

# THE *January 15, 2004* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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Volume 80 ♦ Number 8

# Whence the Diversity Within the Church

*"But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men."*

Ephesians 4:7, 8

**I**n the first three chapters of this epistle God has used the apostle to instruct in many precious truths. These truths are among the doctrines of the apostles (cf. Acts 2:42). These truths serve as the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20).

Now the Spirit leads the apostle to apply these doctrines to the lives of these recently converted Ephesian Christians. The first application concerns the unity of the church of Christ and the necessity to keep or preserve this

unity (4:1-16). As these recently converted Christians grow up in the faith, there will be many temptations to disagree with each other, to make war with each other, and to separate from one another. In the face of these temptations, they are urged to make every effort to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

The reason why the calling to preserve the unity of the church is so important is that the basis of this unity is found in the seven "ones" of verses 4 - 6. Preserve the unity of the church precisely because there is "one body" of the church, a spiritual, invisible reality. The one church is the result of the activity of the "one Spirit," who alone produces and maintains the one life in every member of the one body. The goal of the Spirit's work in the members of the body is to lead them to the "one hope." The one body has one Head, even the "one Lord." They are all given the same gift of the "one faith." And they all have been given the spiritual reality of the "one baptism," namely,

all of the members are washed in Christ's blood. This wonderful unity is because there is "one God," but also because all the members have the "one God" as their "Father." They are children of the same family.



As amazing and as wonderful as is the unity of the body of Christ, it is just as amazing and wonderful that in the unity there is a diversity. While all the elect are one in Christ, they are not identical. Though we are so much one, yet we can be addressed in this verse as "every one of us." We retain our individual selves, our own personalities. The unity of the body must not be conceived as uniformity. Uniformity means that every member is identical in every respect, without variations or differences. The glory of the unity of Christ's body is that we are not merged together into a single, solid mass, without individual identity, but that there is a diversity in the unity, and a unity that compre-

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

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

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

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

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hends endless variations. The unity does not do away with the diversity, and the diversity does not break the unity. The diversity in the unity makes for beautiful harmony!

This is an amazing truth. But let us all recognize that it is one thing to say a loud "Amen" to this truth, and another thing to have a genuine appreciation for the various members of the body!

How can the unity and the diversity be present at the same time in the body of Christ? They co-exist because the source of the unity is also the source of the diversity. The source of the unity is Christ, the Head of the body. And the source of the diversity is Christ, the Giver of the various gifts in each member.

Christ is the Giver of the variety of gifts enjoyed by the church as a whole and by each member in particular. It is not that the members, as parts or pieces, have to be put together and made to harmonize. Rather, the unity is first, and the parts arise out of the unity. This truth is pictured in the human body. Just as the body begins with one cell that contains in it all the different parts of the human body, so the body of Christ begins with its unity — in its Head. That the unity of the body is first is implied in the fact that the calling given to us as members of the body is to keep or preserve the unity, not to make it.



The truth that Christ is the Giver of every diverse gift and manifold grace in His body was spoken approximately 1,000 years earlier. The apostle is inspired in verse 8 to quote Psalm 68: 18, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou has led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men."

The Spirit gives here in Ephesians 4:9,10 an explanation of Psalm 68:18, "(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is

the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)" According to the psalmist, when God delivered Israel from their enemies, it was as if God Himself came down to deliver them, and then, having done so, ascended into heaven again. First, notice that the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle, when quoting the psalmist, to apply the quote to Jesus Christ. While the psalmist speaks clearly of Jehovah, the Spirit moves Paul to speak of Christ. This proves the deity of Jesus Christ.

Also worthy of note is the difference between the Psalm and the quote in Ephesians. Psalm 68:18 speaks of receiving gifts for men, and Ephesians 4:8 speaks of giving gifts unto men. Do not see this as a contradiction. The same Spirit inspired both. Jesus did receive gifts of the Father (Acts 2:33), and it is those gifts that He received that He gave to the members of His body.

Our text declares that the possibility of Christ giving gifts is to be found in the fact that He descended. When our text explains Psalm 68:18, then we are to understand that God's coming down to deliver Israel is applied to God the Son descending, humbling Himself to come in the likeness of our sinful flesh in order to deliver His people from their sins. The apostle explains that if Jehovah ascended, He had to descend first. Jehovah begins above, and if He ascends, then He must have descended first. And Jehovah did descend. He did so in Christ Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. He descended into the "lower parts of the earth" — a graphic description of God, the Son, humbling Himself to come in the likeness of our sinful flesh. Jesus Himself described His incarnation this way. "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the

Son of man which is in heaven" (John 3:13).

The point of the apostle is that it is Christ's humbling descension that earned for Him the gifts He later distributes to all the members of His body. He came down in the likeness of sinful flesh in order to conquer, by means of His suffering, that which held His people captive, namely, sin, the devil, death, and hell. Sin holds man captive. We are deceived into thinking that a life of sin is freedom, doing what we want. However, that is the greatest slavery of all. It is the slavery of being under the curse of the law. But Christ Jesus defeated that

which holds us captive. To lead "captivity captive" refers to the practice of a conquering king leading his conquered enemies in a victory parade. The Lord Christ forgives us all our trespasses and He blots out the handwriting of ordinances "that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:14, 15).

After defeating His and our enemies, the conquering Christ is exalted, set at God's right hand "in the heavenly places, far above all principalities, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (1:20, 21). He is given a name above every name (Phil. 2:9, 10). All things are put under Christ's feet, and He is given to be "head over all things to the church, which is his body" (1:22, 23). His resounding defeat of His and our enemies earned for Him the right to be Head of the church, and in the position of Headship, He dispenses the various gifts all the different members of His body possess.

*The unity does not do away with the diversity, and the diversity does not break the unity.*

Let us not miss the point: the Spirit wants us to know that the presence of the diversity of gifts in the one body of Jesus Christ is the result of nothing less than God descending to the earth in order to destroy the enemies of the church, and then ascending back to heaven. There is no doubt that the very presence of the body of Christ and the unity of this body required the same descending and ascending of God. But the application here is only to the diversity in the church. Let no one think less of the diversity in Christ's body than He does!



When we, the members of Christ's body, consider the unity and the diversity of the church, then we see that the various members, each being gifted with a function to perform for the whole, are altogether under the one and only Head, Jesus Christ. We see that every one of us is given grace. This grace is a part of the grace of salvation — that grace by which we are saved (2:8). This grace is the grace of the functions or positions given to each member. We have "gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy," or ministry or teaching or exhortation, or giving, or ruling, or showing mercy (Rom. 12:6-8). All the members have "received the gift,...as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (I Pet. 4:10).

To every member of the church is given the grace that enables him or her to perform a particular function. To each member is given a unique position and function in the body, and with it is given the ability to exercise that function. Christ's distribution of those gifts is according to the measure He had determined. Each member is gifted according to a perfectly wise plan, so the result is the functioning of a beautiful, harmonious body, of which Jesus Christ is the Head.

We have not only different gifts, but also different capacities

for the use of those gifts. Consider the tremendous variety in the human body! So in the church, the body of Jesus Christ, there are given various gifts: wisdom, knowledge, exhorting, giving, encouraging, praying, serving, teaching, ruling, loving. Doctor Luke, fisherman John, and rabbinically trained Paul differed one from another and yet fit together in the body. Every member must be busy in his position, functioning for the sake of the whole. And no member may despise other members just because they differ. The eye may never exalt himself over the foot, nor may the foot consider himself unnecessary just because he is not an eye (I Cor. 12:14-25).

There is an equality even though some gifts appear to be more important than others. As in the human body, some parts are more comely than others, yet the uncomely ones are as necessary (I Cor. 12:22). The functions differ — and they are meant to be different. Yet they are all essential to the harmonious working of the whole. Each member must labor "that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another" (I Cor. 12:25). Each member must labor for the same commendation: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" Each must be faithful in the use of that which was given to him by the grace of God. And each must realize when looking at the other members of the body, that if the different members have been given grace by God, then they are viewed as indispensable.

The differing grace will make for apparent inequalities (especially from our human perspective). Instead of being disturbed by this, we must see that each member is graced for the sake of the full and harmonious function-


ing of the church. When we recognize these differences and gradations, then we must respect them; for in respecting them, we respect Him who gifted or graced them.



Let us see the implications of the truth of the diversity within the unity of Christ's body. First, let every one of us confess our pride and proneness to jealousy. Let us confess our self-seeking and our feelings of being neglected or unimportant because we are not like another member. Let us humble ourselves before the Head and ask Him to forgive us, to cleanse us, and graciously to continue to use us in His body.

Also let us humbly recognize that what we have is what we have received. We do not have anything of ourselves. "Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" (I Cor. 4:7). Let us confess with Paul, "I am what I am by the grace of God" (I Cor. 15:10). And because it is all of grace, then no one can boast.

Because it is all of grace, each member is essentially equal with all the other members. That equality is that each is damn-worthy, and it is only by grace that he is brought into the body of Christ.

Let us be content with what we have been given. Let us consciously be used by God for the sake of the other members of the body. Let us seek to use the gifts we have been given, however lowly we may sinfully think them to be. Let us use the gifts we have received for the glory of the Giver. He who glories, let him glory in the Lord, the Giver of the gifts, and the Head of the church. 

*Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" (I Cor. 4:7).*

# Certain Assurance

**T**he assurance of which Scripture speaks and which believers and their children have, and ought to have, is certainty. It is certainty about God, about the spiritual things made known in the Bible, and about salvation. Another word for this spiritual state of the soul of the believer and child of believer is confidence.

This certainty is absolutely sure. There are no degrees of certainty, as though there can be certainty that is 75% sure, but 25% unsure, and certainty that is 90% sure, but 10% unsure. If certainty is not 100% sure, it is no longer certainty, but uncertainty, that is, doubt.

The opposite of certainty is not partial certainty, but doubt. Doubt is uncertainty.

If you and I are walking in mountains with which I am familiar, and we come to a wooden walkway over a deep ravine, and you ask me, "Are you certain that the bridge is strong enough to bear our weight?" you do not mean, "Are you 75% sure?" but, "Are you fully confident?" And if I respond, "I am 75% sure of the bridge," you do not walk across the bridge with glad hosannas about my partial certainty, but you stay off it because of my doubt.

There are reasons why a believer is sometimes uncertain about his salvation, why he finds himself miserably doubting, but the reason is not that assurance itself is uncertain. Rather, the uncertainty of his sinful nature, or the doubt instilled into his soul by the devil, or

even a lack of certainty that is a judgment of God upon him has temporarily eclipsed his assurance.

## Full Assurance

When we read in Hebrews 10:22 of "full assurance," we must not suppose that the reference is to assurance that is finally 100% in distinction from assurance that used to be only 50%, because in the past it was accompanied by 50% doubt. The apostle exhorts us who believe the gospel from the heart to draw near to God in assurance, which is always full assurance, and can be nothing else but full assurance. And this assurance, which is by the very nature of assurance *full*, belongs to faith: "full assurance of faith." The Geneva Bible, great predecessor of the marvelous King James version, did not even use the word "full" in translating Hebrews 10:22, but spoke simply of "assurance": "Let vs drawe nere with a true heart in affurance of faith." The King James translators chose to make explicit what is implicit in "assurance" and added "full."

That assurance is certainty is of the greatest practical importance. The Puritans of whom I spoke in the previous editorial, and those influenced by them, are confused about this. They speak of "full assurance" and the search for full assurance as though one can have partial assurance, which then, by ardent seeking, may become full assurance. The consequences of this confusion are disastrous. It fills churches, Reformed in name and confession, with members

who, although they profess to believe the gospel, *have* only "partial assurance," that is, members who are profound doubters.

The opposite of *full* assurance is *no* assurance.

It is as erroneous to contrast *full* assurance with *partial* assurance, as it is to contrast *full* faith with *partial* faith.

Assurance can and must grow in us, just as our faith can and must grow. But the growth is not from partial to full, from 10% to 100%. Rather, assurance, like the faith of which it is an integral part, develops (under good, sound, healthy, doctrinal, expository, Reformed preaching!) from a principle—a beginning—to maturity. The example is not filling up a glass of water that was half-full—and half-empty. But the example is the growth of a seed, which contains everything the plant will be, into a mature plant.

## Certainty about Scripture

That about which the child of God can be, is, and ought to be certain—*absolutely* certain—includes several things. First, he is assured that Holy Scripture is the inspired Word of God. Because Scripture is the inspired Word of God, it is reliable. Upon it the believer can and does depend. This certainty is fundamental to all the other aspects of assurance. If I do not know and trust Holy Scripture as the wholly divine, inerrant Word of God, if I have doubts about Scripture, I must have doubts about all that it teaches, including Jesus Christ the Savior, faith in Him as the alone

way of salvation, my own salvation, and the future salvation that Scripture promises.

The reason why doubt is widespread in liberal Protestant circles, as in evangelical churches and seminaries that have succumbed to the same modernist malady but are not yet quite so far along in the process of dying, is unbelieving criticism of the Bible as merely a historical, human document—the fallible words of men.

I do not say more about this aspect of assurance, for this is not my main concern in these editorials. But I remind us that certainty about the Bible is the foundation of all assurance, including that aspect of assurance that is the main concern of these articles, namely, assurance of salvation. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (II Tim. 3:16). Of this, believers and their children are sure—absolutely sure.

### **Certainty about Jesus Christ**

Second, believers and their children are assured that Jesus Christ is the Savior—the *only* Savior—from sin and death and woe appalling by His incarnation, His atoning death, and His bodily resurrection. Implied is our certainty that our misery is the guilt of our sin in the just judgment of the holy God.

Also this aspect of the assurance of the child of God is, and must be, an undoubted certainty. Surely, no Christian will allege that his assurance that Christ is the one and only God-appointed Savior is 75% certainty and 25% uncertainty. The Christian is absolutely certain that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God in human flesh, is the only Savior of sinners.

So basic is the assurance that Jesus is the only Savior that without it there can be no assurance of personal salvation. Besides, one who lacks the assurance that Jesus is the Savior really does not have the certainty that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, for the mes-

sage of the Bible is that Jesus is the Savior.

Nevertheless, doubt that Jesus is the Savior can creep into a church. Against this doubt, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews was fighting. Some of the Jewish members of the early church were inclined to observe again the Old Testament sacrifices, ceremonies, and worship as necessary for their salvation. This was the “wavering” and “drawing back” noted with alarm in Hebrews 10. Professing Christians, members of the churches, were wavering with regard to Jesus Christ and were drawing back from Him. They were beginning to doubt that He is the one and only Savior.

Still today, wherever the teaching enters a church, that in addition to the work of Christ a work of the sinner himself is necessary for salvation, there is doubt concerning Jesus the only Savior. The teaching denies that Jesus is a complete Savior and thus casts doubt on the truth that He is the only Savior. The immediate effect of the teaching is that those who believe it are doubtful about their salvation, since the teaching has convinced them that their salvation depends upon themselves. If this doubt about Jesus’ being the only Savior is not removed from the church by the condemnation of the heresy and by the deposition of the false teacher, if the doubt is tolerated, it will develop into doubt that Jesus is God incarnate and doubt that Scripture is God’s Word.

### **Certainty about One’s Own Salvation**

Vitally important as these aspects of assurance are, they are not the subject of these editorials. The subject of these editorials is the certainty of the believing child of God of his own salvation personally. It is the certainty, not only that Jesus Christ is the Savior of sinners, but also that He is the Savior of me personally. It is the certainty, not

only that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, but also that the Bible is the Word of God, as good news of grace and salvation in Christ, to me personally. It is the assurance of my own salvation.

The assurance of salvation is certainty that I am saved now. “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that you have eternal life” (I John 5:13).

It is certainty that I will be saved everlastingly. To be sure of salvation today, but fearful that I may perish tomorrow and forever, is not certainty of salvation. Certainty of salvation includes that I am sure of persevering, according to the Word of the Savior to all His own, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29).

Assurance of salvation is also certainty that I was saved from eternity past, in the decree of divine election. “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God” (I Thess. 1:4).

Included in the comfort of this rich and full assurance of salvation is certainty that my earthly life is so in the hand of my heavenly Father, and so precious to Him, that He will provide all things necessary and make all things work for my good. “I am sure,” exclaims every (Reformed) believer, child and adult, “*I have no doubt*, but he [God my Father for Christ’s sake] will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body; and further, that He will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to my advantage” (Heid. Cat., Q. 26).

The assurance of salvation is certainty, absolute certainty, as much as is one’s certainty that the Bible is the Word of God and that

Jesus is the only Savior. It is absurd to speak of an "uncertain certainty." An "uncertain certainty" is not assurance at all, but doubt.

Without the assurance of salvation, certainty about Christ as Savior and certainty about the Bible's being the Word of God would be of no use to me. Positively, the assurance of salvation is closely related to assurance that the Bible is the Word of God and that the Christ revealed in the Bible is

the only Savior. For the Bible promises that every one who knows and trusts in Jesus Christ alone for salvation is saved, has been saved from eternity, and will be saved everlastingly.

About the assurance of salvation, we have our questions.

Is this possible?

Is this possible for all believers?

Can we believers and children of believers be certain with abso-

lute certainty?

*How* is this possible?

What about doubts in the experience of some believers?

What if *I* have doubts? even strong doubts?

The gospel as rightly understood and taught by the Reformed faith has answers to our questions.

Answers that do not encourage, nurture, and even breed doubt.

But answers that assure.

—DJE 

## Letters

### More on Responsibility

**I** thank Rev. Kortering for his detailed answers to my questions regarding his article on "Mission Preaching in the Established Church," in the *Standard Bearer* of June 2003 (SB, Nov. 15, 2003, pp. 79, 80). However, the emphasis or viewpoint with which this article was written tends to focus entirely too much upon man in God's sovereign work of salvation.

In 1953, Rev. Hoeksema warned that overemphasis on the responsibility of man will eventually lead to the loss of the gospel (cd's of 1953, Heritage Recordings). Let's not make man's response to the call of the gospel the focal point of salvation, but rather, let's see God's glory as the sovereign Potter who shapes some vessels to honor in Christ and others to dishonor. Let us confess with all our hearts that God unconditionally saves His elect and that He unconditionally applies to them in time, by the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, all the benefits that are theirs in Christ. Thus He shapes, molds, and fits the elect, causing them to walk in those good works that were before ordained for each of them (Phil. 2:13; Eph. 2:10). By the Spirit's work in them, the elect become more and more willing partakers in all the blessings of salvation as joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). To do God's law be-

comes their delight. God, by His work of sanctification, continually draws His regenerated children into covenant fellowship with Himself and makes them His covenant friend servants, giving unto them the privilege to represent His cause in the midst of this world, so that the believer more and more says "no" to sin and "yes" to God. Thus He changes His bride from glory unto glory. The apostle Paul sums it all up so beautifully when he says in Galatians 2:20, "...I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." And faith is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8).

Rev. Kortering in his answer to my questions says, "A working faith is the believer's duty, which he owes to his heavenly Father out of love and thankfulness for his salvation." However, faith is neither the duty nor the work of the child of God. Faith, as to both its source and activity, is the free gift of God worked in us by the Holy Spirit as the Spirit applies the gospel to our hearts. Faith is not a condition to salvation. It is not, as the children's song puts it, "If I love Him till I die, He will take me home on high." But rather the truth is, "He will love me till I die, He will take me home on high." It is not as though Christ strings the

electric wire of faith between us and God and now it's up to us to turn the switch on in order to make that faith active in a life of good works. When we are ingrafted into Christ by a true and living faith, we live! By this true and living faith we receive all the blessings of salvation that are ours in Christ from all eternity (Eph. 1:3-6). The blessings of repentance, of believing in Christ, and of good works. By the Spirit's work in his heart, each child of God works out his own salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that it is none of self but all of God. As ordained, some will work twenty fold and others a hundredfold. In this light we understand that every man shall be rewarded according to his works (Matt. 16:27). The reward is not of merit but of grace.

I suppose that much of the overemphasis on man's response to the call of the gospel is done innocently enough, at least I hope so. I suppose that ministers see alarming trends in their congregation, denomination, and young people, and come to the conclusion that the way to motivate their listeners to a godly life is by emphasizing man's responsibility. We need more "mission preaching." I fail to see the source of motivation in this. Will you scare the child of God into a life of thankfulness by somehow separating his responsibility from

Christ? If you do, then you have lost the gospel of good news. True, the preaching of the gospel must warn the child of God from ways of wickedness and call sinners to repent, but that is not the "good news" of the gospel. Rather, let us look for the motive to godly living in this, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). Such God-centered covenantal preaching becomes the power of God unto salvation to us who *are* saved, and foolishness to those who perish (I Cor. 1:18).

Herman D. Boonstra  
Hull, IA

#### Response:

Since brother Boonstra does not direct any questions to me or seek additional understanding regarding my published articles, I will conclude this correspondence with him with a few observations.


1. His concern for a proper emphasis upon God's sovereignty is laudable and rare in our day. I can, of course, join him in praising God for the wonderful work of salvation, which is His work from beginning to end. We observed this in the rearing of our children, in ministering over the years in our beloved Protestant Reformed Churches, and in some ways even more so, in the amazing way God

saves heathen. If it were not by grace alone, all such efforts would be of none effect. It is good to hear one of our readers emphasizing this glorious truth.

2. I also want to assure him that my emphasis in the articles upon man's duty to respond properly to the preaching of the gospel was not done out of some sort of innocence, ignorance, or inappropriate consideration. "I suppose much of the overemphasis on man's response to the call of the gospel is done innocently enough." As I have already explained, and it is necessary to repeat for emphasis, God saves and judges men through the confrontation of the gospel. God is earnest when He calls men to repent and believe. It comes to the hearer who has the natural ears to understand clearly what God speaks. Even though the unsaved person does not have the capacity to respond properly, that is, to repent and believe, he does have the capacity to know right from wrong and deliberately to choose the evil and reject the good. When he does such, God justly holds him to account and judges him. The same is true when God is pleased to give grace to the hearer, who then not only has the natural ability to understand what God is saying, but receives grace that enables him to repent and believe. Though there is no inherent grace in the message itself, yet it is

through the message that God calls one to salvation. For this reason, the call to repent and believe is just as much part of the good news of the gospel as the setting forth of Christ as Savior and Lord. I differ with his statement, "True, the preaching of the gospel must warn the child of God (and also the wicked, JK) from the ways of wickedness and call sinners to repent, but that is not the 'good news' of the gospel."

3. Faith surely is the gift of God, worked by grace in the heart of the elect sinner, but that fact does not take away from the reality that faith is viewed in the Bible as the act of man. "For with the heart, man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10). God does not believe in man, neither does Christ believe for man, but man believes. In this sense, God directs the call of the gospel to the hearer, and upon the operation of grace the hearer believes the good news set forth in the gospel. Our spiritual forefathers rejected the notion that the hearer was some sort of "stock and block" or, in more modern terminology, a robot. God saves in the way of conscious involvement of the hearer. Even then, the cause of salvation and the end result is God's wonder work throughout.

— Rev. J. Kortering 

## All Around Us

Rev. Kenneth Koole

### ■ Hell Hath No Fury Like...

**O**f all the evils that threaten the world and that Satan is using against the Christian witness against sin, there is probably none so diabolical, dangerous, and influ-

ential as the radical feminist movement. This movement seems to mother, nurture, and carry all the other demons in its womb. It carries the seed of the serpent, is filled with malice towards the Woman and her seed, and will stop at nothing to put itself and its offspring in ascendancy. It, like Herod and Athaliah of old, will even devour its own (through murderous abortion) if it feels these offspring stand

in its way. This movement is dangerous because of the growing number of females (one blanches to call them women) involved in the movement and the places of power they occupy (from the Supreme Court on down) and places of influence they hold (Universities are shot through with them). They have an agenda that they are pushing with fervor.

In an insightful article, not to

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say troubling, entitled "Depraved New World: Radical Feminists' Plan for America" (*Chalcedon Report*, December 2003), Lee Duigon underscores what this movement is up to, pointing out that the gay movement itself is riding on the — dare I say — "apron-strings" (perhaps better, the *steel corset*) of the feminist movement. As Mr. Duigon points out, while the gay marriage campaign is getting all the publicity, it is really "only the camel's nose in the tent."

The gay activists get the publicity, but the serious work is being done behind the scenes by academic feminists. They have a plan for America, and they have clearly articulated it in print, at public meetings, and in their classrooms. Not since Adolph Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* has a blue print for revolution been so openly laid out.

What this agenda is was made clear last spring at a conference on "Marriage, Democracy, and Families" hosted by Hofstra University on Long Island, New York. Duigon informs us that the participants "included the elite of America's family law profession, many of whom are lesbians and radical feminists." Having listed a number of the leading participants of one panel discussion dealing with an assault on marriage (referred to as "Beyond Marriage"), Duigon asks, "Who are these people?" and then informs us that:

They are respected, highly paid professors of prestigious universities. Some of them are on a career track that can lead to a federal judgeship, as was the case for U. S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

They are teachers and trainers of future lawyers and judges, founders and members of legal advocacy groups..., authors whose works are regularly published in America's law journals.

...they are...the power elite of American family law. As such, they are in a strong position to in-

fluence public policy — especially through the courts.

Now notice what they want and intend to push for, things that are already being suggested in the public forum. According to Duigon:

First, an end to marriage. "The institution is a failure," Fineman says in the *SCU Law Review*. Indeed, according to Fineman, traditional marriage is "plagued with violence" against women and "inappropriate for many people in today's world." The family, says Ertman, is "exploitive," and not "normatively superior to domestic partnerships."

"Gay marriage," for them, is only a step toward the goal of abolishing marriage altogether. This makes good sense to Washington Post columnist Michael Kinsley. Rather than fall into endless debate over gay marriage, "That solution is to end the institution of marriage." Family law revolutionaries ignore the public debate and seek ends well beyond gay marriage. In place of traditional marriage, they would, in Professor Stacey's words, completely "redesign" kinship "with creativity and verve."

Between them, Fineman and Ertman have developed a scheme to replace marriage by treating every "intimate affiliation" — any relationship involving any number of consenting adults (sic! kk) — as a legal contract among private parties, subject to enforcement by the courts as other contracts — say, between a swimming pool owner and a cleaning service — are enforced. Existing contract law could be adapted for this purpose.

Notice that reference to "any number of consenting adults"! Later the article gives us the new word coined to cover this new abomination — "polyamory." As any novice in Latin knows, this is an invented composite word that means "love between many." In other words, sex communes would

become recognized as marriage (marriages?), or, if you will, "intimate affiliation" contracts, with all the rights and liabilities that go along with such. Indeed, it becomes plain, we haven't seen anything yet! Not if these radical feminists have their way.

This is the agenda of the intellectual elite. For all their making claims in the name of freedom and the expression of true democracy, they have no regard for the rights of others. The elite are tyrants at heart. In the name of freedom and democracy they intend to demolish marriage, family, and Christianity, and impose their cravings and will on the rest of the population, like it or not. They alone know what is good. Duigon points out:

As Thomas Sowell explains in *The Vision of the Anointed*, these elitists believe strongly that their exclusive possession of the truth authorizes them to say and do *anything* to promote their policies. This is why they habitually resort to the courts rather than subject their schemes to the uncertainties of legislation or election. After all, the non-anointed will probably get it wrong.

The radical feminists are like the ruling pigs of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, who, while maintaining that indeed "all animals are equal," yet insisted that some (of us) "are more equal than others." These elitists, or, as Sowell calls them, "the Anointed," are hypocritical to the core, and dangerous. What governs them is pride, lust, and malice. An unholy trinity if ever there was one.

As Duigon asks at the end of his article, how long will it be before the proponents of these insanities demand "penalties for churches that refuse to perform 'gay marriage' ceremonies, restrictions on Christian homeschooling, and an end to the church itself as one more 'restrictive' social institution?"

One thing is certain, Satan's

mistresses are hard at work. The book of the Revelation does not describe the church's great enemy in terms of being the "Harlot" and the "Great Whore" for nothing, you know.

## ■ The Pluralism of the Elitists

What has been warned about above is no mere alarmism. Those with the radical agenda are making progress, more than we sometimes may want to acknowledge. In the same issue of the Chalcedon Report as above (December 2003) in an article entitled *Intolerant Tolerance*, Warren Kelly lays out evidence of this progress. He identifies the spirit of "pluralism," the ruling philosophy of the day, as the driving force behind the intolerance of all things right and good and Christian today, pluralism — which claims to be committed to toleration.

The tolerance movement is an outgrowth of pluralism, which holds that all beliefs are morally equal and need to be treated with equal respect. It believes that all religions contain truth and no one religion or belief system is superior to another....

Having pointed out that pluralism has become "the dominant belief system of our media, Hollywood, and many of our political and cultural leaders," as well as increasingly "the committed enemy of Christianity," Kelly points out:

For those who believe in the god of pluralism, the only true sin is violation of its principle doctrine, tolerance. Christianity is based on God's absolute values and ... is an abhorrent concept for pluralists.

The definition of tolerance has gradually been adapted by our pluralist society. No longer is it adequate to allow (sic! — kk) others to hold their own beliefs; tolerance now dictates that we must accept (sic! — kk) the beliefs and practices of others and respect

them as equal to our own, no matter how distasteful they may be.

At this point Kelly confronts us with the progress the radical movement, so hostile to and intolerant of Christianity, is making.

Consider the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) that would make it a criminal act for a Christian employer, even a church, to deny employment to someone based on his lifestyle. If passed, this legislation will be used to force churches and Christian schools to hire homosexuals.

Senator Ted Kennedy's proposed hate crime legislation will also be used against Christians. Again, the language has been carefully crafted to make the legislation difficult to oppose. What kind of person would be in favor of hate? The strategy has been effective, as already forty-nine Senators have signed on as cosponsors to the bill.

Unless we take action now, it will soon be illegal for a pastor to condemn sinful lifestyles from the pulpit. Even the reading of certain Scripture will soon be illegal.

Many would say that this is alarmist rhetoric and that it could never really happen. Tell that to our Christian brothers in Canada where it already has. Just a few miles to the north, the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council has banned *all* radio and television stations airing *anything* negative about homosexuality.

In Ireland, Christians faced up to six months in jail for distributing literature that opposes same-sex unions because to do so would violate the 1989 Incitement of Hatred Act.

Kelly informs us that one such piece of literature produced by the Romish Church (which opposes homosexual activity, but not homosexuality) has already been targeted, simply because it is "likely to give rise to hatred, which is against the Act."

The evidence is irrefutable. The silencing of the testimony of

the Christian faith and its warning against sin is not just in the wishful thinking stage, the assault has already begun. Can we afford to keep silence in the face of these brazen outrages?

## ■ More On "Therapeutic" Cloning: It's Murder

The question of human cloning remains a hot issue. While "reproductive cloning" (with a view to producing fully developed children) has generally been condemned and banned in the West, approval has been given to "therapeutic cloning." Therapeutic cloning is justified in the name of humanitarian purposes, namely, to grow healthy body parts (or as they say in PC language, "body tissue") for people with sickness and disease. Can love thy neighbor require anything less?

In an article entitled "THOU MUST MURDER? Killing Clones around the world" (*Reformed Perspective*, October 12, 2003) Ike Van Dyke points out that on closer inspection therapeutic cloning is no more morally justifiable than reproductive cloning, and ranks right up there with abortion when all is said and done.

Therapeutic cloning is done with the intent of killing the clone and experimenting with its cells. Let me restate that to make it clear. In therapeutic cloning scientists create a human being, and then kill it so that they can play with its body parts. I wish I could say this in some much more horrifying manner, but hopefully you are already struck by the sheer vileness of this idea.

### Death Demanded

Things get worse when you consider what it really means to ban reproductive cloning while still allowing therapeutic cloning. Creating clones would still be legal, but it would become illegal to let them live and grow to maturity.


This is the law of the land in Britain right now. In that coun-

try reproductive cloning is illegal but therapeutic cloning is allowed. Clones can be created but these people *must* be killed!

This is worse even than the legalization of abortion. Yes, by allowing abortion the state does stand idly by as millions of unborn infants are murdered. But

the British government has gone even further with their cloning legislation — they don't just allow the murder of clones, they require it. It is illegal to let clones live and be born.

No matter how you cut it, as Van Dyke points out, "Clones, too,

are people. It doesn't matter how their life began — it matters only what they are, and they are human." Therapeutic cloning adds murder to the list of sins committed by reproductive cloning. So much for the tender mercies of the wicked. 

## *The Fundamental Work of the Deacons (2) Procuring Many Good Means for the Relief of the Poor*

**T**he fundamental work of the deacons in God's church is the relief of the poor and needy. In order to do this work, the deacons must have the means available to relieve those in need. It comes as no surprise, then, that Reformed churches require their deacons "diligently to collect alms and other contributions of charity" (Church Order, Article 25), and again, to "collect and preserve with the greatest fidelity and diligence, the alms and goods which are given to the poor: yea, to do their utmost endeavors, that many good means be procured for the relief of the poor" (Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons).

Three points immediately catch our attention as being noteworthy. The first relates to what must be collected. Not only must the deacons collect alms, but they may collect other things as well, as the following phrases indicate: "and other contributions of charity"; "that many good means be procured...."

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The first installment of this series can be found in the December 1, 2003 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

The second relates to the gathering of these alms and other contributions: they must be collected, and preserved. The third pertains to the diligence with which the deacons must do their work. Both works quoted above point out the need for diligence. In addition, the word "procure" underscores this; generally it means "to get or obtain," but the emphasis falls especially on the care required to get or obtain. One definition given for this word in the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary is "To put forth or employ care or effort; to do one's best."



"Alms" are charitable gifts donated to the poor. The word as it appears in the New Testament is a translation of a Greek word with the basic meaning "mercy." This Greek word refers particularly to mercy displayed in acts of kindness, as Acts 9:36 indicates, speaking of Dorcas having done "almsdeeds." So the alms are specifically those gifts given to the church, in order that she might perform the ministry of mercy through her diaconate, in the service of Christ.

In our experience, alms most of-

ten take the form of money. This is because ours is a money-based society. Money is the most convenient thing to give for the relief of the poor, because we get paid in money. And money is the most convenient thing to give to the poor, because they can buy any material necessity with money. Money also fits nicely into the collection plate.

The deacons, however, are permitted to collect more than simply money. And they might consider doing so for good reason.

First, the poor whom they serve usually have a specific need — such as a need for a house, car, furniture, or groceries. While money can buy all these things in a money-based society, it is obvious that the need of the poor would be relieved if they were given the very thing that they need, rather than being given money to buy what they need.

Second, giving gifts of money is not always wise. With money, a man whose family is hungry can buy more beer to quench his unsatisfied thirst for alcohol. With money, a woman whose children need clothes can buy jewelry or whatever else will keep her happy. When the specific needs of a family are supplied with the very thing

needed, the possibility of the misuse of the gift is greatly reduced.

"Many good means" can also take the form of services, rather than material objects. Some in the congregation are not so much poor as they are invalid; or perhaps they are both poor and invalid. Being invalid, they might need gifts of time and energy, rather than possessions. Perhaps they need transportation to and from places; or they need one to get their groceries for them. The task of making arrangements for such needs properly falls to the deacons.

By requiring their deacons to procure "*many* good means" for the relief of the poor, Reformed churches indicate that the ministry of mercy that they expect of their deacons requires more than simply receiving money and giving money to the poor. Such churches also realize that every case must be dealt with individually. Each diaconate is given some freedom to be creative, in determining how best to meet any particular need.

Perhaps this is a necessary reminder for our diaconates today. So accustomed are we to collecting and distributing only money, that we might tend to view one who comes to us with a different need as bucking the system, or as being bothersome, or as being at the wrong door with their request. I hope such is not the case. It ought not be the case. The needs of God's people, which might lead them to ask help of the deacons, can be many; and the deacons must stand ready to help each child of God with whatever need he has.



These contributions are to be collected.

Obviously, the services that we have mentioned above cannot be collected. Rather, they are to be solicited. When the deacons are not able to give of their own time and energy to provide transportation or other services, they must ask members of the congregation to do so.

What must be collected are the money and other material objects that are given for the relief of the poor. The point that must be now stressed is that collection is the *only proper way* to obtain and receive such contributions.

Passing the collection plate at the worship service is the most common way to gather such alms. This is proper. I Corinthians 16:1-2 teaches that collections for the relief of the poor are an aspect of the worship service. And our Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 38, in explaining what God requires of us in the fourth commandment, says: "that I, especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, to ... contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian."

Other ways of obtaining contributions of charity are not ruled out, so long as they involve collecting.

If the need for benevolent funds and goods is great, but the benevolent fund is low, and the congregation does not give more despite being made aware of the shortage, the deacons may go door to door in the congregation collecting benevolent funds. On this point, Peter Y. DeJong writes:

In some cities of the Netherlands the custom was followed of having the deacons collect alms from door to door. But wherever the spiritual life of the congregation flourished, this method was soon discarded. However, in times of serious economic stress the deacons may with propriety call on those who enjoy greater than average material prosperity and solicit special gifts.<sup>1</sup>

While going door to door to collect funds is not wrong in principle, the fact that it is not done in Reformed churches indicates that Reformed believers realize the importance of putting their benevolence gifts in the collection plate.

Such door-to-door collections are the only way to collect contributions of charity given in a form

other than money. If a member of the congregation gives the diaconate food for the relief of the poor, that member would either bring his donation to the deacons privately, or ask the deacons to pick up the goods from his house. This would still be considered a collection, even though it did not happen at a public worship service.

Why is it so important that these monies and goods be *collected*?

Scripture requires us to give our gifts for the relief of the poor directly to the diaconate, voluntarily, and for the simple motive that we love the poor and desire to supply their needs. That we must give to the diaconate directly is clear from Paul's words to the Corinthians in I Corinthians 16:1-2, as well as from the example of many of the saints in the early New Testament church, who having "lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need" (Acts 4:34-35). That such giving must be voluntary and in love is clear from II Corinthians 8:1-15, in which Paul motivates the Corinthians to prove the sincerity of their love for the poor saints in Judea by taking a collection for them, and yet requires them to give willingly, that is, voluntarily. That we are to give, not seeking anything in return, is clear from Romans 12:8: "he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity." By the word "simplicity" the Spirit impresses on us that such gifts must be given with singleness of mind, expressing genuine love to the saints, not desiring anything in return.

For these reasons, benevolence monies and contributions may not be raised by means other than collections. To obtain means for the relief of the poor by means of auctions, bazaars, carnivals, or other fundraisers is contrary to the principle of giving directly, without desire for something in return. To build up an endowment fund for

this purpose, using the interest to cover the needs of the poor, is contrary to the principle of giving directly for the needs of the poor. To include a line item in the church's general fund budget for benevolence, and then to require every family to give a certain amount every week for benevolence, is contrary to the principle of voluntary giving, and it confuses the general operating expenses of the church with the very necessary and distinct work of caring for the poor. One can read more arguments against this practice in DeJong's book, pages 135-136.



Having collected these goods, the deacons are required to *preserve* them, according to the Ordination Form. That this requirement is explicitly added is striking — does it not go without saying that the funds given for the relief of the poor must be preserved?

But the fact is that thieves and robbers know that someone, upon leaving the church service, either has the money or knows where it is. And the fact is that deacons are men, who are capable of unintentionally misplacing or losing the money — a very uncomfortable situation for any deacon to be in, indeed! So the duty to keep the contributions of charity safe is mentioned.

So important do Reformed churches consider this duty, that two of the questions that church visitors must ask in their annual visits to every church in the classis touch on the subject. One of the questions is put to the council as a whole: "Are the funds of the church and the poor fund and all proofs of possession kept in a safe place so that no occasion is given for mistrust nor difficulties can arise on leave of office or death...?" And the second question is put to the elders and minister in the absence of the deacons: "Are the collections counted in the presence of the minister or one or more of the elders?"<sup>2</sup>

How do our diaconates pre-

serve these alms and goods? Following are some ways. To me they seem obvious. While I realize that each diaconate may decide for itself how to preserve its alms, I suggest that any diaconate that does not conform to the following ways should reevaluate its practice, and ask whether it is doing enough to preserve the alms.

First, the money must be counted carefully as soon as possible. Preferably, this means as soon as the worship service is over. This counting must be done in the presence of the minister or one or more elders, in order that the deacons might have witnesses that they have faithfully and carefully counted these monies. If the counting does not take place until a monthly meeting of the diaconate, the money should be put in a safe as soon as possible.

Second, the money must be brought to the bank as soon as possible. For a deacon to take the money home with him is not at all a good idea. His house is not as safe from thieves or fire as is a bank; the money is probably not insured, so long as it is in his house, while it is usually insured when deposited in a bank; and, because the money has been for some extended time in his sole possession, that deacon is personally accountable for it, and if any discrepancies should arise regarding its amount, he probably has no unbiased witnesses to his integrity.

Third, the money must not be invested in any account that could be devalued, such as stocks or mutual funds. All the church's funds, not only the benevolent funds, belong in an account in which the principal is safe.

Fourth, never may any deacon authorize the disbursement of any of the benevolent funds without the knowledge of the deacons as a whole. Perhaps this pertains more to the matter of distributing the funds, which we will deal with in a future article; but it relates also to that of preserving the funds.



All this the deacons must do "with the greatest fidelity and diligence."


The reason for fidelity is clear enough. To them is entrusted money that is intended for the poor. The deacons must see that it is used for that purpose, and that purpose only. Furthermore, they answer to God for how they do this aspect of the work.

Their fidelity will lead to diligence. It will lead the deacons to do everything possible so that every poor and needy family or individual in their congregation is cared for.

Especially the deacons must remember the need for diligence when the needs of the congregation are many and great. While a deacon must never view his work as a burden, he might be tempted to do so when it requires excessive amounts of his time. Then he must give diligence to his work and not become weary in well doing.

Also, the deacons must remember the need for diligence when the congregation does not appear to be generous in its support of their work. The deacons might grow weary of constantly reminding the congregation of the need to give for benevolence. But such is their calling.

As an example, look to Christ! How diligent He was, and still is, in supplying all our needs! So let the deacons be diligent as they administer His mercies to the poor and needy.

And remember the incentive that God gives deacons to be so diligent in I Timothy 3:13: "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." 

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1. Peter Y. DeJong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1952), page 134.

2. Cf. *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* ("The Green Book"), 2002 edition, pages 112 and 113.

# Reproach

**T**he Hebrew and Greek words translated in the KJV as reproach contain the idea of shame, disgrace, reviling, upbraiding, chiding, and casting into the teeth. All reproach is for Christ's sake, as He is God, and as He is in the flesh the Word and revelation of God. When the people of God are reproached, it is for Christ's sake; it is because Christ is seen in them. Christ was reviled because all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily, and He left behind a certain measure of reproach for His people to endure or fill up (Col. 1:24).

The great passage on reproach is Psalm 69, where we find the term used six times. In this psalm David complains of those who hate him without a cause: they number more than the hairs of his head; and he is even made a stranger to members of his family. And his explanation for this situation is: "Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame has covered my face" (v. 7). David makes the point, further, that the more zeal a person has for the cause of God's house, the greater the reproach (v. 9). He was consumed by such great zeal, and as he showed to Israel this consuming zeal for God's covenant, the reproach of the wicked against God fell on him. This reproach broke his heart, and there was none to pity him or comfort him; his only comfort was that God saw his reproach, shame, and dishonor. And he left it to God to punish the adversaries.


David writes as the great type of the Christ. Every thing of which he writes here was multiplied upon Jesus on the cross, where the adversaries gave Him "gall for my meat; and in my thirst gave me vinegar to drink" (v. 21). In Romans 15:3 the apostle Paul quotes from Psalm 69, setting forth Christ as the example for us in not pleasing ourselves, but rather the neighbor for his good to edification. "For Christ pleased not himself: but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."

Two passages speak of the reproach of Egypt, that is, a reproach that came forth from Egyptians upon the Israel of God. After Israel had crossed the Jordan and encamped at Gilgal the Lord said unto Joshua, "This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you" (Josh. 5:9). The reproach of Egypt was their reviling of God that He could not bring

them to the promised land: "For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in" (Ex. 14:3); it was their idolatry; it was the cruelty they showed the Israelites as the chosen people of God; it was their hard-hearted refusal to bow before God in repentance in the face of overwhelming proof that He is God alone. God rolled that reproach of Egypt from off Himself and His people at Gilgal. There they circumcised an entire generation born in the wilderness, symbolic of the cutting away of their sins in Egypt and in the wilderness, and the token of God's covenant faithfulness toward them.

The second passage that speaks of the reproach of Egypt is Hebrews 11:26, where we read of Moses' choice *against* everything that Egypt could offer, and *for* the people of God and whatever that may involve. Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Moses suffered reproach, not of a general kind, but the reproach of *Christ!* The same reproach Christ would later endure! He was joined to Christ by faith and he believed that Christ would obtain for him a reward that was eternal and not for a season.

There is an interesting use of the term reproach in connection with the believer's conscience. In Job 27:6 this oft-assailed man of great patience exclaims, "My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live." Literally Job says, "My heart reproacheth not one of my days." Because he is assured of his righteousness in Christ, he enjoys the answer of a good conscience every day of his life, and so may we.

Finally, the wise man of Israel calls our attention to our duty to the poor. "He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his maker: but he that honoreth him hath mercy on the poor" (Prov. 14:31). And, "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished" (Prov. 17:5). We take "his maker" as referring to God, the Maker of the poor. Men upbraid and rail against God who makes some poor. They carp at God's sovereignty in doing this; some even call for the redistribution of wealth in the land. Others chide God for the calling that He gives to us in respect to the poor: to labor faithfully that we may have something to give to the poor, helping them in their distress. But the poor that are always with us are to be considered a blessing from God. They give us the opportunity to show forth the love that God has shown to us. By having mercy on the poor we honor the God of all mercy. 

# Handmaidens of Jehovah (1)

## Motivation for the Subject

**I**n the last couple of years, the Doon Martha Bible Society studied for its after-recess time the book *Women of the Old Testament*, which was written by Dr. Abraham Kuyper and translated into English. In this book, the author wrote about many women in the Old Testament, most of whom were godly women, such as Sarah, Naomi, and Ruth. By way of contrast, the author also included a few chapters on some wicked women of the Old Testament.

With each individual, the author gave an explanation of their place in Old Testament history and gave his understanding of the significance of their place in Old Testament history and of their example to the godly women of the church today. Although we were not always in complete agreement with the things that Kuyper wrote, we found that the book was profitable.

During the study of that book, the seeds for this speech were sown. Hence, the speech is really the harvest of some of our discussions in Martha Bible Society. The

structure of the speech is similar to the structure that Dr. Kuyper used in his book. The content of the speech arises out of our discussion of one godly woman in particular, Hannah. A motivation for the speech is to consider one godly woman in the Old Testament whom Dr. Kuyper did not consider, namely, Jesse's wife.

## Timely Truth

In a certain sense, the speech presents to us nothing new. We consider things that we have heard before under the preaching of the Word, in our homes since our youth, and in our Bible study meetings.

Nevertheless, we believe that this speech is timely because we live in a world of increasing wickedness. The world continues to be more and more bold in its sin. This includes the women of the world, who continue to push for the "equality of women," which is actually a push for the supremacy of women over men and the usurpation of authority over men. The women of the world continue to tempt the godly women to lust after physical beauty and to fulfill the carnal lusts of the flesh. The world continues to tempt the young women to dress immodestly and to covet the life of worldly women.

The world is not content to let the church be faithful unto the Lord. As long as the church continues to proclaim the Scriptures faithfully concerning the holy, godly life of the daughters of Jehovah, the world is bent on silencing

that preaching of the gospel and is determined to lure the daughters of Jehovah into the world and its life. As a result, the temptations for the Christian woman abound on every hand. She is constantly tempted to become the master of her own destiny, potential, and abilities.

Over against all the devilish temptations constantly declared through television programs, movies, books, magazines, and advertising, the Lord calls you to follow Christ and the godly example of the faithful women of Scripture. You are called to confess, and to demonstrate in your life, that you do not belong to yourselves, but unto Christ, your faithful Lord and Savior, who bought you with His precious blood. Therefore, you are not masters of yourselves, but you are handmaidens of Jehovah. You are called to live as Jehovah's handmaidens obediently, faithfully, and joyfully in these last days.

## Hannah

There are three women in the Scriptures who either refer to themselves as handmaidens of Jehovah or are called a handmaiden of Jehovah by another.

The first of these is Hannah, according to Hannah's prayer in I Samuel 1:11,

And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto

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This article is essentially a speech delivered on October 30, 2003 for the Fall Combined Ladies Bible Study meeting of women from the Doon, Edgerton, and Hull congregations.

thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

God had placed Hannah in a very grievous trial. It was very difficult for Hannah to be childless. The pain of Hannah's childlessness was intensified by Peninnah, the other wife of Elkanah, who had sons and daughters. As a result, Hannah had to fight the temptation to despair and feel worthless because God in His providence had not given to her the fruit of the womb.

The trial was also very difficult because Peninnah used her fruitfulness as an occasion to despise and mock Hannah. Peninnah provoked Hannah to anger and to fret over her barren womb. Peninnah was self-centered, wicked, and covetous. That was evident by the fact that she took her children for granted and was not humble before God to have the privilege to bring forth children in Elkanah's home. To Hannah, that wickedness of Peninnah was biting.

In contrast to Peninnah, Hannah had been given a spiritual perspective and a godly heart. She learned through her trial not to seek herself. God taught her to deny herself. She learned to seek a child, not for herself or for any selfish reasons, even though the temptations for such were mighty and ever-present. She held before her heart and mind a much loftier goal than to be just a mother. She wanted to be not only a mother but, more importantly, a mother in Israel and for Israel. She was one of those godly women who knew the times and what was needed for Israel. She knew that in a time when the Israelites were doing whatever was right in their own individual eyes, Israel needed a spiritual leader for their reformation. In that dark time, she knew Israel needed a spiritual son from the hand of Jehovah for Israel's good.

In that perspective of faith, she

came to Shiloh to offer up her plea unto Jehovah in order that she might become a mother in Israel and for Israel. The high priest Eli assumed from his initial observation that she was drunk and another one of the ungodly and lawless of Israel. However, Hannah assured Eli that she was not in company with the wicked, like Eli's own sons, and that she was of the faithful remnant in Israel. This handmaid of Jehovah had been praying earnestly to Jehovah for a son, who would be returned unto Jehovah for the cause of His covenant and people.

After being sent away from Shiloh with Eli's blessing and with the assurance that she had been heard, she conceived and brought forth at the appointed time that Nazarite son, Samuel, whom she had asked of Jehovah.

Did she take Samuel for granted? Did she boast in her child and use that to fight back against Peninnah? She did none of that. Her boast was solely in Jehovah. In faithfulness and humility she returned her son, Samuel, to Jehovah when he was prepared to be left with Eli at the tabernacle.

By the grace of God, she demonstrated that she was true to what she confessed in her prayer: a handmaiden of Jehovah.

### **Jesse's Wife**

The second example of a handmaiden of Jehovah is the wife of Jesse. Admittedly, there is not much known about Jesse, let alone his wife. Jesse was David's father, who lived in Bethlehem. He was a descendant of Boaz and Ruth. However, Jesse appears in Scripture as a man of lowly stature and wealth. This was emphasized when David's enemies called him the "son of Jesse." For David's enemies, that was not a name to honor David's lineage. That was a name of reproach. They regarded David's lineage as insignificant and dishonorable. That name indicated the attitude that many would never

have expected a king to come from Bethlehem. They might expect a king to come from Shiloh, Bethel, or Hebron, but not from lowly and insignificant Bethlehem.

To this lowly Jesse, God joined in marriage his wife. She is mentioned by the inspired David, for example, in Psalm 116:16: "O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds."

Of all the compliments that a mother could receive from her sons, this confession by David has to be the greatest compliment that a mother could receive. To be called a handmaiden of Jehovah by your children, whom you brought forth physically, but above all brought forth and nurtured by your spiritual and godly instruction, is the greatest compliment you could ever receive.

Scripture provides us with enough information to show that, in her own way, David's mother was also a handmaiden of Jehovah. She brought forth eight sons and two daughters, and David was the youngest of the eight sons, if not of all the children. She labored faithfully with Jesse to raise their children. In all her labor and work in the home, the most outstanding characteristic of David's mother was that she was a handmaiden of Jehovah. She was not like the women of the world who served other gods or themselves. She spiritually sacrificed herself for the service of Jehovah in her covenant home. She tended to her flock of children as faithfully as David later tended to his flock of sheep. The memory of that spiritual characteristic of his mother was engraven upon David's heart for the rest of his life.

Indeed, she was a handmaiden of Jehovah in a way that she probably never imagined. It is true that she served the bringing forth and the rearing of David. But, through David, she also served the coming of the Messiah, who also could confess that He was the son of this

handmaiden of Jehovah, too, Jesse's wife.

### Mary

Christ could confess the same concerning Mary, who confessed that she was a handmaiden of Jehovah.

Mary was one of the faithful remnant of that day. She along with her fiancé, Joseph, some of her cousins, and others, had been waiting for the coming of the Messiah. They did not follow the popular religion of the day, a religion of works' righteousness. They followed obediently the law of God and by faith looked for the coming of their Lord, in whom is all our righteousness.

The spiritual condition of the Jews at that time was very similar to the days of Hannah. The spiritual condition of the people of God had reached another low point. The Jews were oppressed by their enemies. The temple worship was thoroughly corrupt. The high

priest's office was corrupted. The people of God had heard no new revelation since the close of the Old Testament and Malachi's prophecy of the coming of the forerunner and the Sun of Righteousness. Besides that, the line of David through Solomon had come down to the virgin Mary.


However, the long wait for the fulfillment of the promise was over. The angel Gabriel announced to the virgin Mary that she would conceive and bear a son, and that she would do so as a virgin. The son whom she would bring forth would be Jesus, the Son of the Highest and the Son of David. He would be given the throne of David and would reign over the house of Jacob forever. Of His kingdom there would be no end.

Mary was assured by the angel that though she would not know a man in order to conceive this child, yet the Holy Spirit would conceive in her the Son of

God in the flesh. The reason that this would occur was that with God nothing shall be impossible.

Mary's response to all of this is beautiful. She said, "Behold, the handmaid of the LORD; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). In that confession there is no complaining, no opposition, no rebellion. There was only submission in true faith to the will of Jehovah. In that submission of a handmaid of Jehovah, she later, in the fullness of time, brought forth her firstborn son, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger. She continued in faithfulness to rear Him in the fear of Jehovah, as well as her other six children whom the Lord gave unto Joseph and Mary.

Mary was by her confession and life another beautiful example, by God's grace alone, of a faithful handmaiden of Jehovah.

Next time, we will consider the significance of these three examples of handmaidens of Jehovah. 

*Taking Heed to the Doctrine*

*Rev. Steven Key*

## The Preservation of the Saints

**O**ne of the most beautiful and comforting truths of Holy Scripture is that pertaining to the preservation of the saints and their perseverance in the faith.

It is a truth that permeates the entire Word of God. On the one hand, it is drawn forth by God as the inspired confession of the psalmist in Psalm 16. Christ stands

in the loins of David, as the New Testament quotations of this passage make clear. And because Christ was in him, David confessed (and we do with him), "I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Standing in Christ we have a certain hope for the future, a hope that even absorbs and dissolves the despair of death. God Himself shall preserve us for Christ's sake.

For that reason the apostle Paul could exult in God's faithfulness, pointing to Christ and saying (Rom. 8:38-39), "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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So that same inspired apostle wrote to the church at Philippi, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

Whether we speak of the preservation of the saints or of their perseverance, we are speaking of the same doctrine. It is the simple and wonderful truth that those who are one with Christ by faith can never lose their salvation, and therefore shall never perish but are surely saved. Concisely stated, "Once saved, always saved."

There is an important distinction to be maintained, however, between the *preservation* of the saints and the *perseverance* of the saints.

Preservation looks at this truth from the viewpoint of God's work of grace in the hearts of His people, as that grace which has saved us continues to operate in us until we are safely received into glory.

The perseverance of the saints, on the other hand, looks at this truth from the viewpoint of the activity of the saints and their lives as God's people in the world.

The relationship between the two is clear: Our perseverance is the fruit of God's preservation of us. That believers do not lose their salvation is not due to their steadfast obedience and their unshakable faithfulness, but is due solely and entirely to the grace of God that preserves and keeps them from falling.

### A Certain Preservation

The preservation of the saints is certain. That certainty is tied with several unbreakable cords to God Himself.

In the first place, the preservation of the saints is certain because of the immutability of God's decree of election. While this truth does not preclude the reality that believers often fall into sin, nor minimize in any way the seriousness of such falls, God's unchangeable purpose of election must

stand. In that beautiful Fifth Head of Doctrine of the Canons of Dordt, Article 6 says,

But God, who is rich in mercy, according to His unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from His own people, even in their melancholy falls; nor suffers them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption, and to forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto death; nor does He permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction.

This is biblical. Jesus said in John 6:39, "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." And in John 10, He says of His sheep (v. 28), "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." That certain promise He grounds in the next verse (v. 29): "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

The same truth is set forth in Romans 8:29-30: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

In addition, the Bible teaches that the certainty of God's preservation of the saints rests upon the accomplished work of Christ and the unbreakable bond between Christ and His elect church. The definite atonement of Christ stands as a sure ground for the complete

salvation of His people. He who laid down His life for His sheep accomplished their perfect and complete satisfaction. The debt is paid, and therefore can never be charged to us again.

Furthermore, Christ stands in relationship to His people not only as Mediator, but as their covenant Head. That covenant of grace is infallible. It actually and unfailingly saves all those who stand in that covenant relationship to Him. That covenant is established with an oath, with God's oath, which confirms to the heirs of the promise His own unchangeable faithfulness, thus providing for us a strong consolation, indeed, an anchor of the soul (Heb. 6:17-19). While it is not in the realm of this article to define

the doctrine of the covenant — something that has been done repeatedly in this rubric and in the *Standard Bearer* — any idea that one who stands in a covenant relationship to God through Jesus Christ might eventually fall away and finally

perish is an idea foreign to the Scriptures. The union between Christ and His people is unbreakable. Scripture repeatedly reveals the unbreakable bond of marriage as a reflection of that unbreakable union between Christ and His bride. He who purchased us with His precious blood also unites Himself with us so that we are *one flesh* with Him. It is impossible even for Satan and his hosts surgically to separate Christ and His people.

Still more, the certainty of the preservation of the saints is tied with an unbreakable cord to the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit. It is not without reason that the Canons of Dordt, in the article quoted above, states that God "does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from His own people." The Holy Spirit was given us, said Christ, "that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16).

*The preservation of the saints is certain. That certainty is tied with several unbreakable cords to God Himself.*

What God preserves is the new life of regeneration, the life of Christ in us. The Spirit is He who implants that new life in us. That life is *everlasting* life. I Peter 1:23 plainly teaches that we have been born again, “not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”

That the work of the Holy Spirit is a preserving work is also demonstrated by the fact that the Spirit is revealed in Scripture as sealing the believer. In speaking of that sealing work of the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 1:13, 14 states explicitly, “...ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.” We are sealed by Him “unto the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30). The idea of being sealed is not only to authenticate as genuine, but also to mark one as Christ’s possession and to protect Christ’s possession from tampering. That idea plainly speaks to the doctrine of the preservation of those who are Christ’s.

### What About Those Falls Into Sin?

No, this truth of divine preservation does not exclude the possibility of believers falling into sin. The realism of biblical revelation repeatedly brings us face to face with the grievous falls of the saints. The Canons of Dordt, in developing this doctrine, face the reality of sin in the lives of God’s people. It is striking that most of the Fifth Head of Doctrine develops the truth of the preservation and perseverance of the saints in direct relationship to this very fact, that there remain much sin and many infirmities in the lives of God’s people.

By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and the temptations

of sin and of the world, those who are converted could not persevere in a state of grace if left to their own strength. But God is faithful, who, having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end (Art. 3).

The Canons proceed to face the “lamentable fall of David, Peter, and other saints,” and to show how devastating sin can be in the lives of the saints, and how wonderful is the preserving power of the mer-

ciful and faithful Savior. So serious is sin and so destructive, that when a child of God walks in sin, he loses the consciousness of God’s favor and love. His way is filled with turmoil and distress, the tokens of God’s wrath and hot displeasure. The in-

spired David recounts his own experience with the vivid language of Psalm 32, saying, “When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.”

The doctrine of preservation does not even exclude the possibility that the child of God wanders far from Him for a time. David spent several months in impenitence before God in mercy sent Nathan the prophet to him with the powerful and efficacious call to repentance. And there are children of God who grieve the Holy Spirit and even leave the church and live in sin for a time, seemingly never to return.

But the preservation of the saints is that truth that God continues His work of grace in His people, never permitting them to commit the sin unto death, nor to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction.


Oh yes, there are those who are members of the church only out-

wardly, who even seem for a time to be faithful members of the church, only to depart and never to return. That the church and her families experience such grief does not serve as evidence contrary to the divine preservation of the saints. The fact that we cannot see the hearts of those who walk in sin, and that some return, while some depart never to return, only demonstrates the fact that God preserves the *elect*, that is, those who are in Christ Jesus.

When the church experiences the sorrow of seeing men and women die in their impenitence who once had outwardly confessed faith in Christ, she can only humbly bow before the words of the apostle John in I John 2:19, “They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

God preserves those in whom He has begun His work of grace. He preserves them even when He has to pull them out of the fire, to use the expression of Jude 23.

For in the first place, in these falls He preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing or being totally lost; and again, by His Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore His mercies, and henceforth more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Canons V, Art. 7).

God restores His own through the way of repentance, renewing and strengthening their faith. He does so of His own free mercy. God preserves His own work of grace in His people. That is our comfort. That is our assurance. 

## Haggai: Rebuilding the Church (3)

### The First Prophecy (continued)

**W**e have seen that the Old Testament temple and the New Testament church have the same name in Scripture. They are both called the house of God because they are the place of God's covenant, the house where God and His people live together under one roof and as one family — where He is their Father and Jesus is their elder Brother through the communion of the Holy Spirit. This identity of temple and church is our point of contact with the prophecy of Haggai.

God had promised that the temple would be His house, the place of His covenant, in the Old Testament:

And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God.

That promise was first fulfilled when God in the cloud of glory came to the tabernacle in the wilderness.

For the same reason the church is called the house of God in the New Testament. It is the place above all others where God lives

with His people in blessed and close covenant fellowship. It is the place where the family of God meets together, eats together the bread of life, and does the work of God's kingdom and covenant.

If the temple is not the church prefigured and typified, then the book of Haggai has nothing to say to us as New Testament Christians. Even if it is true, as the Dispensationalists believe, that the Old Testament temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem during a thousand-year period preceding the end of the world, that temple and the book of Haggai are still of no significance for us. The temple and sacrifices were Jewish and will remain so even if the temple is rebuilt before the end of the world. In that case our interest in Haggai can only be that of idle curiosity.

If the temple is the same as the church in the New Testament, then the calling to rebuild the temple is our calling — our calling to be always busy building and rebuilding the church. Of that calling we will speak more fully as we go on, but that calling is carried out in the New Testament in all the work of the church, as well as in the way of church reformation. It is the constant calling of every believer, something the great Protestant Reformation recognized in its description of the true church as "reformed and always reforming." It includes even the daily lives of God's people when they are working for the cause and kingdom of God.

Here in Haggai 1:2 God points out that the reason for the unfin-

ished work on the temple was not the interference of enemies or even the decree of the king, but that the people had given up in the face of many difficulties. The decree of Artaxerxes and the efforts of the Samaritans to halt the work had been taken by the Jews as a sign that God did not really mean them to be rebuilding the temple at that particular time. They had not entirely forgotten God's command, but were suggesting that the work should be left to some future and more propitious time.

They had done what so many do today, taken what they thought was a sign from God and used that as an excuse to neglect God's explicit command. Christians even today are quick to find signs in circumstances and things that allow them to live in disobedience to God's explicit commands in the Scriptures. If their evil deeds are pointed out, then they excuse themselves by saying, "But God showed me that this is what I must do." Further inquiry will usually show that God's showing them what to do is nothing more than their taking some event in their lives as a sign from God.

We must remember that God's Word is our only guide and rule for faith and life. Nothing from God will ever contradict His Word or allow us to live in disobedience to His Word. That is not to say that God does not guide us through circumstances, but we must be very careful that we do not misinterpret circumstances and providences, something we most certainly are doing if our understanding of those

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*(Preceding article in this series: January 1, 2003, p. 157.)*

circumstances leads us into disobedience to God's commands and revealed will in the Scriptures.

A young person who is considering marriage might think on the basis of circumstances that God is showing him whom to marry by the fact that He has brought into his life another person to whom he is attracted and who has come to depend on him and be his friend; but if that other person is an unbeliever, the command of God in I Corinthians 7:39 stands: "Only in the Lord," and no circumstance may be interpreted to allow anyone to disobey that command.

Perhaps the clearest and only way that God guides us through circumstances is when He makes something impossible or does not give us what we have asked of Him. Even that, however, is open to misinterpretation, as the example of these Jews showed. Especially the decree of Artaxerxes suggested that it was impossible to build the temple at that time. Nevertheless, they had the command of God and at no time may circumstances come in conflict with such a command.

That God calls Himself here the Lord of hosts is a reminder that he controlled King Artaxerxes and all their enemies and that the difficulties they faced in the work were really from Him. That name, Lord of hosts, used so often in this book (twelve times), refers to the fact that all creatures in heaven and on earth, men, angels and devils, righteous and wicked, even inanimate things, are God's army or host, which He commands and through which He brings to pass His own sovereign and unchangeable will.

Here God is reminding the people of Israel that the difficulties they faced were not outside of His control and most certainly must not allow them to think that they could disobey His command to rebuild the temple. That He refers to them through Haggai as "this people," not "my people," is an evidence of His displeasure

with their disobedience and failure to bring their difficulties to Him.

What the Jews were saying to excuse their disobedience, then, was nothing more than pious sounding hypocrisy, and is not much different from what many do and say today. No one will deny that the church today very much needs rebuilding. Its worship is often profane and conducted with no thought for the glory of God, its members are wayward and scattered if not completely worldly, its witness is weak and faltering, and its work is misdirected. Yet many, instead of working to correct these things and to rebuild the church on a more biblical foundation, point to the times in which we live, which are evil, and use them as an excuse for forsaking the church and its work altogether, or for sitting back and waiting for someone else to fight the battles and do the work that needs to be done.

Many of them do not even realize that every Christian is called to that work, as all the Jews were in this verse. Not only the leaders, but the people are rebuked for sloth and indifference. In that respect, too, things are not very different today. The people cannot lay all the blame on the ministers, elders, and deacons of the church for the sad condition of the church, when they themselves are not willing to take up the work that needs doing.

*3. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying.*

*4. Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieleed houses, and this house lie waste?*

The Jews had pleaded the difficulties that they faced as an excuse for their failure to carry out God's command to rebuild the temple. They plead their poverty, the hostility of the Samaritans, and the decree of Artaxerxes as proof that the time had not come to build God's house. God rebuked them for that, but He also points out in

Haggai 1:3, 4 that the real reason for their failure was a gross materialism that revealed itself in a greater concern for their own houses than for God's house. And, what is worse, their lack of concern for God's house was really a lack of regard for God Himself and for the covenant He had established with them.

When they first arrived back in Judah they had immediately begun the work of rebuilding the temple and had shown a greater concern for it than for their own homes and farms, which were also ruined and infested with weeds and wild beasts. That had changed in the face of many trials, and though they were now living in homes of their own, God's house was still waste. God is saying in effect, "You have a place to live and I don't."

That must not be misunderstood. That God lived in the temple in the Old Testament does not mean that He was confined to it. Solomon had confessed at the dedication of the temple:

Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? (I Kings 8:27).

That God lived in the temple meant only that He revealed His glory there as the God of His people, spoke to them there, and kept His covenant with them there. Nevertheless, even that meant that until the temple was finished, there was no place for God to reveal Himself to Judah. Judah's lack of concern reflected, therefore, on their attitude toward God and His covenant.

This verse makes it clear that the temple was far from finished at this time. God speaks of it as lying waste. That alone shows that there was much more to all of this than just the difficulties that they were using as an excuse. The decree of the king Artaxerxes forbidding the work had been passed

only about five years earlier, but about twenty years had passed since the return and little had been done beyond the laying of the foundations. They just did not care anymore about God's house and had spent their time working on their own homes.

When God speaks of their ceiled houses, the idea is not just that their houses were finished and could now be lived in, but that they had even had time to decorate and furnish their houses. The word

used is the same as that used to describe Solomon's work on the inside of the temple and of his own palace (I Kings 6:9; 7:3, 7). God describes their houses as "ceiled" to show how little concern they had for His house, which was still in ruins. It was not just that they needed roofs over their heads and places to live, but that their only interest was in their own homes and their own comfort there.

God puts them in their place

and reminds them who they are by the double "you" of verse 4. He is reminding them that He is God and they but men, men whom he brought out of Babylon and took safely back to the land of Canaan. The words, therefore, express a certain incredulosity that they, who owe so much to God, should have so little care for His house and such selfish regard for their own. May we never be like them, and if we are may God give us repentance.



## Book Reviews



*Redeeming Pop Culture: A Kingdom Approach*, by T.M. Moore. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2003. Pp. vii + 167. \$11.99 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

A pop treatment of the weighty subject of the Christian and culture.

"Once, after a morning service in which guitars had been used to lead the congregation in praise songs, I was making my way back to the pulpit to retrieve my Bible and sermon notes. One of the young men of our congregation was standing with his back to me, playing something on one of the guitars. As I approached, I discerned the familiar opening riff of Jim Morrison's 'Love Me Two Times, Baby.' I crept quietly up behind the young man, and at just the right moment, sang softly over his shoulder, 'Love me two times, baby; love me twice today.' He turned quickly around, with a look of astonishment on his face, and said, 'Do you know that song?' I answered that I did, and that I had seen The Doors in concert while in college. A brief conversation ensued about the merits of their music, but, more importantly, a friendship began with ... which has continued to this day" (p. 141). ■

*The Prophet and His Message: Reading Old Testament Prophecy Today*, by Michael J. Williams. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2003. Pp. xi + 220. \$12.99 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

In some respects, this book is a fresh, sound, helpful study of the important Old Testament office of prophet. In word, deed, and affections, the prophet of the Lord revealed God to His people. At the same time, the prophet represented the people of God. All of the Old Testament prophets, their speech, their prophetic behavior, and their prophetic feelings prefigured the consummate prophet, Jesus Christ.

The chapter on the prophetic role of Israel contains a significant treatment of typology. Williams gives guidelines for the identification of Old Testament types. He issues a necessary warning against the illegitimate restriction of types. "A greater danger than misuse of types is their neglect" (p. 129).

While recognizing the threat of allegory, Williams contends that "the experiences of Israel recorded in Scripture, taken as a whole, may be considered a type of God's coming redemptive activity with hu-

mankind on a broader level" (p. 128).

It is a weakness, however, that the explanation of the Old Testament prophet's calling toward the nations leaves the impression that that calling was mainly, if not exclusively, positive witness to the gospel. That the prophet condemned the nations, as in Amos 1 and 2, and that the prophets did not, as a rule, bring the message of salvation to the nations are simply ignored. Jehovah showed His Word unto Jacob. He did not deal so with any nation (Psalm 147:19, 20).


When Williams, rightly, comes to apply the prophetic office to the New Testament congregation, he leaves much to be desired. The first model of a church held up to criticism, if not ridicule, is the preaching church. This congregation is a mere "lecture hall" (p. 162). The calling to preach, evidently, refers only to the evangelizing of the unbelieving neighborhood, not to the weekly edifying of the body of Christ, believers and their children. And all the members are made out to be evangelistic preachers, thus denying the office of preacher, as taught in Ephesians 4 and in Romans 10.

Obsession with missions and

evangelism swallows up concern for the preservation and building up of the established church. This forebodes the death of the church.

The author so stresses the im-

portance of the godly behavior of the members for the church's prophetic ministry that love and peace virtually become the marks of the true church. The Reformed faith, on the other hand, without deny-

ing the importance, even necessity, of peace and love, confess the preaching of the "pure doctrine of the gospel" to be the chief mark of the true (and prophetic) church. 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Mission Activities

**T**he congregation of the Hull, Iowa PRC was called to a divine worship service on the evening of December 11 to witness the installation of Rev. R. Miersma into the office of missionary to the saints in Ghana, West Africa. Rev. S. Key, pastor at Hull, led the worship service, preaching from Isaiah 60:4, 5, with Rev. D. Kleyn, president of our churches' Foreign Mission Committee, reading the form for installation. The Lord willing, Rev. Miersma and his wife, Sharon, will join Rev. W. Bekkering and his wife, Phyllis, already serving our churches as missionary in Ghana, on January 14.

The arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Justin Koole as missionary assistants to Ghana in late November has cleared the way for Mr. Doug Bekkering to return to the U.S.A. He planned to leave for home on December 16.

We are also able to give a few more details of the busy itinerary of Prof. H. Hanko while on a two-week visit to our denomination's missionary to Northern Ireland, Rev. A. Stewart, and his wife, Mary, as well as the members of the Covenant PR Fellowship. On December 9 Rev. Stewart and Prof. Hanko flew to Bradford, England to meet with a long-time contact. Then on Friday and Saturday, December 12 and 13, Rev. and Mary Stewart and Prof. and Mrs. Hanko planned to visit contacts in South

Wales, with Prof. Hanko giving a speech in Porthcawl, South Wales on Friday evening entitled, "The Sovereignty of God and the Signs of the Times." Prof. Hanko was also scheduled to preach at both services on December 14, before flying home out of Dublin on Monday, December 15.

Rev. W. Bruinsma and Mr. G. Boverhof, representatives of our Domestic Mission Committee, were able to visit our churches' mission work in Pittsburgh, PA on December 4-8. They hoped to meet with our missionary, Rev. J. Mahtani, his family, the steering committee, and members of the mission. This visit was part of our DMC's regular oversight of the work.

The mission in Pittsburgh, PA decided to send the offering collected at their catechism classes this past year to an orphanage in India. Both Rev. Mahtani and Rev. Kortering have personal contact with the minister who oversees the work at this orphanage. How appropriate that the gifts of these children from Pittsburgh can now serve as a blessing to children in India.

The first weekend in December also saw two elders from our Loveland, CO PRC, Mr. R. Ezinga and Mr. R. Campbell, travel to Spokane, WA for a visit with our missionary, Rev. T. Miersma, and his family, as well as members of the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship. This visit was part of their regular supervisory work.

and of our Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, as well as other supporters of Christian education, were invited by the Board of the Lacombe PR School Society to attend a lecture December 3 at Immanuel. Their speaker for the evening was Rev. S. Key, who spoke on the topic "Why Protestant Reformed Education."

The first twenty days of December the Student Council of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI collected gift certificates from students, parents, and supporters of the school to help those in our churches in the area who have need of such help and assistance.

### Congregation Activities

**T**hree couples from the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI left in early December for a week and a half in Romania. This visit was to serve both as a follow-up of the work done this past summer and to distribute gifts from the Georgetown congregation to some of the saints there.

In the month of December many of the members of our congregations are invited to go caroling together to the older members of their congregation, as well as to any widows or widowers they may have, or perhaps to any children or adults with special needs. This provides the members, no matter what age, a time of fellowship together, and it certainly is an excellent way for a congregation to enjoy the communion of the saints. Many thanks to all of you for all your efforts to those often-forgotten members of our churches.

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

### School Activities

**M**embers both of our First PRC of Edmonton, AB, Canada

# THE STANDARD BEARER

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Choir programs also dominate the month of December for many of our churches. By our count we had choral societies presenting concerts in eight of our congregations last month. Some choirs, like the one at our Hudsonville, MI PRC, have been presenting concerts for over 50 years, while some like Trinity PRC in Hudsonville have just begun. But regardless of that, hopefully you had an opportunity last month to hear one of our church choirs sing praise to our covenant God for the unspeakable

gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, come in the flesh.


## Young Adult Activities

**T**he Young Adults of South Holland, IL PRC have decided to begin a study of the subject of common grace, using Prof. D. Engelsma's book *Common Grace Revisited*. The young adults were also encouraged to read Dr. R. Mouw's book "He Shines in All That's Fair," to prepare for that study.

Post High Young Adults continue to meet at the Faith PRC in

Jenison, MI on a regular basis. Prof. B. Gritters led a meeting on November 30 on "The Prayer Against Temptation," based on chapter 9 of *In the Sanctuary*.

## Minister Activities

**O**n January 4 the Hudsonville, MI PRC was to call a pastor from a trio of the Revs. R. Cammenga, G. Eriks, and R. VanOverloop. Rev. S. Key declined the call he had been considering to serve as the next pastor of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. 

## Announcements

### NOTICE!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will be hosted by Hope PRC in Redlands, California on Wednesday, March 3, 2004 at 8:30 A.M. All material for the agenda should be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, February 2, 2004. An officebearers' conference is planned for Tuesday, March 2. Delegates or visitors in need of lodging or transportation should notify Rev. M. VanderWal (909-792-6776), (mlvdw@cs.com).

Rev. Daniel Kleyn  
Stated Clerk, Classis West

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of Edgerton PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. Art Bleyenbergh and family in the death of their wife, mother, and grandmother,

**MRS CARRIE BLEYENBERG**, who was taken to be with the Lord on October 4, 2003 at the age of 87 years. May the Lord comfort them in their sorrow. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13).

Rev. Daniel Kleyn, President  
Mr. Ron Brands, Clerk

### NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Jeff Kalsbeek (Phone: 453-6455). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 23, 2004, in Southwest PRC, at 7:30 P.M., D.V.

Student Aid Committee  
Jeff Kalsbeek, Secretary

### 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.

### REMINDER:

Heritage Christian High School in South Holland, IL is now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year of operation, teaching a full course load as a four-year high school. As we plan for the 2004-2005 school year, we ask qualified Protestant Reformed teachers to consider our need of one additional staff member. Interested individuals, please contact our Administrator, Ralph Medema, at (708) 339-1733 [Ralph.medema@heritagechs.org] or Education Committee Chairman, Andy Birkett, at (708) 895-8214 [andy@preferred.windowanddoor.com]."