are loved, to serve and glorify Him with our all.

Filled with the fullness of God our every need is met. Every sense of emptiness and want is gone. We have in us a well of water springing up, so we never thirst. We are filled! Filled with God's fullness!

Let us pray this prayer for ourselves. And for our fellow-saints. May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ grant, according to the riches of His own glory, strength by His Spirit in our inner man so that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints the tremendous vastness of Christ's love, a love which passes knowledge, unto the end that we may be filled with the fullness of God. Can you pray anything better?! 

*Each generation to the next Shall testimony bear,  
And to Thy praise, from age to age, Thy wondrous acts declare.  
Upon Thy glorious majesty And honor I will dwell,  
And all Thy grand and glorious works And all Thy greatness tell.*

*Thy mighty acts and terrible Shall men with awe confess;  
Of Thy great goodness they shall sing, And perfect righteousness.  
Most gracious and compassionate Is God Who reigns above;  
His wrath is ever slow to rise, Unbounded is His love.*

Psalter #394:2, 3



# Remembering the Schism of 1953

**2**003 is the fiftieth anniversary of the great schism in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC).

Meeting in April and May 1953, Classis East of the PRC condemned particular teachings of one of the ministers of First Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan as heretical. The matter had come to the classis by appeal from members of First Church's consistory. At the same time, Classis East advised the consistory of First Church to require a public apology from the minister for his teachings. Classis added that the consistory should deal with a refusal to apologize by suspending the minister from his office.

When the minister refused to apologize for his teachings, judged heretical by the major assembly, the consistory of First Church suspended him at a meeting in June 1953. At the same meeting, the consistory deposed a number of elders who resisted both the classis and the consistory by supporting the minister in his refusal to apologize.

Rather than submit to the decisions of classis and to their discipline by the consistory, while protesting to classis or appealing to synod, the suspended minister and deposed elders continued to function in their offices. They called and held worship services apart from the consistory of First Church and in opposition to the decisions of Classis East. In fact, they seized and occupied the building of First Church.

Schism in First Church, mother of the denomination, was a reality

on Sunday, June 28, 1953. More than half of the five hundred-family congregation worshiped under the leadership of the suspended minister, Rev. Hubert De Wolf, in the building at the corner of Fuller and Franklin in Grand Rapids. The rest worshiped that Sunday in a rented building with the other ministers of First Church, Rev. Herman Hoeksema and Rev. Cornelius Hanko.

Inevitably, and quickly, the schism widened throughout the entire denomination.

Classis East met again in July 1953. Delegations both from the consistory of First Church and from the church of the suspended pastor and deposed elders presented themselves to be seated. Classis recognized as rightful representatives of First PRC the delegates from the consistory that had carried out Classis' advice. At this decision, all the office bearers and people in Classis East who sided with the suspended minister of First Church broke with Classis East and thus with the denomination. They expressed their support of the suspended minister, rejected the authority of Classis East, and set themselves up as a rival Protestant Reformed denomination.

Schism in the churches of the other classis, Classis West, followed in September 1953. Classis West took decisions condemning the action of First Church in suspending its minister. Thus Classis West deliberately opposed and repudiated Classis East, which alone had jurisdiction in the case. The result was that several congregations in the West separated them-

selves from the PRC, while other congregations split, one group remaining faithful to the PRC and another group allying themselves with the rival denomination.

Fifty years have passed since that fateful event in the history of the PRC.

## Worthy of Our Remembrance

Recently, the PRC celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of their birth as a Reformed denomination. No such denominational celebration is scheduled to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the schism in the PRC. But the schism is worthy of our remembrance.

We certainly cannot ignore an event of such magnitude in our history. When the dust and fury of the ecclesiastical storm had settled, more than half, indeed nearly two thirds of the members and ministers of the PRC had left the denomination, most of them never to return. In 1952, on the eve of the schism, the PRC were twenty-four churches, almost fourteen hundred families, and a little more than six thousand members. Twenty-eight ministers served the churches. After the schism, the denomination was reduced to sixteen churches, about five hundred and sixty families, and slightly fewer than twenty four hundred members. Only fourteen ministers remained.

The schism shook the churches to their foundation. Those looking on from the outside must have wondered whether the denomination would survive.

The question, "Why? Why the schism?" points us to the reasons for remembering the schism, dev-

astating and painful as it was, with thankfulness to God, who was sovereign over it. By the schism of 1953, God preserved in the PRC the unadulterated gospel of salvation by grace alone. Thus He preserved the PRC as a denomination of true churches of Jesus Christ according to the authoritative declaration of Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. God preserved the gospel of grace in the PRC by maintaining the truth of the unconditional covenant in the face of opposition to it by those determined to introduce into the churches the doctrine of a conditional covenant.

Although personalities entered in and although men and women on both sides marred the work by their sins, the issue in the controversy was doctrinal. The doctrine at issue was the covenant of God. The issue was the unconditionality of the covenant. This, the PRC had confessed from the beginning of their separate existence as churches. This, a powerful faction in the churches was determined to repudiate in favor of the doctrine of a conditional covenant. This, the churches contended for, however imperfectly, in all the bitter struggle of 1953—valiantly and gloriously. This, by the grace of God the churches maintained in that fight, not counting the cost. And this, the PRC confess fifty years later.

In light of the development of the doctrine of a conditional covenant now ongoing in Reformed churches, it becomes evident how important the struggle for the unconditional covenant by the PRC in the late 1940s and early 1950s really was. As the recent series of editorials in the *Standard Bearer*, “The Unconditional Covenant in Contemporary Debate,” showed, prominent Reformed and Presbyterian theologians are teaching the gross heresy of justification by faith and works on the basis of a conditional covenant. Reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches and seminaries are tolerating these false teachers and their

assault on the gospel of sovereign grace because the churches and seminaries are themselves committed to a conditional covenant.

In this and subsequent, occasional editorials, I intend to reflect on the schism of 1953 in the PRC.

### The Histories

It is not my intention to relate the history. For the history, the interested reader has a number of good resources. A brief history of 1953 is included in Prof. Herman Hanko’s treatment of the history of the PRC in the fiftieth anniversary book, *God’s Covenant Faithfulness* (RFPA, 1975). Gertrude Hoeksema gives a more detailed account in her history of the PRC, *A Watered Garden: A Brief History of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America* (RFPA, 1992). Mrs. Hoeksema recounts something of the history of 1953 also in the last chapters of her biography of Herman Hoeksema, *Therefore Have I Spoken* (RFPA, 1969). More recently, three chapters of Prof. Herman Hanko’s doctrinal history of the PRC are devoted to the controversy that culminated in the schism of 1953 (*For Thy Truth’s Sake*, RFPA, 2000).

The issues of the *Standard Bearer* in the late 1940s and early 1950s, readily available on CDs and in bound volumes, are a unique history of the controversy. They give the history as it was unfolding. The account breathes the passion and agony of the church struggle. One who immerses himself in those issues of the magazine relives the schism.

My purpose with the editorials on the schism that will appear from time to time is to comment on various aspects of the schism that instruct, edify, and warn the churches today.

### A Possible Denominational Remembrance

Even though synod has not arranged for a denominational celebration of this anniversary, there are ways by which the churches

can fruitfully remember the schism. Consistories can schedule special classes; ministers can preach special sermons; evangelism committees can plan appropriate lectures.

Without preempting activities conducted by the local congregations, I suggest a denominational remembrance of the schism of 1953 that is still possible at this late date. Let the Theological School Committee ask the faculty of the seminary to prepare lectures on the most important aspects of the controversy. With the cooperation of the churches in the area, these lectures would be given in western Michigan this fall, either during successive weeks or at a conference-type meeting on a Friday evening and a Saturday morning.

The lecture-series would be made available to all the churches, although outside of western Michigan the program would have to take the form of a weekend conference. If the churches are interested, a weekend conference would accommodate the four churches in Illinois and Indiana. Another such conference would serve the churches in northwest Iowa and southwest Minnesota. The two churches in Canada could combine to have the lectures given for the benefit of their members. Each of the rest of the churches, over time, would schedule the conference of lectures for itself.

Two or three subjects commend themselves at once as topics for the lectures: the fascinating history of the events, the vital doctrinal issue, and the intriguing church political aspects of the schism. Every lecture, or conference, should conclude with sufficient time for questions from the audience.

Not only would the members of the PRC benefit, but the lectures could also be advertised as witness to people outside the PRC. And it is healthy that seminary professors occasionally have this kind of contact with all the churches.

In the providence of God and by the ingenuity of certain mem-



bers of the Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois, a very valuable resource of rare and important materials pertaining

to the controversy of 1953 has just become available. Some of these materials I had never before heard or read.

About this in the next editorial remembering the schism of 1953.

— DJE 

## Letters

### Waltzing to Damnation

I just received your February 15 edition of the *Standard Bearer* and read the sad, sad account of the situation at Toronto's First Christian Reformed Church.

I found it practically unbelievable that a denomination, to which I belonged, could have sunk so low. I lived in the Toronto area in the

50s and 60s, and Toronto's and the whole province of Ontario's Christian Reformed Churches were so scriptural and true to the Word. That's where I developed the love of the Word of God.

What a scourge homosexuality has become, not primarily on the social scene, but sadly affecting all sorts of Christian denominations. And people are just merrily waltz-

ing their way to damnation, while the Scripture is so plain.

I am thankful that there is the *Standard Bearer* and the volumes of tremendously helpful material.

God bless you, and I thank you and your staff for your labors in His vineyard.

John Vanduyvenvoorde  
Whitehall, MI 

## All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

### ■ More on Harold Camping

Harold Camping has been gaining some attention (notoriety?) because of his presentation of the view that the church age is over. Now Christians are to come out of the church, all the churches, and assemble in homes on Sunday for informal worship and meditation upon Scripture. Some churches, especially some small evangelical churches, have had families leave as a consequence.

The Associated Press had a story on Camping in an article that appeared in a number of newspapers across the country. The article also was in the *Loveland Reporter-Herald* of February 1, 2003 — sent to me by two faithful correspondents. The article stated:

An influential Christian radio host, best known for his failed predictions of the second coming of Christ, has run into more deri-

sion and criticism for telling listeners to abandon church.

Harold Camping says his Bible studies have revealed that what he calls "the church age" has ended. He has told his worldwide radio audience that Satan has taken over all churches.

For the past two years, Camping has been teaching that God wants people to worship privately in their homes instead — with no leaders, no baptism and no communion.

"The Bible says God is not saving people any longer in the churches," Camping said in a recent interview at Family Radio's headquarters in Oakland. "They're being saved outside the churches."

"...He's in critical locations in the United States and the rest of the world. He has a large listening audience," said David Clark, who tracks Christian fringe groups. "He's got pastors all over the United States in an uproar. He's gone over the edge this time."

The concern of the churches became evident here in Grand Rap-

ids when Seventh Reformed Church (Independent) of Grand Rapids scheduled a lecture by Dr. Cornelius Venema, professor and president of doctrinal studies in Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, IN. The *Grand Rapids Press*, February 8, 2003, reported that Seventh Reformed Church has three families that "have deserted the Rev. Zachary Anderson's pews because of Camping." The report continues:

"Camping is a warning to us to not listen to the word of one individual," said theologian Cornelius Venema, who spoke at Seventh Reformed last Saturday. "It's very injurious."

Venema, professor and president of doctrinal studies at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Ind., called Camping's teachings "outlandish" and urged deserters back to church.

It is a perilous and dangerous course on which these people have embarked. Let us pray it is for a season only," he told an audience of about 200.

...Venema — while crediting

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

Family Radio for turning many to Christianity since broadcasts began in 1958 – today considers Camping's methods "idiosyncratic" and his conclusions "fan-ciful."

Camping, he said, relies on allegory, where texts are symbolic stories whose real meaning allegedly lies elsewhere.

For example, Camping argues Christ's prediction of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in Matthew 24 is really saying parishioners should stay away Sundays, Venema said. "It's a very strange reading."

Venema said Camping's "para-church movement" seems like a cult, but is too disorganized for the label.

"He is another in a long line — and it's a very unhappy history — of these kinds of prophets."

Those who want to read what Camping's teaching is can find information on the internet ([http://www.familyradio.com/cross/tract/add/church\\_add1.htm](http://www.familyradio.com/cross/tract/add/church_add1.htm)). Some of what he writes (I have not corrected the many grammatical errors found in the article) is:

For more than 1900 years God has tolerated the wrong doctrines even as He tolerated the high places of Old Testament Israel. But now God has loosed Satan and through his deceptions churches all over the world have become apostate, following the desires of men rather than those of God. Satan has been allowed to marshal his forces to surround Jerusalem and destroy it. We have learned that the terms Jerusalem and Judea refer to the corporate external church.

...But the question must be raised; If a church earnestly tries to remove all of its wrong doctrines (its spiritual high places) and if it still has true believers within it, why cannot it continue as a viable God blessed congregation. In answer to this question at least two answers must be carefully considered.

The first answer is that if God declares there is not to be left

one stone upon an other. This means that God is declaring that it is His intention that there is not to be any churches left to represent God's kingdom. If a church insists that it is still recognized by God then it is still trying to have a small part in the temple of God. The believers (the stones) in that church are still in place in the temple of God. But that cannot be because God declares there will not be left one stone upon another. This means that God's usage of the churches and congregations has come to an end.

...But then we read Amos 8:11: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."

The book of Amos is speaking of the very time in which we are now living. And this verse is very pertinent to this time. God is speaking of a famine that is to come. It is not a famine of bread and water. Spiritually bread identifies with Jesus who is the bread of life. Water has to do with the true Gospel. Thus God is declaring this is not a time when there is a famine of the declaration of the true Gospel. That is, in the churches that exist today there may still be Pastors that faithfully bring the true Gospel to their congregations. There may still be missionaries sent out by these faithful churches who are still faithfully bringing the Gospel to the lost of the world.

However, it is the next phrase that is so ominous. "a famine of hearing the Word of God." Why is that so ominous. We must remember there are two very important ingredients in God's plan of saving the elect. First of all they must be under the hearing of the Word of God. Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 8:17). [Camping must mean Romans 10:17.—GVB]

Camping, through much convoluted reasoning, finally shows that, even if the true gospel is still being preached in faithful

churches, it will be of benefit only to those already saved.

The true Gospel may still be faithfully preached. Those who are saved may experience blessings. But what about the infants and the children. If the Holy Spirit is not applying the Word of God by giving these children spiritual ears they will remain spiritually dead. How awful this is. This is a frightening truth that parents must face. If they truly love their children and are praying for their salvation they must consider this problem very seriously.

One can argue; but God will save them if they are elect. True, but God's elective plan is God's business. We are to be obedient to God's commandments. We never want to set up our own rules. We are to be obedient to God's commands. He tells us the Holy Spirit has been taken from the temple and we are to come out of it. Therefore if we have a concern for the salvation of our children we should want to obey God's command to flee from the temple. Wonderfully it is still the day of salvation; but it is God who sets up the plan through which He will work to save.

Remember we read in Amos 8 that there would come a time of a famine of hearing the Word of God. Thus even though the Word of God is faithfully preached, if God does not give spiritual ears to the hearers of that Word, they cannot be saved.

This solemn truth bears repeating. There may still exist congregations in which true believers are still hearing faithful preaching by which they are blessed because God previously had opened their spiritual ears to the Word of God. But any children or adults that are not saved cannot be saved if God will not open their spiritual ears. In that church there will be a famine of hearing the Word of God. Likewise the missionary that is sent out by that church will see no true fruit on his labors. No matter how faithful his preaching may be there will be a famine of hearing of the Word of God.



Now we can understand why God commands us to depart out of Jerusalem. It is for our own spiritual safety and the spiritual welfare of our children that we are to depart out.

Now God is using the means of radio, television, books, and the internet (according to Camping) to convey the gospel and to save unbelievers and the children—most specifically, through Family Radio. One would suppose, then, that tithes no longer are to be paid to churches—but presumably to Family Radio.

One can only be amazed that all of these allegorical, fanciful interpretations come forth from one man — and that many believe his word. I am not aware of anyone in all the history of biblical interpretation who has come up with this kind of interpretation — only Harold Camping. Harold Camping is the one man, the *only* man, who has come to recognize all these things in Scripture that the church has always confessed to be perspicuous (very clear). There is one man, only one man, who can convey these “truths” to people of God. Amazing, is it not, that in these last days God has found one, *and only one*, man who can correctly teach the people!! More amazing still is the fact that there are many who will follow after and repeat these teachings to others. Actually, it’s very sad and destructive.

## ■ Tightening the Clamps

It becomes increasingly evident that “freedom of speech” has definite limits when it comes to the Christian. The unbeliever can say all kinds of vile things about God and our Savior Jesus Christ — that’s “freedom of speech.” The unbeliever can promote adultery of all sorts — that’s “freedom of speech.” But when sin is *condemned* — and that, too, in connection with the teaching of Scripture — then the statement is made: “Freedom

of speech carries some responsibility.”

Some disturbing court decisions have been recorded in Regina, Canada, as reported in the *Leader-Post*, February 11, 2003, of that city. The article states:

While Bill Whatcott contends he has a right to freedom of speech, some people who took offence to his anti-homosexual pamphlets argue that right is limited when it promotes hatred.

Whatcott is defending himself against four complaints which allege he promoted hatred on the basis of sexual orientation in violation of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code. A tense hearing punctuated by repeated objections and refereed by human rights tribunal chair Anil K. Pandila began Monday in Regina and is expected to continue today.

Whatcott attended the hearing wearing a t-shirt that shows stick-figures of two men and two women holding hands superimposed with crossed-out circles under the phrase “Homosexuality is a sin.”

It’s similar to an advertisement that a Saskatchewan human rights tribunal ruled offensive in 2001.

The article continues by reporting on the question of right of free speech — and Whatcott’s claim that anyone who disagreed with his position had the right to tear up his pamphlets.

According to the report in the *Leader-Post*,

At issue are pamphlets Whatcott put in mailboxes in Regina and Saskatoon. Between December 2001 and April 2002, three men and one woman filed complaints with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission about the material, which condemns teaching schoolchildren about homosexuality and links it to pedophilia.


Guy Taylor, of Saskatoon, testified the pamphlet brought him to tears. “There were so many words that were trigger

words — hateful and mean,” he said.

“I’m offended by being told my life is filthy.”

The outcome of this case is a foregone conclusion. The *Catholic World News*, Feb. 11, 2003 reported on a similar case and its decision:

In a ruling given virtually no media coverage, the Court of Queen’s Bench in Saskatchewan ruled a man who placed references to Bible verses on homosexuality into a newspaper ad was guilty of inciting hatred. The December 11, 2002 decision was in response to an appeal of a 2001 Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission (HRC) ruling which ordered both the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* newspaper and Hugh Owens of Regina pay CAN\$1,500 to three homosexual activists for publishing an ad in the Saskatoon newspaper quoting Bible verses regarding homosexuality.

It is becoming increasingly clear that those who have “freedom of speech” can willfully vilify God in their cursings and swearings, can portray Christ as homosexual, can set forth “alternate life styles” in shacking up together without the benefit of marriage and can willfully live in and promote adultery. Those who point out that Scripture, in the time of the Theocracy, required even the death penalty for such sins, are “hateful and mean” and offend those who are “told (my) life is filthy.” Sin can be promoted and encouraged under this “freedom,” but the sinner cannot be condemned because that is a “hate crime” and abuses “freedom of speech.” One can believe the testimony of Scripture as it applies to himself, but he may not express that in any public place. How long will it be before more fines are levied against all those who condemn sin with the claim that such promote “hate crimes”? 

# God's Hatred of Lying

**O**ur society accepts lying as a normal part of life. People lie when they fill out their tax forms. Employees lie on their job applications. Salesmen "stretch the truth" (i.e., "lie") about the products they sell. Companies falsely advertise by promising a great deal in bold print while printing disclaimers in such small print they can be read only with a magnifying glass. Politicians make campaign promises they never intend to keep. Criminals lie in the courtroom to keep themselves from punishment. Speeders lie to police officers in an attempt to escape receiving a large fine. Recently, executives of major corporations lied about the worth of the company to stimulate the stock prices. And in the end, employees of these companies lost thousands or even millions of dollars while these executives walked away with millions. When lying affected their pocketbook, then people finally expressed their outrage.

The lie is found in so many different forms. When a man lies, he might deliberately speak what is the exact opposite of the truth. For example, a murderer may be caught with the smoking gun at the crime scene with a motive for the murder. He knows that he committed the crime. But when he is asked in court what he pleads, he responds, "Not guilty." Or when a man lies, he might slightly dis-

tort the truth. There will be some truth in what he says, but it is slightly twisted for his own advantage.

Many in our day lie about what God's Word teaches. When men teach that God loves all men and desires to save all men, they lie. The standard of truth in this world, Holy Scripture, clearly teaches that God loves only those whom He chose from all eternity in Jesus Christ. The teaching that the Son and the Holy Spirit are not co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father is a lie. Scripture clearly teaches that God is one in being and three in persons. Not only is doctrinal lying heinous, but living the lie is also a terrible sin. I John 1:6 speaks of this lying: "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." The man lies who claims to be a child of God, but lives constantly in sin without confessing that sin and turning from that sin.

These lies arise from sinful motives. Some lie because they do not trust in God. For example, Abraham lied when he and Sarah fled to Egypt to escape the famine in the land of Canaan. Abraham told Sarah to tell the Egyptians that she was Abraham's sister and not his wife, because he was afraid Pharaoh would kill him to take Sarah to be his wife (Gen. 12:10ff.). Others lie to save themselves from punishment and ridicule. Children will lie so that they do not receive the spanking they deserve. Some lie deliberately about the neighbor so that they might climb up in the

eyes of men upon the ruined reputation of the neighbor. Still others lie to receive something they want. For example, Ananias and Sapphira lied to obtain recognition and praise for their gift to the church (Acts 5:1-11).

What does God say about lying? God speaks clearly in His Word about lying especially in the book of Proverbs. In Proverbs 6:16-19, lying is declared to be one of the seven sins which the Lord hates. Proverbs 12:22 says, "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight." In Proverbs 19:9 we read of God's great anger against those who lie: "A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish." God's hatred for liars was manifest in the harsh punishment of Ananias and Sapphira. God struck them down dead for their lie (Acts 5:3-5). The ninth commandment of God's law, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor," forbids the sin of lying. The Heidelberg Catechism explains that the ninth commandment calls us "to avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper works of the devil." From all these passages it is clear: God hates lying! God punishes those who lie. Therefore, it should not be found in the lives of God's people.



Does God hate all lies? Does not God in His Word approve lying in some instances? The instance that seems to support the idea that God approves of some lying is when Rahab lied to the sol-

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diers who came to her home in Jericho looking for the Israelite spies. Rahab hid the men and told the soldiers that the spies had left the city already. Yet, Scripture calls Rahab a woman of faith (Heb. 11:31, James 2:25). The argument goes that good came from this — the Israelite spies were kept alive. And Rahab's motive was pure. She was concerned about God and His people. We cannot deny that her motive was good. The conclusion reached from Rahab's lie is that circumstances determine whether or not a lie is pleasing in God's sight. If the motive is pure, then the ends justify the means. God looks down on some lies favorably from His judgment seat. Circumstances must dictate when to lie and when to tell the truth.

But Scripture declares that all lies are sin. It is certainly true that God used the lie of Rahab to save His people. But this does not make the lie right. We interpret Scripture with Scripture. The passages listed above must be applied to the actions of Rahab. What does God, in His Word, say about lying? Lying is sin. All the passages in which God speaks about lying teach us that lying is *always* wrong. There are no exceptions.

It is certainly true that God used Rahab's lie for the good of the spies, Israel, and Rahab. God works all things for the good of His people, even sin (Rom. 8:28). Scripture is full of examples of God using sin for good. Just look at the cross of Jesus Christ. Wicked men crucified Jesus. God does not excuse the sin of these wicked men because He accomplished our salvation through this event.

We should learn something about ourselves from this argument. We would like obedience to God's law to be determined by the situation. By nature we desire to decide for ourselves what is good and evil. We want our sin to be excused by the circumstances. But never is obedience to God's law determined by the situation. Proudly

we would like it if we were the final court of appeal in matters concerning God's law. But we are not. The objective Word of God is the final court of appeal.

We come to the conclusion that lying is always sin. This does not mean telling the truth is easy. It would not be easy to speak the truth if we were in Rahab's situation. But Scripture declares the truth: the fierce anger of God rests upon the man who lies. Therefore, lying must be completely cut out of the life of the child of God. We must speak the truth in love.



The anger of God burns so hotly against lying because of the antithesis between the truth and the lie. God is Truth. The sin of lying does not originate with God, for He is truth in Himself. God Himself is the standard of all truth because He is truth in Himself. God loves what corresponds with reality, of which He is the Judge. There is no lying in God. Therefore, God hates the lie and loves the truth. God demands of man that he speak the truth.

The lie originated with Satan, the father of the lie, and not with God or with man. God created Adam in His image to know the truth and to speak the truth as God's prophet in the world. With a lie, Satan tempted Eve to disobey God. Satan told Eve that if she ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Satan lied to Eve, and Eve became a partaker of that lie when she ate the fruit. Because the lie originated in Satan, Jesus says in John 8:44, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it."

By nature we are liars. Apart from God's grace we can do nothing but speak the lie and believe the lie. By nature, man hates the truth about God and about Jesus Christ. How clearly we see this in our own children. Our children do not need to be taught how to lie. Lying comes naturally to them. Soon after they are able to respond with "yes" and "no" our children lie. We cannot stop this lying in our children any more than we can keep ourselves from lying by our own efforts. Sinners are lying addicts. Speaking the truth goes against our sinful natures.

The only way we can be delivered from the sin of lying is by the work of Jesus Christ. In Him alone is found forgiveness for this sin. When Jesus died on the cross for the sins of His people, He died for all the lies His people tell. We know there is forgiveness for the sin of lying in the way of repenting of this sin. We must repent.

But how is it possible for us to turn from this sin? It seems too difficult. The possibility of turning from this sin cannot be found in man, for he is a liar by nature. The possibility is found alone in Jesus Christ, for He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Christ enables His people to know the truth. He reveals the truth to His people through the preaching and the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of His people. Believers receive the spiritual strength from Christ to speak the truth in love. Man is completely unable to tame his own tongue in regard to lying. Man has been able to tame dogs, horses, and lions, but not his own tongue. He is unable to keep himself from lying. The only one who can give the strength to refrain from lying is Jesus Christ, in whom we have been made children of the light.

Because we are children of the light, we must not lie. As children of Satan, the wicked lie. They are children of the darkness. Therefore they lie without blinking an eye. Children of Satan lie to their

parents without any remorse. Husbands and wives of the darkness lie to each other. But children of the light, who have the victory over sin, shine by speaking the truth.



Positively, our calling, according to Ephesians 4:15, is to speak "the truth in love." This means we must speak the truth about God. God demands that we confess the truth about Him before the world. We must speak the truth about God to those who hold to the lie. We must witness to the truth about God by our lives and with our mouths.


God calls us to the truth about the neighbor and with the neighbor in love. In Ephesians 4:25 we read, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one

of another." This means we do nothing but speak the truth. When we speak the truth, our motive must be pure. It must be done in love. This is important because we can speak the truth in hatred. The ninth commandment forbids speaking the truth in hatred. When someone else sins, we may not recount that sin to another. This is sin because it hurts the brother or sister. In these instances, we must keep our mouths shut. Or we can approach a brother about his sin and speak the truth about that sin, but do it in such a way that we rub it in his face and look down on him for it. This is not speaking the truth in love, but in hatred.

Speaking the truth in love means that we seek the spiritual good of the neighbor. For example, when a believer or unbeliever walks in sin, we go to the neighbor in love seeking his spiritual good.

We go to the brother desiring that he might repent of that sin.

The world today knows nothing of speaking the truth in love. The world is becoming darker and darker in its lying. Lying is expected in society. The devil and the world would love for us to join with them in their sin. And often we do join the world in this sin. Pray that God will show us when we lie, because you and I often lie without thinking. Pray that God will enable you to speak the truth in obedience to His Word.

There is great urgency for us to speak the truth in love. This is our calling as those who are the prophets of God in Jesus Christ in the world. We must speak the truth to the glory of God. Let us reflect that we are the children of the God of truth. May the truth always be found upon our lips. 

*Go Ye Into All the World*

*Rev. Arie denHartog*

## The Great Commission (2)

**T**he great commission to the church is to preach the gospel to all nations. This says something very important about how the church is to be gathered. It is the purpose of the Lord that she be gathered through the means of the preaching of the gospel. Many throughout history have imagined and have taught that the church is gathered through other means than the preaching. In the past, there have been those who have advocated that the cause of

the kingdom of Christ must be advanced by the sword. This had disastrous consequences for the church and brought shame on the name of the Lord. Some have taught that it is through social and political action, maybe even through fomenting revolution in the nations of the world, that the kingdom of Christ is advanced. This has caused some to accuse the church of activity similar to the terrorist and radical revolutionary organizations of our present day. Others teach that the church is gathered through emotional rallies that stir up the masses with a supposed irrational and supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. There are many in our day who maintain

that preaching is not the most effective means for the gathering of the church. Rather, the church must be gathered by well-planned, orchestrated, widely-advertised rallies, with popular entertainment, movie shows, and great movie-star-like personalities as the speakers and entertainers. Others have maintained that the church is gathered by feeding the world's poor and alleviating the great social ills of our time and seeking to bring relief to the oppressed and disadvantaged and underprivileged of the world.

The great commission teaches that the Lord will gather His church through the mighty power of the preaching of the gospel. The

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reason for this is that the preaching of the gospel is the power of the Lord Himself to save His people. The church must never be ashamed of this power. There is no power like the power of the preaching of the gospel. There is no other power in all the world like the power of God unto salvation, which goes forth through the preaching of the gospel. The church must perform her labor with a clear understanding and strong conviction concerning these truths. The history of the astounding growth of the church and its gathering in nation after nation of the world, in spite of the opposition of men, is the mighty demonstration of the power of the preaching of the gospel.

In order to understand the great commission, we must understand the central significance of the preaching of the gospel. In a future article we will focus on this subject alone. What exactly is meant by the preaching of the gospel? Why is it true that the preaching of the gospel is the means through which the exalted Lord Himself gathers His church? What makes a speech given by the church truly the preaching of the gospel, and how does it differ from presentations that are merely lectures on various subjects?

Briefly, the preaching of the gospel is the authoritative declaration of the good news of God's mighty salvation. It is the declaration of the truth that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. It is the mighty announcement, in the world, of the truth of the absolute victory of the cross of Christ Jesus and its mighty and finished accomplishments and the finality of the righteousness of the saints it achieved. It is the declaration of the truth of the victory and triumph of the resurrection of Christ. It is the glorious announcement of Jesus now exalted at the right hand of God the Father in heaven and clothed with all power and authority in heaven and earth and enthroned above all principalities

ties and powers and dominions as the sovereign Lord and King of all the nations of the world. It is the declaration of the powerful Word of this exalted Christ whereby He will gather His elect out of all the nations of the world and make them forever His own, causing them to be citizens of His everlasting kingdom of glory. It is the declaration of the blessed hope of the coming of this glorious Lord at the end of the ages. It is the mighty announcement in the world that Christ is coming as the Judge of all the nations and as the mighty Lord of salvation who will come to redeem His church with perfect and everlasting salvation, causing her to inherit His everlasting kingdom of glory and finally redeeming her from the wicked world that through the centuries has persecuted her and sought to destroy her. It is the glorious Word of the Lord that prophesies that this church shall be before His throne in the heavens forever praising and glorifying His name.

The great commission involves a very comprehensive declaration of the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not a one-time presentation of a very simplistic gospel. Jesus commanded His disciples in the great commission to teach all things "whatsoever I have commanded you." This refers really to the whole of the content of the Scriptures. In the words of the inspired apostle Paul, it is declaring the whole counsel of God concerning salvation and His glory. It refers to all of the great and glorious doctrines of salvation as they have been infallibly recorded in the Scriptures. It includes all the doctrines concerning proper Christian living, the holy calling of the church in the world. The whole truth of Christ must be declared without compromise, without adding to or taking away from it. This truth must be declared again and again in the world. This truth was given forever to be the foundation of the church upon which she must

stand and upon which the faith of the saints must be based.


Often times this truth will be opposed, denied, compromised, and forgotten. Then this truth must again be restored and the remnant of God's people must be gathered. Churches will become apostate, the faithful will be scattered. The church must be gathered again, and she must be reformed and brought back to the truth of Christ and built again on that truth. The Bible makes no absolute distinction between preaching to those who have never heard the gospel and those who once heard the gospel and have forsaken this truth in their generations. The work of preaching to recover again the wayward, and the work of preaching to reveal the truth of Jesus Christ and the hope of salvation in Him to those who never yet heard the gospel, go hand in hand until the end of the ages when the Lord returns.

According to the great commission, the gospel must be preached to all nations. This was an astounding commission of our Lord. It was given to a small band of eleven disciples. It seemed at the time impossible that they could carry out such a great commission. But the Lord intended that this work should be accomplished over the decades and centuries of the New Testament age until the end of the world when He comes again. The church must always be interested in nations and people that have never heard the gospel, to bring this gospel to them as the Lord Himself guides the course of missions through the ages. The Lord will not return until this great work has been accomplished. The church must not lose her zeal and courage in this work but look to the glorious appearing of the Lord at the end of the ages. In the end, the great commission will gather an innumerable host of saints from every tribe and tongue and nation and people that will one day stand before the throne of God and the

Lamb of God to worship Him in glory throughout all eternity.

When the Lord gave this great commission to the church He gave her the assurance and promise of His blessed presence. His power and His Spirit would be with her. His Word would be given to her. His favor and loving kindness would be upon her. His protection would keep her. Without this the church could never perform the great work which the Lord has

called her to do. It is a humanly impossible task. How could it be that a small band of men could accomplish such a great and glorious task as preaching the gospel to all the nations of the world? In doing this work the church will face many enemies far more mighty than she herself is. The preachers of the gospel must face tremendous hardships. They will be hated and persecuted in the world. Many will have to die as martyrs as the great

commission is being carried out. As the end of time approaches, the work of the preaching of the gospel will grow ever more difficult, the opposition to it more and more fierce in the world as the Antichrist rears his ugly head. But the comfort and strength and assurance of the church and the preachers of the gospel are the blessed promise of the Lord Jesus. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. AMEN." 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

## Servetus and the Denial of the Trinity (2)

### Introduction

**T**he Reformation in general, and John Calvin in particular, had to wage war not only against Rome and the errors of Rome that had plagued the church of Christ for centuries; it had also to wage war against many who left the Romish Church to join the Reformation, but who themselves proved to be heretics spouting heresies worse than anything Rome had ever taught. Calvin was constantly summoned to defend the truth of God's Word against heretics. The worst of them all was Michael Servetus. In his almost unbelievable arrogance, he had chosen to deny that God is triune, that is, three in person and one in

essence. And, in doing so, he had also denied the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He repudiated the ancient creeds of Nicea-Constantinople and Chalcedon, and chose to set up his own views as the primitive truth of the apostolic church.

So heretical were his views that he was arrested in Vienne, France by Roman Catholic authorities. He escaped from their clutches, and was on his way to Italy, when he decided to stop in Geneva! This was strange. It was almost a death wish, for Calvin himself had been so bothered and harassed by Servetus that he had written Farel that, should Servetus come to Geneva, Calvin would see to it that he did not leave alive. Yet, Servetus went to Geneva when there was absolutely no necessity of doing this.

### The Character of Servetus

Before we enter a discussion of the arrest, trial, and execution of

Servetus in Geneva, it might be helpful to have some idea of his character, which at least in some respects explains his strange conduct.

We already mentioned the towering pride of Servetus. This more than anything else was his undoing. Every man who knows and loves the creedal heritage of the church knows too that the creeds are not on a par with Scripture. They are made by men, frequently in consultation with each other at synods, and they are formulated with the greatest care only after long and extensive discussion and frequently after controversy. But they are man-made.

To say that they are man-made, however, does not rob them of all their authority. Christ promised the Spirit of truth to the church, who would guide the church into all truth. This guidance of the Spirit is a work that is carried out through searching the Scriptures, discussing Scripture's truths, de-

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fending these truths against enemies, and formulating these truths into precise theological propositions. Although the church which follows the formation of these creeds must of necessity compare them anew in every succeeding generation, the church nevertheless recognizes that they are prized possessions, special gifts of Christ's Spirit, the fruit of intense work by great men, and born out of the thunder of the spiritual battlefield. Servetus had no interest in all this.

Schaff has an interesting description of Servetus:

Servetus ... was one of the most remarkable men in the history of heresy. He was of medium size, thin and pale, like Calvin, his eyes beaming with intelligence, and an expression of melancholy and fanaticism....

His mental endowments and acquirements were of a high order, and placed him far above the heretics of his age and almost on an equality with the Reformers.... He knew Latin, Hebrew, and Greek ... as well as Spanish, French, and Italian, and was well read in the Bible, the early fathers, and the schoolmen. He had an original, speculative, and acute mind, a tenacious memory, ready wit, a fiery imagination, ardent love of learning, and untiring industry.... He had much uncommon sense, but little practical common sense. He lacked balance and soundness. There was a streak of fanaticism in his brain. His eccentric genius bordered closely on the line of insanity. For "Great wits are sure to madness near allied,/ And thin partitions do their bounds divide."

His style is frequently obscure, inelegant, abrupt, diffuse, and repetitious. He accumulates arguments to an extent that destroys their effect. He gives eight arguments to prove that the saints in heaven pray for us; ten arguments to show that Melancthon and his friends were sorcerers, blinded by the devil; twenty arguments against infant baptism; twenty-five reasons for the necessity of faith before baptism; and

sixty signs of the apocalyptic beast and the reign of Antichrist.

In thought and style he was the opposite of the clear-headed, well-balanced, methodical, logical, and thoroughly sound Calvin, who never leaves the reader in doubt as to his meaning....

He labored under the fanatical delusion that he was called by Providence to reform the Church and restore the Christian religion. He deemed himself wiser than all the fathers, schoolmen, and reformers. He supported his delusion by a fanciful interpretation of the last and darkest book of the Bible.

### Servetus' Arrest and Trial

When it became known that Servetus was in Geneva – Servetus made no effort to keep his presence a secret – the Council ordered his arrest on the ground of public heresy and blasphemy. He was imprisoned and preparations were made for his trial.

The trial of Servetus took almost a month and a half. There were reasons for this. The Council proceeded slowly, determined to prove beyond doubt that he was guilty of the charges. During the course of the trial Servetus, in an attempt to take the offensive, charged Calvin with false doctrine and many other serious charges. Schaff gives these "specimens":

He calls Calvin again and again a liar, an imposter, a miserable wretch, a hypocrite, a disciple of Simon Magnus, etc. Take these specimens: "Do you deny that you are a man-slayer? I will prove it by your acts. You dare not deny that you are Simon Magnus. As for me, I am firm in so good a cause, and do not fear death.... You deal with sophistic arguments without Scripture.... You do not understand what you say. You howl like a blind man in the desert.... You lie, you lie, you lie, you ignorant calumniator.... Madness is in you when you persecute to death.... I wish that all your magic were still in the belly of your mother.... I wish I were free to make a catalogue of your

errors. Whoever is not a Simon Magnus is considered a Pelagian by Calvin. All, therefore, who have been in Christendom are damned by Calvin; even the apostles, their disciples, the ancient doctors of the Church and all the rest. For no one ever entirely abolish free-will except that Simon Magnus. Thou liest, thou liest, thou liest, thou miserable wretch."

Because Servetus attacked Calvin's teachings, Calvin himself was brought to the trial to debate with Servetus in public. This took time, and Servetus used the opportunity to load additional curses on Calvin's head. The Council decided to write Vienne for further information. When the authorities in Vienne heard that Servetus was imprisoned in Geneva, they requested the Genevan authorities to extradite Servetus so that he could be tried there. The Council in Geneva gave Servetus a choice between being tried in Vienne by the Roman Catholics, or in Geneva by the Protestants. He chose the latter. It is difficult to know why, although it seems he thought he had a better chance of gaining his freedom from Protestant authorities than from Roman Catholic inquisitors. In addition, Calvin was at this time embroiled in controversy with the Libertines in the city of Geneva. These Libertines were ancient families in Geneva who had long ruled the city and who resented the influx of refugees from all over Europe and the change to Protestantism. They were desperately fighting for control of the city and were literally persecuting Calvin. Servetus was friendly with these Libertines and hoped that they might gain control of the rule of the city and secure his freedom.

In any case, the Council also decided to consult four other cantons in Switzerland, much as they had done in the case of Jerome Bolsec (see earlier articles). They contacted Bern, Zurich, Basel, and Schaffhausen, all of which, unani-

mously and without hesitation, condemned him.

It was at this point that Servetus filed formal charges of heresy against Calvin in the hopes that his countersuit would delay his sentence yet longer. But the Council would have none of it, and Servetus was found guilty of heresy, blasphemy, and public dissemination of dangerous denials of Scripture. He was sentenced to be burned at the stake.

Calvin tried to get the Council to execute Servetus by beheading, a less painful and less cruel death; but the Council refused. Both Calvin and Farel pleaded with Servetus to retract his heresies and sins, but to no avail. He was adamant, although he begged for mercy.

The heresy of Servetus ended in a conflagration.

### **Servetus' Heresies**

Servetus' heresies were many. He, for example, tended strongly to a mystical pantheism, a heresy which deifies the creation and identifies it with God. He denied infant baptism and mocked the practice. But his chief heresies struck at the very foundation of all the Christian faith: the doctrines of the Trinity and the absolute divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He taught a vague Sabellianism, in which he made the three persons of the divine Trinity three different manifestations of one divine being. In doing so, he also had to repudiate the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, true God of true God — to use the well-chosen words of Nicea. That the heresies had been taught early in the history of the church and strongly repudiated by the church meant nothing to him. He brushed it all aside with a wave of the hand.

Not only did Servetus fiercely attack these doctrines, but he was guilty also of the terrible sin of blasphemy. He defined the doctrine of the Trinity as confessed by

the orthodox in such terrible terms and with such blasphemous language that I cannot bring myself to print his words.

His heresies were recognized as such by all Christendom. Roman Catholics and Protestants, professors in Europe's universities and common folk on the street, old and young, without dissenters, condemned his views and viewed him as a heretic and blasphemer of the worst sort. But nothing deterred him. He is the father of all post-Reformation Unitarianism and liberal denials of the divinity of our Lord.

### **Evaluation of His Death**

Though Calvin did not play a decisive role in the burning of Servetus, nevertheless Calvin's name will always be associated with that funeral pyre outside Geneva. Even Schaff calls it a dark blot on Calvin's name. All condemn Calvin for his part in the drama that ended so tragically. Enemies of Calvin gleefully latch onto this event as proof of Calvin's innate cruelty, and some even are so bold as to trace this condemnation and burning of Servetus to Calvin's theology. Sometimes, when one reads the stories, one gets the impression that Calvin was almost exclusively responsible for the execution of this heretic. A statue of Servetus has been set up in Geneva as a kind of confession of guilt on the part of Protestantism.

The suppression of heresy by fire and sword is always wrong. This is true when the church executes heretics; but even the State may not engage in such activities. The power of salvation lies not in the sword, but in the work of the Holy Spirit, who works where and how He wills through the preaching of the gospel. The sword cannot do what the gospel does. Those who rely on the sword to promote truth err. Rome did that for centuries, and would do it again if given the chance. The Reformed have come to understand that they who fight with the sword perish with

the sword — also in efforts to suppress heresy.

Nevertheless, the burning of Servetus must be understood in its context. Though the act cannot be excused or condoned, it can be properly understood.

Some accuse Calvin of being no better than Roman Catholics in this regard. But let it be noted that Calvin once, only once, gave approval for the burning of a heretic — although he did not publicly object when, in other parts of Switzerland, a few Anabaptists were being imprisoned and drowned. Rome's murders are legion. The blood that was shed by the Inquisition over nearly 500 years is a river engulfing all Europe. Insofar as Protestantism has been guilty of similar crimes, though on a far lesser scale, Protestantism has abandoned the policy and seen the wrong of it. Rome would once again kill "heretics," if the opportunities were there and the "climate" right.

It must not be forgotten that Servetus' heresies were dreadful. He directly corrupted the truth of God Himself in His own person and being. And he did this not only by denials of the truth, but by blasphemies too terrible to print and by public dissemination of his views in an effort to persuade the multitudes of his views. Let no one use the crime of the burning of Servetus to soften the horror of his heresies.

All Europe agreed with Geneva's sentence. There was no dissenting voice. Roman Catholics and Protestants, Reformers and laity, kings and rulers, professors and pupils — all agreed that Servetus justly received what he deserved.


That there was unanimity on this question is, of course, due to the fact that all Europe agreed that it was the solemn duty of the civil magistrate to "promote the true religion" by the suppression of heresy as well as by positive policies. The Council in Geneva was doing



what the church and the states in Europe had done for hundreds of years. The dawn of a new day had not come. It was not far off, but it would be some time before the church as well as the state saw that each man must himself answer to God for the things he holds to be truth. The church must exercise the keys of the kingdom; but these keys are spiritual. The state must use the sword, but not to kill heretics. Policies that were painfully learned

were slow in being put into practice. And yet today the lessons are not learned. The state, piously proclaiming the separation between church and state, promotes its own agenda, proclaiming evolutionism and favoring abortion and homosexuality. Liberal theologians, most gleeful in pointing to this error of the Genevan Reformer, will be the very ones who turn in fury against the true church and against those who confess the faith. They

will be the first to wield the sword once again, but this time against the people of God. The "tolerant" are the most intolerant on questions of the truth. The "peaceniks" are the most warlike against those who oppose them. The opponents of forceful promotion of the true religion are the most violent against the truth. These days are near.

But let us never allow Calvin's mistake to obscure the evil of Servetus' blasphemy. 

## Review Article

Michael Kimmitt

# Righteous by Faith Alone

**A** hearty recommendation of Hoeksema's Romans commentary *Righteous by Faith Alone: A Devotional Commentary on Romans*, by Herman Hoeksema. Ed. David J. Engelsma. Grand Rapids: RFP, 2002. Pp. xxiv + 702. \$41.95 (cloth).

### Introduction

This volume contains ninety-seven sermons expounding Paul's epistle to the Romans, preached by the Reverend Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965) to the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan in the late 1930s. Subsequently an extended version of the sermons on chapters 9-11 was published under the title *God's Eternal Good Pleasure* [1940; 1979]

Apart from that, the sermons have never before appeared in print. We owe their existence to Martin Swart (1891-1977), a member and elder of the church, who

took them down and subsequently transcribed them into notebooks, whence David Engelsma has edited them for this volume.

### Discussion

Now we are reminded, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Our Lord taught, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." So we may not despise any, but clearly in Romans we are at the heart of the gospel. Augustine was converted by reading it; Chrysostom had it read over to him regularly; Luther rediscovered the doctrine of justification here; and Tyndale said "that every Christian man not only know it, by rote and without the book, but also exercise himself therein evermore continually, as with the daily bread of the soul."

The reviewer has at hand the commentaries of Calvin, Haldane, Hodge, Moule, and John Murray on this epistle, as well as the first ten volumes of Martyn Lloyd-Jones' magisterial exposition. The

importance of Romans lies in its exposition of the cardinal doctrine of justification by faith. This Paul had had to expound polemically to the Galatians when they started to slide away from the grace of Christ to another gospel. Now in Romans, from the relative comfort of Gaius' house in Corinth with his amanuensis Tertius at hand and with the visit of Phoebe to Rome coming up, he can tackle the whole didactically and more relaxedly. "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." Why do we need to know this? "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness." We are sinners! We are "ungodly" having broken the first four of the ten commandments; and "unrighteous" over the remaining six towards our neighbours. "And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."

We need justification before we die and come to judgment — the issue is quite simply life or death, heaven or hell! Of course we need

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all of Scripture: to reveal creation and the fall; the Cainite line of reprobation — and the Sethite one of salvation down through Noah to Abraham; the twelve patriarchs; David; and finally David's greater Son: "Our God contracted to a span / Incomprehensibly made man."

So we come to:

### The Epistle

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." That is why Romans is of the first importance — for here all is explained. I welcome then this exposition, which I found edifying and enlightening, helpful and urgent.

Hoeksema's technique is not to give a verse-by-verse commentary but to grab the main idea or ideas in a chunk of Scripture — the passage quoted above being the text of the first sermon — consider them in the context of the surrounding verses, explain them including the relevant theological issues, and conclude with a brief application. Sometimes he will add a striking illustration. So on 12:2: "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." "We may compare life in the world to people drifting on a strong current in a rowboat. They are drifting just above the falls. On this current are three kinds of people. There are people who help the current along. They row with the current, laughing, singing, and having a good time. There are also people who row desperately upstream. And there are people who let the oars rest and drift downstream. The Word of God says to them, 'Don't

drift downstream! Row against the stream!' This is the text. Are you going downstream? Don't copy the world! Don't be conformed in your life and walk to the forms of the world! If you do conform your life to this world's forms, you go to destruction."

### Sin

I found the explanation of Romans 2:6-8, "Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath," the first I had met which actually clarified it. Sermon 12 on "The Vain Boast of Self-righteousness" is a searching piece on our standing: "Our religion, our piety, our baptism, our doctrine, our Reformed convictions; still more, our repentance, our faith, and our hope are taken away as the basis of our righteousness in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men." On pages 100ff. is a searching piece on: "what if some did not believe?"

### Justification

In the first part of the epistle the apostle has been establishing the fact that "all have sinned." Then at 3:21ff. come the blessed words: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference." The doctrine of justification is developed through to the end of chapter 8. On the word "manifested," Hoeksema has some interesting reflections on eternal justification.

Thus the argument is unfolded. "God has set forth Jesus Christ as a propitiation"; "all boasting must be excluded"; "by faith we do not 'accept.' By faith we receive"; "God does not forget the fact of sin,

but He dismisses it from His mind as sin"; "the Jews are not children of Abraham at all, not scripturally. Abraham is the father of believers"; "we continually stand before the face of God and are judged by Him." It would be very easy to go on quoting Hoeksema as he develops the argument.

### Chapters 9 and 10

Here Hoeksema takes a high [not hyper] Calvinistic position. We listen to the apostle as he wrestles with his sadness concerning Israel's rejection of their Messiah. In fact, there is no particular problem with chapter 9! It is clear enough. I read recently an article on reprobation which listed nine objections to the Calvinistic doctrine. But our business is simply to expound Scripture — problems of theodicy may safely be left with our Creator. But Hoeksema reminds us: "We are to imitate the apostle in this when we speak of election and reprobation, we must not rejoice in the damnation of the reprobate. The apostle did not. Paul assumed an attitude of great sorrow and heaviness of heart."

He then brings out the truth with respect to our situation. "All the children of God are the seed of believers. I do not say that other believers cannot come in, but the children of God come in the line of the generations of believers. The Word of God to Abraham, 'I will be thy God, and the God of thy seed,' is true today. This is why we have our Baptism Form. This is why we are proud of our seed. This is why we have as many children as possible. This is why we have nothing to do with the damnable practice of birth control." But he recognizes that we face the same problem. "They are all called the church of Christ. As such they are known. All have the same treatment from their infancy.... And yet there arises out of this church a carnal seed. And you and I bring them forth." The discussion continues through "Jacob's



Election" to "God's Raising up of Pharaoh." "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." Here we have a searching piece on the doctrine of reprobation.

In John 6:37, we read: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." As we pass from chapter 9 to chapter 10 we meet a similar contrast as we are reminded of the universality of the gospel. There is a splendid sermon on "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Hoeksema holds that the "usual interpretation of 'end,' that Christ terminated the law," is wrong. "End here has the same meaning as when we speak of the end we have in view.... The ceremonies, the temple, the altar, the priest, the sacrifices - all had Christ in view."

At verse 9, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved," we are reminded that the "emphasis falls on the resurrection of the Lord. This is also the heart of the apostles' preaching. They preached the resurrection of Christ. This is even far more the center of their preaching than the cross." This must be a matter of the heart, and to "confess that Jesus is Lord is to insist that Christ shall be Lord over us in our whole life."

Having spoken of the universality of salvation, he then considers "The Mission of the Preacher." Two points of the first importance are brought before us here. First, there is a mistranslation at verse 14: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe *in* him of whom they have not

heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" The second "in" is not in the Greek and should be omitted. In true preaching we do not hear about Christ, but we hear Christ!\* Second, a preacher is someone sent by Him — a sobering reflection for those of us who have from time to time sought to speak in His name. "In these words, Scripture makes salvation dependent on the preaching" — a point Hoeksema develops in three further sections.

## Chapter 11

Throughout these three chapters, the apostle has been considering with some anguish the particular position of Israel, but here he comes to his solution. Hoeksema rightly rejects dispensationalism. "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." What then is the solution?

Essentially, it is to be found in the olive tree. The branches represent generations, and the root is Christ. Some natural branches are broken off. These represent those who rejected Him. The ones who remain are those who received him. Gentiles were grafted in, the believing Christians in their generations. But "Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again."

Now what do we see? All around the olive tree on top of the lopped Jewish branches lie heaps

of cut off Gentile branches: either as unbelieving churches or simply a folk memory of the past. The recent UK census revealed that 71% of the populace still called themselves Christian!

Of course, there remain a gracious remnant with occasional outsiders being converted and coming in, but the decline is obvious to all. Meanwhile, there are down the centuries additions of Jews being grafted back in. Back in their own olive tree, they readily assimilate and are no longer recognized as Jews. When the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, "so all Israel [that is, the final Jewish convert] shall be saved."

I fear this bald summary scarcely does justice to the argument, but almost I am persuaded. The result is "life from the dead," i.e., the resurrection, and this brings forth the apostle's exultant concluding *paean*.

## This Is Most Excellent

"Practice and doctrine are inseparably connected. They cannot be divorced from each other" — so preached Hoeksema as he turned from the doctrinal intricacies of chapter 11 to the practical injunctions of 12 to 16. "In what follows in Romans, we must prepare ourselves for something to which we may have many objections. For the Word of God is not according to the flesh."

In looking over my notes, I see remarks such as, "excellent," "practical," "useful discussion," "warnings," etc. Space limits me to a few points. Speaking of the "gifts," Hoeksema reminds us "that the apostle is not speaking exclusively of the special offices ... for all have the office of believer."

Under "be of one mind": "Pre-eminent is the one great calling of

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\* John Murray, in his commentary, confirms that there is no need to insert the preposition "in" before "him." All the English translations retain it except the latest. ESV has, "Or him whom they have never heard," as a footnote.

the church to maintain, defend, and propagate the truth."

We are to be *subject* to the higher powers. On page 623, I came across the following: "In the sword-power is also the right to wage war. We must not go along with those who cry 'pacifism.'" The state has the sword, and though it may not use the sword for aggression it has the right to use it against aggressive nations.

Because the authority of the state is a derived authority, it is limited. The American power is limited to America. The higher powers of America have no authority except in America. The authority of the civil government is limited to its own domain. *Verb.sap!*

Romans 13:11, 12 reads: "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." I was intrigued to find our author confirming my own thinking: "There is something else. For the individual believer the day of the Lord is much *nearer*. For the individual believer, the day of the Lord comes when we die. This is

true because the death of the Christian is his salvation." Then comes a significant remark: "I suggest that after we die and enter into eternity, time must be changed ... it will seem to be but a short stretch of time from the day of our death to the day of the Lord."


I thought the treatment of the "weaker brother" wholly admirable. He has an important practical application to make on "Greet one another with an holy kiss," (p. 686). He concludes: "If we, by our study of the book of Romans, may have attained a little more knowledge of God's wisdom by contemplating the mystery of God in Jesus Christ, God will be pleased, and we will rejoice."

### Discussion

I agree with the editor that we have here an excellent example of homiletics. The preacher has carefully pondered his text and in his exposition brings out the coherence and exposition of it before making clear application. May I also, as a voice from the pew, add my wish for continuous exposition of the totality of Scripture. I have over more than fifty years been successively a member of five churches

in Ireland, England, and Wales and must have heard over six thousand sermons. In only two of those churches (thankfully, one is the current church) has the general practice been followed of consecutive exposition. There are some one thousand five hundred chapters in Scripture, but I find great chunks of Scripture, e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others on which I have heard few if any sermons. I believe Matthew Henry, during his residence in Chester, preached through the whole Bible and had started again before his removal to London. Three centuries later his commentary is still in the praise of all the churches.

### Conclusion

I am happy to recommend these sermons. The reading of them has been profitable, indeed at times something of a challenge. They would serve well for devotional reading, being relatively short, but even the scholar will find material here to interest and challenge. Our thanks go to Hoeksema and Swart for the preaching and transcribing and to Professor Engelsma for the editing. RFPA has done its usual exemplary work in this production. 

## Book Reviews



*The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, volume 4: The Age of the Reformation*, by Hughes Oliphant Old. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002. Pp. xi-556. \$45.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

**F**orty-five dollars for a paperback may seem steep, especially for students, but this volume is worth the price. Seminarians, professors of theology, ministers, and

lay members of the church ought to read this book. Old writes in a nice, readable, understandable style. Anyone who cares about the proper worship of the church and the preaching of the Word as the central element in the worship of the church will come away from this book encouraged to carry on in the Reformed tradition of worship.

Following the brief Introduction, titled "the Reformation of Preaching," Old, in chapter one, analyzes the preaching of Martin

Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Oecolampadius (and several of the preachers in Strasbourg, among them Martin Bucer), Johann Brenz, John Calvin, and the English preachers: Hugh Latimer and John Hooper.

Old points out, and correctly so, that the Reformation not only preached reform, but was a reform of preaching. Whereas preaching was incidental to worship in the Medieval Church (Rome), the reformers taught that preaching is essential to the proper worship of



God. The two giants of the Reformation responsible for this new and distinct school of preaching were Luther and Calvin.

Not surprisingly, the sections on Luther and Calvin are excellent. Old points out that Luther's theology of preaching flows out of his high regard for Scripture as the "ultimate authority in the Church..." (p. 38). For Luther this meant, "Quite naturally, then, preaching is fundamentally an interpretation and application of Holy Scripture. Preaching is a matter of reading the Bible, explaining its meaning for the life of the congregation, and urging God's people to live by God's Word ... preaching as an act of worship has a definite centrality in the well-ordered service of worship" (38-39). The essence of the content of the preaching of the Word for Luther was, salvation is not by our works, but by faith in Jesus Christ alone, God's gift.

Calvin, according to Old, was an expository preacher who preached in the *lectio continua* style (explaining the Scriptures phrase by phrase, clause by clause, going thus through entire books of the Bible, RDD). Old has a nice, well-documented analysis of Calvin's sermons on the Beatitudes. He paraphrases large sections and quotes from these sermons so as to give the reader a good sense of Calvin's preaching style. These sermons indicate that Calvin, in addition to his exegetical skills, was a very effective orator. Calvin made effective use of his extensive vocabulary and also made effective use of variety of sentence structure.

Geneva, during Calvin's time there, did observe the evangelical "feast days": Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. Calvin's sermons during Holy Week demonstrate "the pastoral thrust of Calvin's preaching" (124). With Luther, Calvin regarded preaching as the heart of worship. For Calvin, Christ is really present in the reading and preaching of the

Word. Worship, therefore, is a covenantal relationship between God and His people (132-133)!

The chapters that follow contain analysis of: The Counter-Reformation, the Puritans, Anglican Preaching, Protestant Orthodoxy in Germany, France, the Netherlands, and the Age of Louis XIV. All of these are instructive and well worth reading.

Of particular interest to those of us in the Dutch Calvinist tradition is Old's analysis of Dutch preaching in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most, if not all of us, would agree with Old that Dutch preaching and worship were not elaborate, but were characterized by solid exposition and simplicity of liturgy. Most of us would disagree with Old's conclusion that Voetius (scholastic) and Cocceius (covenantal, experimental) represent the two main streams of Dutch preaching emerging in the age of the Reformation.

Old laments the fact that much of Dutch preaching is inaccessible. Writes he, "The Netherlands was a good place to preach.... The Dutch have always loved solid preaching. What a pity it is locked away in leather bound volumes only Dutchmen can read. Thus is Dutch preaching rather inaccessible..." (449-450). Perhaps the Dutch Translation Society (the Board of which is located in Western Michigan, Grand Rapids, Holland area) can do something about this?

The book is well-documented. Each chapter contains an excellent bibliography. The book is also enhanced by a detailed, excellent index.

Orthodox, Reformed Protestantism is indebted to Old for this fine work. We are pleased to learn that Old has completed most of the work for the remaining three volumes of this seven-volume series on "The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church" (cf. Preface, xi). We look forward to reading them, DV. ■

*I & II Timothy and Titus*, by Patrick Fairbairn. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002. Pp. ix-451. \$27.99 (cloth). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

This volume is part of the Banner's Geneva Series of Commentaries. Here is good, solid exposition of these pastoral Epistles from the pen of Patrick Fairbairn (1805-'74). Included is a rather detailed and instructive Introduction to these Epistles. Also included are three interesting appendices: A. The Peculiar Testimony for Gospel Times; B. The Meaning of the Expression "Husband of one Wife," in I Tim. III. 2, etc.; C. The Treatment of Slavery in New Testament Scripture.

On some passages, notably Titus 2:1-10, where the apostle instructs the preacher to exhort the aged men and women, the young men and women, and slaves concerning their respective callings, Fairbairn is far too brief in his exposition.

Patrick Fairbairn was one of the leading theologians and ministers of his day. One of the founders of the Free Church of Scotland (600 of the 800 members of his congregation followed him in the "Disruption" of 1843), Fairbairn served three congregations before becoming Principal of the college in Glasgow. In addition to several commentaries, he wrote three books on principles of biblical interpretation, the most commonly known being *The Typology of Scripture* (1845).

The mid-nineteenth century style of writing is a bit cumbersome, but not distracting. Recommended for both clergy and laity.



March 7, 2003  
Lynden  
Protestant Reformed Church

**T**he March meeting of Classis West was held in Lynden Protestant Reformed Church in Lynden, Washington on Wednesday, March 5. Rev. D. Kleyn chaired the meeting.

On Tuesday, the day before classis, an officebearers' conference was held. The conference was attended by the delegates to classis as well as by many of the members of Lynden PRC. The theme of the conference was "The Canons of Dordt: Our Reformed Banner!" The keynote address was given by Prof. H. Hanko, who spoke on "The History and Relevance of the Canons." Sectionals followed, with papers on related subjects being presented by Revs. Doug Kuiper, T. Miersma, R. Miersma, S. Houck, M. DeVries, and S. Key. Many commented on how much they enjoyed and profited from the instruction and discussion throughout the day.

In the evening, the delegates to classis as well as the members of Lynden PRC gathered again at the church for an enjoyable time of fellowship.

In business on Wednesday, classis dealt with one protest. This concerned the matter of providing financial support for a minister of the Word who has been deposed from office. Classis decided that the content of the protest was really an overture and that the proper approach in this matter would be to bring such a matter to synod through one's consistory.

Subsidy requests from three of our churches were approved and forwarded to synod.

Annual elections were also held. **Ministers** elected as delegates to Synod 2003 were Revs. M. DeVries, C. Haak, S. Key, D. Kleyn, Doug Kuiper. The alternates are Revs. A. Brummel, G. Eriks, S. Houck, M. VanderWal. **Elders** elected as delegates to Synod were Egbert Gritters (Hull);

Jack Lenting (South Holland); Lammert Lubbers (South Holland); James Regnerus (Doon); Rick Span (Lynden). The alternates are Henry Bleyenburgh (South Holland), Lewis DeJong (South Holland), Ray Ezinga (Loveland), Henry Ferguson (Edmonton), John Heystek (Lynden).

In other elections, Rev. D. Kleyn was reappointed to a three-year term on the Classical Committee; Rev. S. Houck was elected to a three-year term as a synodical deputy of Classis West, with Rev. Doug Kuiper elected as the alternate; and Revs. M. DeVries, C. Haak, S. Houck, and R. Miersma were elected as church visitors, with Revs. A. Brummel and S. Key as alternates.

The expenses for classis totaled \$7676.77.

The Lord willing, classis will hold its September 2003 meeting in South Holland, IL, and its March 2004 meeting in Redlands, CA.

Rev. Daniel Kleyn  
Stated Clerk, Classis West

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Minister Activities

**T**he council of the Hull, Iowa PRC presented the following trio for missionary to Ghana: Pastors B. Gritters (Hudsonville, MI), D. Kleyn (Edgerton, MN), and C. Terpstra (Holland, MI). Their congregational meeting was scheduled for March 26.

From a trio consisting of the Revs. C. Haak (Roselle, IL), J. Laning (Walker, MI), and R. Smit (Doon, IA), Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids called Rev. Haak,

who served his first pastorate in their midst, from 1979-1986.

On March 12 the congregation of our Faith PRC in Jenison, MI extended a call to Rev. G. Eriks, pastor of the Loveland, CO PRC, to serve as their next pastor. Also included on that trio were Revs. A. Brummel (South Holland, IL) and D. Kleyn (Edgerton, MN).

March 14 and 15 the pastors of Classis East, along with their wives, joined together for what has become their annual ministers' retreat, held this year at Maranatha Bible Camp in Muskegon, MI. Discussions usually center in a topic of interest for pastors, and for their wives, with each meeting sepa-

ately to apply it specifically to their own needs, and then later together. Each retreat also includes plenty of good, loud singing.

### Mission Activities

**E**veryone in the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI was invited to stay after their evening service on March 2 for a presentation/open discussion by Rev. J. Kortering entitled, "Mission Enthusiasm."

Rev. T. Miersma, our churches' missionary to Spokane, WA, has returned to Spokane to work with four families and three individuals who are very desirous that the work continue there.

On March 13 an all-day Mission

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



Conference was held at the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI. The conference was sponsored by our Domestic Mission Committee. Those attending were members of the DMC, our home missionaries, and representatives from the councils of the calling churches. The subject of the conference was "Developing and Nurturing Mission Fields."

Mrs. Alva Spriensma and daughter Jessica returned to the US from the Philippines for a couple of weeks in March to visit with family and friends, but especially to say good-bye to their son Andrew before his ship left for the Middle East.

Rev. A. Stewart, presently serving our churches as pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Northern Ireland, presented a special lecture entitled "The Real St. Patrick," on Friday, March 14, at the Protestant Hall in Ballymena, the hall where they also hold worship services on the Lord's Day. Thankfully, since for most of us it was impossible to attend that lecture, Rev. Stewart is providing feature articles dealing with that subject for readers of the *Standard Bearer*.

#### Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of our First PRC in Holland, MI has recently received back from the printers the first Spanish version of the series on the main points of

Calvinism written by Rev. G. VanBaren. The six little pamphlets have been put into one booklet titled *Verdades Fundamentales de la Fe Christiana (The True Fundamentals of the Christian Faith)*.

#### Congregation Activities

Classis West met in early March at the Lynden, WA PRC. As usual, the host congregation sponsored an Officebearers Conference the day before. This particular conference took a close look at the Canons of Dordt: Our Reformed Banner. The keynote address was given by Prof. H. Hanko and was entitled "The History and Relevance of the Canons." This was followed by six sectionals presented by six of our pastors in Classis West, dealing with various aspects of the Canons, from preaching to pastoral use to common grace. Hopefully the entire conference will appear in written form later for all of us to enjoy.

The council of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI informed their congregation recently by way of their bulletin that they are interested in identifying any member of their congregation who desires to become an accomplished organist. Sadly, there appear to be fewer and fewer organists in Southeast, as well as in the entire denomination. Hoping to turn that around, even if just a little, South-


east is looking to identify and then offer encouragement and support to anyone, young or old, male or female, inexperienced or accomplished, who could serve the congregation and or denomination.

The council of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI recently informed their congregation that it had taken a decision to secure an architect to draw up plans for the completion of the balcony of their sanctuary. When definite plans are drawn up, the council will present them to the congregation.

A library of religious, reference, and meditation books has been set up in one of the catechism rooms of the Hudsonville, MI PRC. Their congregation was encouraged to make use of this resource, which included most RFPA titles, as well as many other titles found at the Reformed Book Outlet.

#### Young People's Activities

The Junior Young People of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI hosted their 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Faith Fellowship Dinner for their congregation on March 8.

The young people and young adults of the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada invited the young people and young adults of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB to join them March 14 at Kingsway Garden Mall in Edmonton for a Mall Scavenger Hunt. 

## Announcements

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

Hope Protestant Reformed Council (Redlands, CA) gives its condolences to fellow elder Mr. Everett VanVoorthuysen, in the passing away of his sister,

**MRS. BETTY EKEMA.**

"And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:26).

Rev. Martin VanderWal, pres.

John Feenstra, clerk

#### NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 14, 2003 at the Grace Protestant Reformed Church.

Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

We extend our sympathy to our fellow officebearer Mr. Pete Meulenberg, in the death of his brother-in-law,

**MR. GERALD DEVRIES.**

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Council of Hope (Redlands)  
Protestant Reformed Church  
Rev. Martin VanderWal, pres.  
John Feenstra, clerk



## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Redlands, CA, expresses its hearty sympathy to fellow office-bearer Mr. Alvern Miersma, in the death of his father,

**MR. HENRY MIERSMA,**  
and in the death of his uncle,  
**MR. JAKE JABAAY.**

May he and his family receive the comfort given by the apostle in Romans 8:28, "For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Rev. Martin VanderWal, pres.  
John Feenstra, clerk

## NOTICE!!!

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

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

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Hope Protestant Reformed Church (Redlands) extends its sympathy to fellow officebearers Mr. Bernie Meelker and Mr. Gerrit Meelker, in the passing away of their father and grandfather,

**MR. BEN MEELKER.**

"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15).

Rev. Martin VanderWal, pres.  
John Feenstra, clerk

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Hudsonville PRC expresses its sincere sympathy to our fellow officebearer, Elder Ben Wigger, in the death of his beloved father,

**MR. JOHN WIGGER.**

The Lord provides comfort and hope for the Wigger family in II Corinthians 4:17-18, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Rev. Barry Gritters, president  
Ralph VanderVeen, clerk

## NOTICE

The Board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association of Kalamazoo, Michigan is inviting applications for a full-time and part-time high school teacher for the 2003-2004 school year. Successful applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith, biblical inerrancy, six-day creation, male headship, the antithesis between Christianity and the world, and covenantal theology. Applicants should send a letter of application and resume to: Reformed Heritage Christian School, 700 North Fletcher, Kalamazoo, MI 49006. For more information, phone: 1 (269) 279-7373.

## SCHOOL ANNIVERSARY

Due only to the grace and mercy of our faithful Lord and Savior, Covenant Christian School of Lynden, WA is able to celebrate 25 years of covenantal Christian education. "For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

An invitation is sent to all who wish to celebrate with us in this joyous occasion. We especially urge all alumni, former teachers and students, parents and supporters to attend. The Lord willing, a time of thanksgiving has been set for Friday evening, June 13, and Saturday, June 14.

RSVP if you plan to attend. If you are not able, we ask you to send your comments or memories from the past 25 years.

Promotions Committee  
c/o John Heystek  
7511 Hannegan Rd.  
Lynden, WA 98264  
e-mail: [djheystek@aol.com](mailto:djheystek@aol.com)

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

On December 12, 2002, our merciful God received into glory our beloved brother and fellow-officebearer,

**MR. JAKE JABAAY.**

We extend our sincere Christian sympathy to his widow and her family. We cling to the abiding comfort of the Word of God, "so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thessalonians 4:17).

Consistory of Hope (Redlands)  
Protestant Reformed Church  
Rev. Martin VanderWal, pres.  
John Feenstra, clerk