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A Song of Ascents

Psalm 133

Whenever in biblical times Jewish people would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate one of their feasts, they sang the songs of ascents recorded in Psalms 120 through 134. Singing these psalms, they expressed their joy in the Lord God as they came closer to the city and eventually arrived at God's temple.

When we approach God in worship, we must do so by gathering with fellow worshipers in a spirit of unity and harmony. The psalmist sings, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers [and sisters] live together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1). We acknowledge that the closer we come to God the more harmonious we

should be in relationship to our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Wherever this characteristic is evident, worshipers sense not only God's goodness and blessings but also his nearness. We know that it is impossible to worship God when constant strife and enmity are present among his people, for then God withholds his blessings.

The psalmist illustrates delightful unity and peace among the worshipers by portraying Aaron in his role as high priest. He writes, "It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes" (Ps. 133:2).

At first sight this picture has nothing in common with our times and culture. It does not speak to us and is utterly foreign. Yet when we put the picture in its historical setting and examine it, we begin to see the meaning of oil running down the head and clothing of the high priest.

God anointed Aaron as high priest for the task of presenting Israel's praises and petitions to him. Aaron could serve God in that capacity after he had been properly ordained. The ceremony of ordination demanded that he be drenched with precious oil that would cover his head, saturate his hair and beard, and drip down onto the collar of his robe.

The oil stood for holiness that signified total consecration to God.



Volume 52, No. 6 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) "And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon' (Judges 7:20).

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Aaron had to think that which is pure, speak that which is true, and do that which is right. His every thought, every word, and every deed had to exemplify holiness.

In the same vein, unity, harmony, and peace must saturate God's people so that the world is able to see our Christian walk of life. We are living, as it were, in a glass house and everyone on the outside is able to see and even hear us. Hence, the guideline for any Christian is to live in the very presence of God and joyfully sing, "So shall no part of day or night from sacredness be free, but all my life, in every step, be fellowship with Thee."

The psalmist provides a second illustration, "It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore"

(Ps. 133:3). Dew descends nightly on Mount Hermon and the land of Israel to refresh and replenish all vegetation, animals, and insects. The dew is so heavy that moisture steadily falls in large drops on all plants insects, and animals. Thus they are supplied with the necessary moisture to withstand the heat of the next day and flourish. Dew comes silently and inconspicuously; it nourishes and revives God's great creation. When Mount Zion, located at one of the higher places in Israel, receives the same dew that descends on Mount Hermon, the result is uncommon fruitfulness.

Similarly, when we in our Christian community display the characteristics of peace, harmony and unity, God's blessings descend on us quietly, unobtrusively, and profusely. God strengthens us for the task to which He has called us. He literally

places His material gifts next to us to sustain us in our daily life. In addition, He also grants us spiritual gifts, especially eternal life. In our own strength we come to failure, and consequently we readily admit that we are totally dependent on our heavenly Father. The prophet Jeremiah eloquently expresses this by saying, "Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

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Jay A. Wesseling

Our Father in Heaven and Earthly Fathers

As those made in the image of God we are told to be like Him in perfection, holiness, and so on. If we are to be like God in being a Father it will help us to know what God has revealed about Himself as a Father.

We have a good and clear example here of progressive revelation, that is, how God reveals Himself more fully as the Scripture goes on from the first revelation in the Old Testament to the final and complete revelation as we have it in the New Testament.

God reveals Himself first as the Creator: God, the Father, Almighty,

Maker of heaven and earth, as we profess in the Apostles' Creed

In the Old Testament God also calls Himself the Father of the nation of Israel as well as the Father of the kings of Israel.

The more personal relationship between God and the believer is often mentioned in the Psalms, where God is said to have pity on those who fear Him, as a human father pities his children.

Searching a concordance will yield many references from the Old Testament. Yet it is in the teachings of

our Savior that we find the clearest references to God as the Father of His people. "Clearest" is the operative word here, and it is due to the fact that Jesus makes clear the fact that God is a Father to all who are in Christ by faith. This relationship is special beyond the fact of God being our Creator. It reveals a depth of feeling and intimacy which is not found until our Savior shows that we are God's children when we believe in His only Son for our salvation. Think of John's exclamation: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (I John 3:1).

When He speaks of our future in

glory this is also carried through, for God tells believers “I will be his God and he shall be my son.” (Revelation 21:7).

Knowing what is true about God as the Father of His children challenges all Christian fathers. He provides for all our needs and is always patiently there for us.

On our part, we will seek to love God our Father since He first loved us. We must reflect that love by keeping His will for our lives before us as family men.

Since the essence of love is to seek and supply what is best for the object of our love, even at the price of self-denial when necessary, such love will characterize Christian fa-

thers. Their priorities will be determined by their calling as fathers who are sons of their Heavenly Father.

In covenant with Him, they will fulfill the pledge they made at baptism for the training of their children in the Christian truth and way. This training does not begin or end with Christian education, be that in a Christian day school or through the increasingly common practice of home-schooling. It will show when the child is yet just a babe in arms, through growing years, even beyond adolescence, for one blessed with children never stops being a father. With wisdom sought from the Heavenly Father, we earthly fathers must never stop striving to

live up to the ideal of being role models for our own children.

In Malachi 1 the Lord states “A son honors his father...” and then asks wistfully, “If I am a father, where is the honor due me?”

May the Lord not only bless all Christian fathers in their calling, but may the children of such fathers also honor them as they are called to do by the Lord in His Word.

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Needs Which Wives Need Met At Home

Part 2

In Part I of this series entitled, “*Needs Which Our Wives Need Met At Home*”, we set forth and summarized these three needs with the acrostic **T - L - C: Time; Love; and Communication**. Having previously addressed the need of our wives for “*Time which results in God-honoring, Christ-centered companionship and compatibility*”, we now consider a second need which our wives need met at home, namely, “*Love spoken in a language which our wives will understand and appreciate*.” Allow me to illustrate.

Early on in our nearly 25 years of marriage, my wife, Margaret, and I

came to the realization that there was some growing tension between us. In short, we were beginning to wonder if we really “loved each other” as we thought. As we discussed these mutual feelings, by the grace and mercy of God, we both came to a very surprising, but ultimately edifying, insight!

You see, as we began our married life together, being the godly woman that she is, Margaret was faithfully seeking to show her love to me in the language which she understood the best. She was selflessly offering practical help and support in a myriad of ways throughout the course of each day. For example, she would make me a hearty breakfast, keep and clean the house, run

all sorts of errands during the day, make any number of phone calls for me, and then welcome me home in the evening with a delicious dinner. Margaret was repeatedly saying, “I love you” in her language by offering to me all sorts of practical help and support along life’s way.

Ah, but the only problem with that, you see, is that I am a “*romantic*” by nature! That is just how God made me to be. So, while she was working so hard as a young wife trying to keep the house clean, keep up with the laundry, prepare good food and all the rest, as a young husband I was thinking to myself, “*Who cares what the house looks like! I want romance!!*” At the same time, even though I was busy buying Margaret cards and flowers and little “surprise gifts”, I certainly wasn’t much (if any) help around the house.

Richard J. Kuiken



In summary, we suddenly realized that while we were both sincerely and repeatedly saying, “I love you” to one another, we were saying it in a language which our marriage partner simply did not understand. And friends, if the message of love which we are trying to send to our husband or our wife is not being received, obviously that has the same negative “emotional impact” upon our spouse as if the message had never been sent at all.

Margaret and I talked through these things. The Lord graciously showed us that we both really did, in fact, love each other and that according to His Word we were completely desirous of remaining fully committed to our marriage vows.

Both Margaret and I consciously committed ourselves to learning and speaking each other’s “language of love”. Consequently, by God’s grace, Margaret became much more of a “romantic” and I simply started helping out around the house and doing more practical things to support my wife in the course of her days. (I don’t mind sharing with you that a side benefit of all this was that through the years I have gladly discovered that my wife’s language of love is much *cheaper* than my own!)

Now, a particular challenge to the men, if I may. Brothers, why do you suppose that I, as a man and the head of my home, was willing, by God’s grace, to adapt and modify *my* “language of love” to meet the needs of my wife and seek to put *her needs* before my own, and why should *you* be willing and desirous of doing that very same thing? Well, the reason has to do with what we

read, in Ephesians 5:25-33 where God’s Holy Spirit inspired Word declares:

Husbands, love (*agape*) your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In

...we were saying “I love you” in a language which our marriage partner simply did not understand.

this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church - for we are members of His body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

In similar fashion, in Colossians 3:19 Paul writes, “Husbands, love

(*agape*) your wives and do not be harsh with them.” And to both husbands and wives, indeed, to all Christians everywhere, God’s Holy Word declares in I Corinthians 13:4-8a:

Love (*agape*) is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

You see, we most often and most naturally express love in a language which means the most to us. But our calling as Christians, our task as God-honoring husbands, is to ask ourselves, indeed, let us even ask our wives, “*Honey, how can I say ‘I love you’ in a way that means the most to you?*” Some wives most appreciate “romantic gifts” and others “practical helps” and still others may respond most favorably to “hugs or physical touch”. In whatever language of love our wives wish that we would speak, we must be willing to “die to ourselves”, to subjugate our own feelings, wishes, dreams and desires and put the feelings, wishes, dreams and desires of our wives before our own. Men, I assure you, if you do this you can not miss! You will not fail! You will be meeting the needs of your wives ever more faithfully and effectively, and God will be glorified!

Isn’t this what “*agape love*” and the very heart of the gospel of Jesus

Christ is all about? In Romans 5:8 we read, “And God demonstrates his own love (*agape*) for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

In the midst of a culture where the message repeatedly being conveyed is, in effect, “I love you *because...*”; or “I’ll love you *until...*”; or, “I’ll love you *when...*”, or “I’ll love you *if...*” ... the godly man, indeed, also the godly woman, any true disciple of Jesus Christ will increasingly seek to model and exemplify the Lord’s kind of love, *agape*. In Christ, the person will repeatedly say to his/her spouse, in word and in deed, “*Honey, I love you - period*. Unconditionally; unreservedly; no strings attached. And I promise to show you and express to you that kind of love, each and every day.”

Why? Because in the midst of a very sinful, selfish, self-centered, unloving and often lonely world - LOVE - *agape* - spoken in a language which our wives will understand and appreciate, is one of the *Three Key Needs Which Our Wives Need Met at Home*.

Rev. Richard J. Kuiken is the Senior Pastor of the Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church.

A Word to Husbands

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered (1 Peter 3:7).

Since Father’s Day is around the corner it might be a good time to hear a biblical word from the Lord to husbands and fathers. David Blankenhorn of the Institute for American Values said this about a good father: “A good father does these basic things: provides for his family, protects his family, and gives spiritual and moral guidance.” I would agree that a good father does all those things but I think there is something absent in the description. I would add that in order to be a good father you need to be a good husband first!

The best thing you can do as a father is to truly love your wife as Christ loved the church and heed by the grace of God the divinely inspired word that Peter expresses in the passage above. Men, your relationship to your wives and how you live with them is a first priority. The ordinary consequence of a good and faithful marriage with Christ at its center will be good and faithful children who will love and serve the Lord. There certainly are exceptions but this is the norm.

Peter is concerned that husbands realize that they are called to give both intelligent and tender leadership to their wives. Every man is inescapably answerable to God for what his

home becomes. This is so because a husband is the head of his home no matter how he leads (1 Cor.11:3). He is not only commanded to be the head of his wife and home but to be a good head. He is either a good head who leads his wife and family in faithfulness to the commands of the Lord or he is a bad head who leads his family toward spiritual ruin and compromise. And as the head of his wife and family he must pastor his home with spiritual wisdom and compassionate care. In light of this, I’d like to look at the above verse by first, considering the motive for a husband’s ministry to his wife and second, the manner of that ministry.

The Motive for a Husband’s Ministry

I Peter 3:7 begins with the words “Husbands, likewise.” These words connect us to the preceding context in which Jesus submits to the will of His heavenly Father as He carries out the salvation of His people (2:21-25). On this ground servants are to render submission to their masters (2:18-20), wives are to yield to their husbands (3:1-6) and husbands are to lovingly submit themselves to caring for the needs of their wives. The word

...in order to be a good father you need to be a good husband first!



“likewise” bids us to look at the conduct of Christ and how He laid down his life for the salvation of His church.

Jesus knew the needs of His people and their helpless inability to save themselves. He gave His life in order to satisfy the demands of the righteous and holy God. Thus, Peter reminds husbands that our motivation for ministry to our wives is built upon God’s saving grace applied to us on the ground of Jesus’ work. Any command without this behind it has no more force than simple good advice. Because Jesus, as the suffering servant delivered us from our sin and because He has become the “Shepherd and Overseer” of our souls, husbands must live with their wives like Jesus lives with His church! This provides the motive for obediently hearing and doing what God says in our passage.

When we think about how our Savior writhed in anguish upon the cross under God’s just wrath against our sins and graciously delivered us - when we think about how God knows us and has compassion on us by providing a Savior who meets us at our most urgent need - when we think about Jesus, the Lord of the universe nailed to a tree, spilling His holy blood, bowing His sacred head in bitter heartache, becoming the Lord of our shame and sinful hearts, and healing us by His stripes - can we not then realize the honor and dignity of our calling to serve sacrificially the needs of our wives as Christ sacrificially served the true needs of His church! Thus the pattern by which we live in relationship to others and in particular our wives is built around the person and work of Jesus.

The Manner of the Husband’s Ministry

Having realized the importance of this passage from Peter concerning the motive for a husband’s ministry, now we see how Peter describes the manner in which husbands should live with their wives. He begins by explaining that husbands should live with their wives in an intelligent or “understanding” way. But what does Peter mean by this? Well, he certainly means that husbands should continuously seek to know what makes their wives tick. They should pursue the knowledge of their wives as much after saying

The pattern by which we live in relationship to others and in particular our wives is built around the person and work of Jesus.

“I do” as they did before they said “I do.” That is, we should all remember how we courted our wives before we married them. Do you remember way back then when you couldn’t get the thought of her out of your head? We need to continue that throughout our entire marriage.

A part of this understanding or knowledge is further expressed by the call to care for our wives by honoring them, being tender toward them, realizing that they are more delicate, and are co-equals before the Lord in their standing before Him as believers. The wife is not

inferior because of her physical delicateness. This is the way the Lord has made her. She is to be protected and cared for, especially as one who is a joint heir of Jesus Christ.

To honor her is to praise her and to give preferential treatment to her. She has been chosen for the important role of the “weaker vessel.” Her role calls for special esteem! Certainly in terms of sheer physical ability a man is stronger than a woman and therefore husbands should be very careful that they do not use their physical strength to intimidate their wives. They are to employ their energies in being tender and gentle showing special tribute to their wives. For the husband to exploit the wife’s weakness is to risk the chastisement of the Lord and will turn the ear of the Lord deaf to a husband’s prayers.

However, the wife is not a weaker vessel simply because she is physically more delicate but because she assumes the role or takes on the mantle of weakness in relation to her husband as she submits to him in obedience to the Word of God. When we think of weakness we understand that to refer to a lack of power or position. For a wife to gently and quietly submit to her husband is to be weak and faint in the eyes of the world. Therefore, husbands need to especially demonstrate in word and deed great praise, admiration and reverence toward their wives because they have been assigned by God the “weaker” position in the marriage.

Furthermore, both believing husband and wife are “heirs of the grace of life.” They both belong to the Lord, they both know His sav-

ing grace and stand to inherit all that Christ has promised, therefore husbands must treat their wives not as inferiors, but as a joint heir with Christ. This is certainly a part of the knowledge or intelligent understanding with which a husband should relate to his wife.

But the knowledge or understanding that I believe overall is most important is the knowledge or understanding of the Scriptures. It is knowledge which is from above that is to be grasped by husbands if they are going to honor their wives and dwell with them to God's praise. A husband is to know that wisdom concerning Christ, the gospel, and all that God has revealed, especially as that concerns marriage and family relationships. In Peter's second letter the word knowledge is used repeatedly to refer to the knowledge of Christ and His revelation (2 Peter 1:3,5-6; 3:18).

Thus, the central point of Peter's command to husbands is this: Husbands must keep on dwelling with their wives in harmony with that revelation of God in Christ and His Word that belongs to the Christian believer. Since you are a Christian, and you know the Word of God, then apply that Word to your relationship with your wife! This seems to be the essence of what is being said.

Peter reminds us that the unbeliever is full of unbelief and ignorance which leads to slavery and foolishness - something which the believer has been delivered from (1 Peter 1:4; 2:15). Therefore every believing husband must strive to be a student of Scripture. He must be the pastor of his home who reads, ex-

plains, and applies the Scriptures in his relationship to his wife and in his leadership of the home and the training of his children. To heed this command, a husband has to be saturated by the Word of God. Husbands, are you students of Scripture? Does this command pinch a little? It should!

The sad fact of the matter is that so many husbands, even Christian husbands, are far away from the scrip-

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keep on dwelling
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tural ideal of a husband who shepherds his home. Some husbands are little more than grown-up little boys who see their wives more as their mothers than their wives! They view their wives as someone who satisfies their physical needs, keeps them well fed and soothes their egos when they hurt.

Or, they reduce their role to that of a provider alone. The major concern for many husbands is to make a living, the wife's job is to run the home. So the husband hurries himself off to work and is eager to acquire plenty of money so that he can provide the comforts of modern life for his family. Most men do a pretty good job at this and take this part of their responsibility very seriously, but this is lopsided leadership

at best. Peter would tell us that there is more to husbandry than just earning a good living for our families.

What about it husbands, are you really working hard to study Scripture so that you can pastor your home effectively? Have you really understood from God's Word the exalted place of weakness that your wife occupies and have you praised and venerated her for this? The best way to observe Father's Day is to commit yourself by God's grace to the pursuit of learning and understanding and applying God's Word so that you dwell with your wife and family in harmony with that Word.

For most it would be utterly unacceptable to be pastored in the church by a preacher who did not know or give himself to the study of God's Word. Likewise, it ought to be unacceptable and abhorrent to us as husbands, who are called to be pastors of our homes, to be less than diligent students of the Holy Scriptures!

Rev. Tim Perkins is the Pastor of the Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.



A Look at the 2002 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church

A Brief Look at the Agenda

Rev. Harlan Vanden Einde

On Saturday, June 8, 2002, 188 delegates from the 47 classes of the CRC spread across the United States and Canada, will gather at the Fine Arts Center Auditorium on the Calvin College Campus in Grand Rapids for their annual synod. Unless their work is finished earlier, the sessions are scheduled to conclude by 11:45 AM on June 15th. By mid-April, most of the delegates had received their copy of *The Agenda*, and began pouring over its contents in preparation for deliberation and decision. The purpose of this article is to give you a bird's eye view of what that agenda contains.

The Board of Trustees

The governing board of the CRC is called "The Board Of Trustees", and this board annually presents to synod a summary of the activities carried out on behalf of synod during the interim between annual synod meetings. Included in that report is a summary of the activities of the agencies and educational institutions of the CRC, which is why the BOT report occupies 276 pages of *The Agenda*. Let me highlight just a few items from their report.

Of note is the fact that the office of general secretary is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2002. It was back in 1902 that synod initiated that office (then referred to as Stated Clerk; now General Secre-

tary). At that time Synod appointed Dr. Henry Beets to that position. Since then, five different persons have occupied that office, which became a full-time position in 1956.

Also of interest is the fact that to date, 19 of the 47 classes of the

Appendix H of The Agenda not only describes what the CRC is, but prescribes what we should be.

CRC have declared the word *male* inoperative in Church Order Article 3-a. Synod 1995 instructed the General Secretary to keep a list of those classes and report their names annually to synod. Synod 1995 also approved the position of an ethnic advisor to serve synod, and thus the BOT has appointed six people to serve in that capacity at Synod 2002.

Synod 2000 adopted a recommendation that is in effect until 2005 that women advisors also serve synod. Thus the BOT has appointed seven women to serve in that capacity at Synod 2002. A review of this decision concerning women in office is scheduled to take place in 2005.

Though this has been a difficult

year for most charitable organizations, including the church and our denominational agencies, it is gratifying to note that as a support system for denominational ministries, our ministry shares have generated over twenty-million dollars of support annually for the past few years. In view of the specific needs of the agencies, and on the recommendation of the Ministries Administrative Council, the BOT has adjusted the ministry share allocation, increasing the shares for Calvin Seminary and CRC Publications, and decreasing the shares for Back to God Hour, Calvin College, Home Missions and Word Missions. Synod 2002 will be asked to approve that reallocation.

In 1997, the synod endorsed a recommendation from the BOT which presented a Denominational Ministries Plan, put together as a result of two extensive listening tours throughout the denomination. The intent was to give some clarity about the CRC's identity and purpose. After working for several years with the goals and strategies that were part of the plan, major portions of it have been rewritten. This expanded and revised version is being presented to Synod 2002 for endorsement. It is found in Appendix H of *The Agenda*, and covers some 26 pages. It not only describes what the CRC is, but prescribes what we should be. All members of the Christian Reformed Church would do well to take the time to carefully read this identity statement.

Agencies

In an article such as this, it is impossible to go into detail about the work of the various agencies of the CRC. Each of these agencies report their activities, their concerns and their successes. If you would take the time to read through these reports, you would be amazed at what the Lord is accomplishing through this relatively small denomination known as the CRC. There is reason for tremendous gratitude and praise to God for what He is doing through this small group of churches.

Interchurch Relations Committee

But let me call your attention to a couple of recommendations coming from the Interchurch Relations Committee. One of them is this: "The synod authorize the IRC to apply for membership in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), (Agenda 2002, p. 245). This alliance is one of the oldest ecumenical organizations, having been formed in London in 1875. Today its membership consists of over two hundred churches located in more than one hundred countries, with a total membership of approximately eighty million Reformed believers. Though there is reason for caution in joining this alliance, since there are some member churches who interpret Scripture in a manner incompatible with the CRC's principles and practices, yet as the report of the IRC says, "membership in WARC offers the CRC a rich opportunity for Reformed ecumenical witness and work" (Agenda 2002, p. 263).

The other report of the IRC that

will elicit some discussion pertains to clarifying the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church concerning the Mass. This report is the outgrowth of two overtures presented to the 1998 Synod concerning question and answer 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism. In a 20 page report, found in Appendix D of *The Agenda*, (page 274ff), the committee analyzed the statement found in q. & a. 80 of the Heidel-

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berg Catechism as it relates to current Roman Catholic theology and practice. As a result of their study, the IRC is recommending to Synod 2002 that this entire report be submitted to "the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops requesting their agreement that the report gives an accurate presentation of official Roman Catholic teaching regarding the sacrament of the Eucharist" (Agenda 2002, p. 294). Before any changes are suggested in the Heidelberg Catechism, that much surely has to be done, and synod would do well to give careful and prayerful consideration to this report.

Study Committee

Synod 2002 will be confronted with just one study committee report this year, a 38 page report (including appendices) from the committee to give directions about and for Pastoral Care For Homosexual Members. This report is a result of a mandate given to them by Synod 1996 to study the above mentioned subject "in a manner consistent with the decisions of Synod 1973" (Agenda 2002, p. 313).

This committee met with a variety of persons with same-sex attractions and reviewed a survey sent to CRC pastors as to the ways in which the guidelines of the 1973 report were being carried out in the churches. Their conclusion was that many congregations appeared to have little knowledge of the 1973 report, and thus the guidelines for dealing with persons of same-sex attraction were not being followed. So the preliminary report of this committee, which was presented to Synod 1999, was made available to the churches for study and response. Now Synod 2002 is receiving their final report.

It is obvious, as the committee reports, that there "is considerable diversity of opinion and feeling within the denomination about individuals with same-sex attractions and ministry to them" (Agenda 2002, p. 315). The committee's hope is that "the contents of the report that follows....will assist our churches in ministering more effectively in the name of Christ" (Agenda 2002, p. 316).

Overtures

There are 13 overtures going to Synod 2002, two of which ask synod



to revise the decision of Synod 2000 not to permit women ministers to serve as synodical deputies; one calls for a revision of Belgic Confession Article 34, specifically that sentence that says “we detest the errors of the Anabaptists”; and two have to do with our present ministry-share system, asking for some revision.

Finally, one Confession-Revision-Gravamen is on this year’s agenda, appealing to synod to consider replacing the phrase “He descended into hell” with “He descended to the realm of the dead” in the Apostles’ Creed and the Heidelberg Catechism. Since this gravamen was rejected by the classis in which the church presenting it is located, the appeal is now being presented to Synod 2002.

Being a delegate to synod involves a very significant responsibility, and surely one that requires the prayerful support of the entire church. As the delegates themselves prepare for Synod 2002 and the matters on the agenda, may all of us be much in prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that the will of our Heavenly Father may be done through the part of His Kingdom known as the Christian Reformed Church.

Rev. Harlan Vanden Einde recently retired from active ministry after serving the Borculo Christian Reformed Church for thirteen years.

Observations on Synod 2002

Rev. Richard Blauw

An annual rite of spring, like seeing the first robin in your back yard, is having the UPS driver deliver the Agendas for Synod. At first glance it appears to be a fairly light agenda. There are the reports from the agencies and committees all calling attention to various noteworthy or sometimes less than noteworthy projects with which they are involved. There is the usual politically correct rhetoric, yet there are also some significant trends that can be seen in this year’s agenda.

A Reformed Identity

Appendix H (p. 63) the Denominational Ministries Plan for Agencies and Institutions of the CRC, has an extended discussion of our reformed identity. There is an analysis of three emphases in our denomination. The first is the doctrinalist (or confessional) emphasis which stresses the confessions. Being “reformed” is defined by the historic reformed confessions. The most well known systematic theologian of this position is Louis Berkhof.

The second emphasis is that of the Pietist. Here the stress is one’s experience of the Christian life and one’s personal relationship to God. The third emphasis is labeled the transformationalist view. Here the emphasis is on developing a world

and life view and applying this perspective to every aspect of culture.

Abraham Kuyper is quoted noting “that the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ lays claim to every square inch in the whole domain of human existence.” The report concludes that “these three emphases – doctrinalist, pietist, and transformationalist – have often functioned as distinct approaches in the CRC”. All three of these need to be integrated in a well-balanced Christian life and theology.

The report is a sound analysis of the CRC, although a few more observations could have been made. There is increasing fragmentation in the denomination and some of it is along the fault lines of these mind-sets. Home Missions, for example, and those who advocate praise teams and contemporary worship are usually of a more pietistic bent. Among the transformationalists, for example, are those who think that the denomination is obligated to create a committee to address every real or perceived social ill.

It is the first emphasis – the doctrinalist – that now exercises the least influence in the denomination. In some quarters to appeal to the confessions or the creeds is perceived as being “exclusive” or “dogmatic” or “legalistic”. Some churches have abolished programs of catechical instruction for their children and catechism preaching is waning. There are some who think the creeds and confessions

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are 16th century documents and should be re-written every 10 or 20 years to keep up with the changing times. Some of that mind set was behind the “Contemporary Testimony”. Recent articles on doctrinal subjects in the *Banner* (eg. on Election or the Authority of Scripture) reflect either an ignoring of the confessions or a desire to redefine them.

The problem is that when one does not emphasize the doctrines of grace as embodied in the Reformed Confessions, it is very difficult for our children to understand what it means to be reformed and why we are different from other evangelical protestant churches. This may be one reason why we are losing our children in significant numbers.

From NAPARC to WARC

Evidence of the diminished role of the confessions in the life of the church can be seen in the report of the Interchurch Relations Committee (p. 238 ff). It appears that our historic association with NAPARC (North America Presbyterian and Reformed Council) will be terminated. One of the charges brought against the CRC by the PCA (Presbyterian Church in America) is that the CRC, in allowing the ordination of women, acted not only contrary to Scripture, but also contrary to its own confessional statement, i.e. Art. XXX of the Belgic Confession which deals with the government of the church and its offices. This article notes “that everything will be carried on in the church with good order and decency, when faithful men are chosen, according to the rule prescribed by St. Paul in his Epistle to Timothy.” Obviously this article

would be an impediment to the ordination of women so the word “men” was changed to “persons”. The argument put forth was that the word in the French version of the creed was “personages” which is gender neutral. The word “personages” is not gender neutral, rather its gender is determined by its context. Contextual references to the Epistle to Timothy make the word in this context masculine so the use of the phrase “faithful men” is correct. This was part of the

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PCA’s theological-historical argument. The counter arguments of the CRC appear to be grammatically and historically weak. It reflects a diminished view of the significance of the confessions in the life of the church.

If ecumenical relations with our historic reformed friends and sister denominations are terminated, it is a bit difficult to confess the catholicity of the church. We would find ourselves in an ecumenical no-man’s land. So the Interchurch Relations Committee is recommending that the CRC apply for membership in the World Alliance

of Reformed Churches. The report rightly notes some significant difficulties in joining this alliance. “WARC’s confessional commitment is not as clear and distinct as the CRC’s.” The constitution of WARC recognizes the Reformed tradition as a “biblical, evangelical and doctrinal ethos, rather than any narrow and exclusive definition of faith and order.” Such language ought to make Synod extremely nervous. J. Gresham Machen was expelled from the Presbyterian Church in the 20’s because Presbyterianism was a “controlling ethos” and not a “doctrinal commitment.” The Apostle Paul in his letter to Timothy identifies the church as “the pillar and ground of the truth” not the pillar and ground of an “ethos”. Tepid commitment to an “ethos” has allowed outright heresy in some denominations. Even Roman Catholicism demands commitment to the “magisterium” (the teaching authority) of the church. It is unlikely that membership in WARC will enhance our commitment to the confessions in the life of the CRC.

This recommendation to join WARC represents a shift away from identifying with the more historically conservative Reformed and Presbyterian denominations towards identification with the more mainline protestant and theologically liberal denominations. If this trend continues one might expect an overture in the not too distant future to join the National Council of Churches (NCC). If, however, the CRC desires to drift toward the mainstream of American Protestantism, there is a serious risk of getting swept away in some dangerous theological currents.



Women's Ordination

Perhaps no other issue has been as devastating and divisive in the history of the CRC as the issue of women's ordination. In the past decade we have lost numerous churches, families and some 40-50 thousand members. Financial receipts are down and support for denominational causes and agencies is eroding. In an effort to settle the troubled denominational waters Synod decided to postpone dealing with Church Order Art. 3 until the year 2005.

Such pastoral considerations and concerns seem lost on Classes Grand Rapids East and Lake Erie which are overturing Synod to revise the decision of Synod 2000 not to permit women ministers to serve as Synodical Deputies. The rhetorical overkill of the Grand Rapids East overture is astounding. The implication is that they are a "voice for the voiceless", as if it is impossible for male delegates to Synod to represent the interests of the women of the church.

It may come as a surprise to some that there are some intelligent and educated women in our denomination who think that women's ordination is "contrary to the clear teaching of scripture". It is highly unlikely that their views will be represented on the Women's Advisory Committee to Synod. Overtures such as these are not likely to promote the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

CRC and RCA

There is however, another overture from Classis Grand Rapids East that merits careful consideration

and that is the proposal to explore "organic unity" (whatever that is) with the RCA (Reformed Church in America). The overture rightly notes that the grounds for separation in 1857 (such as singing hymns in public worship, having non-RCA Christians at the Lord's Table, not enforcing weekly catechism preaching and annual home visiting) are now characteristic of the common practice of the CRC as a denomination.

The RCA is less bureaucratically

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dominated and with its regional synods is more respectful of the rights of the local congregation. It is in many ways a kinder and gentler denomination. Perhaps we ought to explore the possibility of merger which would formally acknowledge what in fact has taken place. Opposition to this would be most evident in the denominational bureaucracies and boards. It remains, however, something worth considering.

Conclusion

Synod 2002 may be a more pivotal synod than a superficial scanning of the agenda may first indicate. Ultimately its success will be mea-

sured not by denominational pundits but by the Lord's blessing. The Roman Catholic theologian Hans Kung once observed that "The Bible is the Book of the Church and that the Church must continually strive to become the Church of the Book". As Reformed Christians we confess indeed that the Bible is the book of the church. The question that synod must ask is, are we increasingly becoming the church of the Book? May God grant His wisdom and discernment to the delegates of Synod 2002.

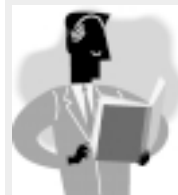
Rev. Richard Blauw is the pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois.

- Dr. Cornel Venema - President of Mid- America Reformed Seminary

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Reformed Evangelism

“Election and the ‘Free Offer’ of the Gospel”

Part Four

In the history of the Reformed churches, the distinction between a universal and an effectual call of the gospel is a commonplace. Even though there are a few advocates of a strong form of hyper-Calvinism, which denies that the gospel call should be preached to all sinners, the elect and non-elect alike, the mainstream of the Reformed tradition has always affirmed the legitimacy of an indiscriminate preaching of the gospel to all sinners without exception.

However, in the debate regarding the nature of this gospel-call, some have advocated what I have called a “soft” hyper-Calvinism. In this view of the gospel-call, we should not present the gospel promise to all sinners in the same manner. Since some of those to whom the gospel-call is addressed are non-elect, we should not regard the call, so far as it is addressed to them, as expressing any good will or favor on the part of God or those who speak in His name. The gospel-call, when it comes to those whom God has not determined to save, does not express any desire, whether on God’s or His ambassadors’ part, that they should believe in Jesus Christ, turn from their sin and so be saved.

In my previous articles, I sought to show from the Scriptures that this reserve regarding the gospel-call is

not fully biblical. Rather, there is biblical evidence for the teaching that in some sense God desires the salvation of all lost sinners, and that those who represent Him in the gospel ministry ought likewise to seek earnestly the salvation of all to whom they have opportunity to bring the message of salvation. The gospel comes to lost sinners as good news: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household” (Acts 17:31). It does not summon people to believe that they are elect or non-elect, but to put their trust in Christ alone for salvation. The biblical teaching regarding particular election, however clear and compelling it may be, does not negate the biblical teaching regarding the propriety of extending the gospel’s summons and promise to all lost sinners.

However, there are a few questions that I have not addressed until this point, which I would like to consider in this and a subsequent article. These questions are: first, is the gospel-call, as I have interpreted it, the teaching of historic or classic Calvinism?; second, is the idea of a well-meant offer of the gospel consistent with the biblical teaching of God’s sovereign and unconditional election of some sinners, but not others?; and third, what implications does a proper view of the gospel-call have for the subject of Re-

formed evangelism?

Classic Calvinism?

Though the Reformed tradition is known for its affirmation of God’s unconditional election of His people in Christ, there is some dispute whether it also affirms the teaching of a free offer of the gospel. Is there evidence that the historic position of the Reformed churches favors the idea that the gospel-call expresses some kind of good will on the part of God toward all lost sinners?

Though it is not possible to canvass the whole of the Reformed tradition to ascertain its position on the gospel-call, we will accomplish our purpose by briefly considering two representative sources: Calvin, who is generally acknowledged to be the leading theologian of the tradition; and the Reformed confessions, which express the churchly consensus of the tradition. Admittedly, this is a limited basis for drawing any general conclusions about the Reformed tradition. But it is sufficient to illustrate what is the historic position of the Reformed churches, especially as it comes to expression in one of its representative theologians and confessional symbols.

Calvin

Calvin’s teaching on the subject of unconditional election is well known. God has from eternity purposed to save His elect people, not upon the basis of foreseen faith or works but upon the basis of His sovereign grace and good-pleasure.

Is there evidence that the historic position of the Reformed churches favors the idea that the gospel-call expresses some kind of good will on the part of God toward all lost sinners?



However, his position on the subject of the well-meant offer of the gospel is not as well known, nor is it as uniformly interpreted. Rather than attempt to sort out all of the varying interpretations of Calvin's view, I will only cite a few examples from his writings to show that he affirmed some kind of free offer of the gospel. Several of these examples also show how Calvin interpreted the texts we considered in our previous articles.

In his commentary on Romans 5:18, Calvin writes: "Paul makes grace common to all men, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is *offered* to all. Although Christ suffered for the sins of the world, and is *offered* by the goodness of God without distinction to all men, yet not all receive Him" (emphasis mine)¹. What is remarkable about this comment is that Calvin speaks of "the goodness of God," which is exhibited to all men in the preaching of the gospel. He even acknowledges a kind of "common grace" that extends to all those to whom the gospel is offered. Though many do not "receive" Christ as He is offered in the gospel, this does not remove the fact that He is truly offered to all to whom the gospel is addressed. While Calvin elsewhere in his commentary on Romans declares that "God does not work effectually in all men,"² in his comments on Romans 5:18 he affirms God's favor or goodness toward all to whom the gospel-call is extended. He also uses a variety of terms in this commentary to describe the nature of the gospel-call: the gospel "exhibits" or "offers" Christ, and thereby "invites" sinners to "receive" Him.³ These terms are stronger in meaning than

a view of the gospel-call as a mere "exhibition" or "presentation" of Christ would allow. They suggest that God through the gospel genuinely and graciously invites all sinners to believe.

Equally remarkable are Calvin's comments on Matthew 23:37 (par. Luke 17:34; "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling"). According to Calvin, Christ's

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language in this lament expresses a "maternal kindness." In a manner of speaking, God "bares His breast to us" in the overtures of the gospel.⁴ Through the gospel God manifests His "great goodness," which is similar to a maternal tenderness and kindness expressed toward wayward children who prove unwilling to respond in kind. Indeed, it is precisely the tender-heartedness of God's lament in the Person of His Son that renders human unbelief in response to the gospel such a "monstrous" thing. For this reason—the sinner's stubborn refusal to respond appropriately to God's kind overtures—a "dreadful vengeance awaits us as often as the teaching of His Gospel is put before

us, unless we quietly hide ourselves under His wings, in which He is ready to take us up and shelter us."⁵

In his lectures on Ezekiel, Calvin expressly states that God announces through the prophet (especially in Ezekiel 18:23,32) "His wish that all should be saved."⁶ This is the general tenor of the whole gospel when it is presented to lost sinners—"all are promiscuously called to salvation."⁷ Though we are not to confuse this gospel-call with God's "secret counsel" whereby He has determined to save the elect, we may not deny that "God calls all equally to repentance, and promises Himself prepared to receive them if they only seriously repent."⁸ When it comes to the presentation of the gospel to lost sinners, therefore, we should not curiously inquire into God's hidden purposes but rather look to the Word in which the divine will "is made plain to us and to our children."⁹ While Calvin readily acknowledges that this may suggest to us a kind of duplicity in God (He decrees one thing, but expresses Himself in another way through the gospel), he nonetheless insists that God's purposes are harmonious and consistent, however difficult, even impossible, it may be for us to see clearly how this is so.

The last example of Calvin's affirmation of the well-meant offer of the gospel comes from his treatment of 2 Peter 3:9 ("The Lord . . . is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance"). This passage, like others in the Scriptures, presents us with a difficulty that is not easy to resolve. How can God desire to save sinners whom He has not pur-

posed (in some cases) to save? Calvin admits that this might suggest some kind of disparity between God's secret and revealed will: though God has secretly determined to save the elect alone, He declares in the gospel that He desires the salvation of all. The only solution open to us is to acknowledge that in His revealed will "God stretches out His hand to all alike," even though secretly He has determined to save one and not another.¹⁰ Nonetheless, there is no ultimate disharmony between God's purpose of election and the universal call of the gospel, however difficult this harmony may be for us to comprehend. Indeed, if we attempt to discover in what sense God desires or wills the salvation of all, we will be seeking to know something God has not chosen to reveal to us.

Confessions

The most important evidence for the historic position of the Reformed churches on the gospel-call is, of course, the testimony of the confessions. These have official standing as a summary of the church's understanding of the Word of God. Even though it may be too much to insist that the Reformed confessions require a strong affirmation of the well-meant offer, this view seems to comport best with the language used in the confessions.

The most direct and clear statement of the nature of the gospel-call as it is addressed to all lost sinners is found in the Canons of Dort. The Canons of Dort were formulated as a Reformed or Calvinist answer to the five "opinions" of the Arminian or Remonstrant party in the Dutch Reformed church of the early seventeenth century. In their "opinions,"

the Arminians claimed that the teaching of unconditional election undermined the universal and indiscriminate preaching of the gospel to all sinners. In particular, the teaching of unconditional election deprived the gospel invitation or offer of its seriousness and sincerity.¹¹

In their response to the Arminians, the Canons of Dort address the subject of the well-meant offer in two places. In the Second Main Point of Doctrine, which deals with Christ's death and human redemption, the Canons affirm that the death of Christ "is of infinite value and worth,

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more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the world" (Art. 3). Though Christ's death was designed to provide redemption for the elect alone, the gospel must be preached to all lost sinners. According to the Canons, "it is the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel" (Art. 5).

However, it is in the Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine that the Canons most expressly speak of the gospel offer. In Article 8, we read that "all who are called through the gospel are called seriously. *For seriously and most genuinely God makes known in His Word what is pleasing to Him (gratum est):* that those who are called should come to Him. Seriously He also promises rest for their souls and eternal life to all who come to Him and believe" (emphasis mine). The language of this Article, which is closely but not exactly patterned after the language of the Arminians' "opinion" on the gospel-call, clearly expresses the idea that God declares through the gospel what He finds desirable and pleasing, namely, that lost sinners come to Him in faith. Without in any way compromising their affirmation of the electing purpose of God, the Canons simultaneously affirm the genuineness and sincerity of the gospel-call.

Though the Westminster Standards are not as explicit or direct in their affirmation of the well-meant offer of the gospel, they do use language that implies this teaching. Chapter Ten of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which summarizes the Scriptural teaching of "effectual calling," speaks of those who are effectually called being "enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it" (WCF X.II). Now it might be argued that this language only describes what is offered to the elect, who alone are effectually called through the gospel. In this view, grace is only offered through the gospel to the elect. But it is more plausible that this language describes the nature of the gospel call itself, which becomes



effectual unto salvation when the Holy Spirit grants faith and repentance to the elect. The faith granted to the elect is, in other words, a believing response to a gracious summons and offer. The matter is more clear, however, in the language of the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The Westminster Larger Catechism, for example, speaks of the non-elect as those “who, for their wilful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them, being justly left in their unbelief, do never truly come to Jesus Christ” (Q & A 68). Likewise, the Westminster Shorter Catechism affirms that Jesus Christ is “freely offered to us in the gospel” (Q & A 31).

The likeliest reading of these confessional statements is one that affirms the teaching of a well-meant gospel offer. The gospel-call, which is extended indiscriminately to all lost sinners, freely offers Christ and invites its recipients to believe in Him for salvation. The gospel summons sincerely reveals what God finds pleasing and desirable. Failure to respond in faith and repentance, accordingly, aggravates the guilt of those who refuse what God invites them to receive. Following Calvin’s lead, the Reformed confessions insist upon a free and indiscriminate preaching of the gospel to all lost sinners. Furthermore, through this preaching God Himself graciously offers and invites sinners to respond in faith and repentance.

Endnotes

¹ *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, (ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963-74), vol. 8, pp. 117-18. Hereafter cited as CNTC. I am indebted to my colleague, Rev. J. Mark Beach, for call-

ing these passages to my attention.

² CNTC, vol. 8, p. 27.

³ CNTC, vol. 8, p. 27.

⁴ CNTC, vol. 3, p. 68.

⁵ CNTC, vol. 3, p. 68.

⁶ *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1843-55), vol. 12, p. 266. Hereafter cited as COTC.

⁷ COTC, vol. 12, p. 266.

⁸ COTC, vol. 12, p. 247.

⁹ COTC, vol. 12, p. 267.

¹⁰ CNTC, vol. 12, p. 364.

¹¹ The Arminian opinion declared the following: “Whomever God calls to salvation, he calls seriously, that is, with a sincere and completely unhypocritical intention and will to save; nor do we assent to the opinion of those who hold that God calls certain ones externally

whom He does not will to call internally, that is, as truly converted, even before the grace of calling has been rejected” (as cited in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Synod of Dort (1618-’19)*, ed. P. Y. De Jong [Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1968], Appendix H, pp. 226-27).

Dr. Cornelis P. Venema serves as president of Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana where he also teaches doctrinal studies.

Edward Marcusse

God’s People, My Parish

Jesus in My Heart

I had never met the man before. All I had was his name: Dennis. Having moved into my new church just a short time before, my elders had told me about this member of the congregation who was confined to a care facility some distance away.

He was not that old, or so I was told. He was only in or around his mid-forties, but he was suffering from A.L.S. Experts refer to this as Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis; most people simply call it “Lou Gehrig’s disease.” The elders recommended that I visit him sometime. So, I now found myself walking

down the hallway toward his room, not knowing who or what to expect.

This care facility had that institutional look to it, as well as the barely sanitized smell that so many of these sorts of “homes” have. There were drab green walls, a highly polished floor, and an odor in which you could detect both human waste and chlorine bleach doing battle. This was clearly not the kind of place where the rich and famous came to live out their final years on earth; rather, this was where those came who could afford no better.

I stood there for a moment watching him, debating whether or not I should leave and never come back.

I approached Dennis' door and entered his room. It was dreary and bare, with no pictures on the wall, no knick-knacks on the dresser, and not even a chair to sit in. There was nothing at all to personalize this room—nothing at all that would indicate that it was someone's "home." The only furniture was a simple three-drawer, wooden dresser and a cold chrome institutionalized bed. On that hard bed lay but a shell of a man.

Dennis' hair was matted and uncombed; his beard was tousled and unkempt. His shirt had the remnants of at least several days' worth of meals spattered across its front...but these were all secondary. What first and foremost grabbed my attention was Dennis' arms and legs. The disease had attacked these parts of his body first, causing the muscles to degenerate and constrict. This, in turn, caused his extremities to be pulled in tightly to his body, like a spider caught in the first hard frost of the autumn—the kind you have to blow on to see if they are alive.

I did not have to blow on this man. I could easily see that he was still alive because of his eyes. The disease had struck this part of him next. They were the eyes of a blind man—ever staring but never seeing. They moved aimlessly, spasmodically, back and forth, up and down. He had not heard me enter, and so I stood there for a moment watching him, debating whether or not I should leave and never come back. He would never know. What difference would it make?

A fresh stream of spittle ran down from the corner of his mouth and onto his beard, following the dried

up course of others before it. I decided to at least say his name; if he did not respond, I could always go back and tell the elders I had tried.

"Dennis," I whispered.

Immediately, he turned his head and stared at me with those big sightless eyes. Obviously, the disease had not affected his hearing.

"Yeshh," he slurred. ALS was now attacking this part of his body.

I introduced myself as the new minister of his church, and I watched

***He also told me of
his disease, which
was slowly
overtaking him more
and more each day,
and which he knew
would someday take
his life.***

as his right arm, with its hand pulled tightly inward, tried to move out to me in order to greet me. I put my hand on his, and instantly, his face broke into a mile-wide smile. The disease had obviously not yet found these muscles, as this smile became the trademark of my meetings with Dennis. He was a joy to visit, and I found myself going back there regularly.

Over the course of my time with him, he told me about his life. In his halting speech, he told me of his children who were now grown but lived too far away to visit. He told me of a wife whom he had loved

much, but who had left one day and never returned. He told me of a job that he had performed ably and well, but the money from it had run out years before. He also told me of this disease, which was slowly overtaking him more and more each day, and which he knew would someday take his life. Dennis told me a lot of things, many of them meaningless, and now I've forgotten them. One day, however, he told me something that I will never forget.

During one of my visits, I greeted him as usual. As soon as he heard my voice, he responded in his familiar way: with his trademark Texas-wide smile. So I asked him, "Dennis, why do you smile so much? How can you be so cheerful when you have gone through all of the things that you have?"

Without missing a beat or even thinking it over, Dennis responded in his slurred and crippled speech, "Because ... I ... have ... Jesus ... in ... my ... heart."

And I cried.

Here was a man where every pitch life threw at him was a curve ball. Here was a man of whom society would say had absolutely no quality of life, a prime candidate for euthanasia. Here was a man who had no apparent reason for living...and yet, God had a reason for keeping him alive. God had great use yet for him, even with his disease. God gave quality to his life, and that was what was most important.

God used Dennis to minister to me, the minister. He used Dennis to challenge me and my view of life. He used Dennis to cause me to





Book Reviews

grow closer to the Lord out of appreciation for all that the Lord has given to me. God, through the Apostle Paul in I Thessalonians 5:16-18, commands us, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Through Dennis, God taught me the full meaning of these verses: that if I have "Jesus in my heart," then I really have everything I need. The next time I am thrown that curve ball in life and I am tempted to not be joyful, to not pray, to not give thanks then I will remember Dennis and smile, because I, too, have "Jesus in my heart."

Rev. Edward Marcusse is the pastor of the Bethel United Reformed Church in Calgary, Alberta.

Engelsma, David S. *Reformed Education: the Christian School as Demand of the Covenant*. Revised Edition. Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000. V. 101 pp \$8.00, paperback.

The title of this book may turn off some readers, thinking it is for teachers, or that it will take such an outdated view of education that it would not be relevant. First, it is for everyone: teachers (and they must read it), parents who seek to be faithful to their covenant responsibilities or who wonder what the purpose of Christian Education is, students old enough to think and discuss this time - honored part of covenant-life. Further, it is not old-fashioned in approach, it is a return to the teaching of Scripture. This is sorely, needed in an age where secularism has invaded even the Christian Schools. Also, anyone who knows Professor Engelsma's writings, knows they are always relevant.

Originally given as lectures for the benefit of teachers in the Protestant Reformed Christian Schools, and published in 1977, they have been somewhat revised but not expanded. The concluding bibliography gives many suggestions for further reading.

Professor Engelsma begins by explaining the covenantal basis of Christian Education. The school, he states, arises from the demand of God's Covenant. Perhaps home-schoolers will not like what he says about that practice, however, his concern about curriculum is a valid one. Instead of closing the book at that point they should read on. They will certainly learn something!

His chapter on the place of the Bible and Confessions in the school is important. He stays far from the Fundamentalism which is rampant in some schools called Christian.

Boldly he addresses Reformed Education in relation to culture as he writes about the dangerous temptation of world-flight and the nearly unknown concept of the antithesis in today's church world.

The section on the place of the teacher must be read again by teacher and parent alike.

The final chapter on the goal of Reformed Education is a gem in many ways.

Not much has been published on this particular approach to Reformed Education. May this little volume fill the gap!

* * * *

This is not old-fashioned in approach, it is a return to the teaching of Scripture.

Alcock, Deborah. *The Spanish Brothers: a tale of the sixteenth century.* And **W. Oak Rhind.** *Hubert Ellerdale: A Tale of the Days of Wycliffe.* Neerlandia, AB / Pella, IA I Romsey, Rants, UK: Inheritance Publications, both 2001. 326pp. \$12.90 US. \$14.95 CN 221 pp, \$10.90 US, \$12.90 CN, respectively, paperback.

Both of these books for young people and adults are in *The Reformation Trail Series*. The value of these works is simply that they lay before the reader aspects of the Reformation that we either do not

*The information
comes so pleasantly
since it is in novel
form.*

know or knew very little about. Besides, the information comes so pleasantly since it is in novel form.

Rhind's book about the days of Wycliffe introduces us to fourteenth century England and the early reforming movements, especially that of Wycliffe. With so much emphasis on Luther and his providential place in the Reformation - and rightly so - we forget the early struggles toward reformation. The story is engaging and the disguised history is enlightening.

Alcock's book is equally valuable in the light of what has already been written. Yet, it has another value: it informs us about the site and the struggles of God's people in Spain following the Reformation. Most of us do not know about a Reforma-

tion Church in Spain. We can imagine that in a Roman Catholic country the price believers would pay would be high, but this book, though the story is fiction, gives "an accurate historical account of the rise, progress, and downfall of the Protestant Church in Spain." The faithful believers who would hold to the truth of life in Christ by grace would see death as heretics at the hand of the Church, but Truth could not be killed!

The story is about two brothers, one brought up as a soldier, the other as a priest. Their quest was to find what happened to their father. It is a story which captures your interest and imagination. Even though the story itself is old - this is a republication - you will learn a lot by reading it, and you will be reminded of God's strange and wonderful ways. Highly recommended!

* * * *

Kuyper, Abraham. *Particular Grace: a Defense of God's Sovereignty in Salvation.* Translated from the Dutch by Marvin Kamps. Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2001. xx, 356 pp. \$29.95 hardcover.

Most Reformed people know the fame of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), the great Dutch church leader, preacher, statesman, and prolific writer. Many of his works remain locked in the Dutch language. This volume, until recently, was numbered with those. In 1879, Kuyper began writing a series of articles for the religious weekly *De Heraut* (*The Herald*) under the heading "Dat De Genade Particulier Is." These articles, which continued until June 1880,

were later published as a book. It took one hundred twenty years to get them in English. Marvin Kamps has performed a great service for English - speaking Calvinists. His preface gives a wonderful introduction to the volume. Also, he has included a short appendix which explains Kuyper's distinction between grace and "gratie."

The text is divided into four parts. The first section is entitled "No Christ for All." It becomes very apparent that in "the good old days" the problem of universal or general grace and a "Christ - for - all"

*Marvin Kamps has
performed a great
service for English -
speaking Calvinists.*

mentality was rampant in the Dutch churches. Kuyper comes down firmly for particular grace. He spends much time on the passages that are often used in opposition to particular grace; I John 2:2, I Timothy 2:4, and II Peter 3:9. Then he makes clear that man is totally depraved and unable to do anything toward his salvation. As he concludes this section he writes that we believe and teach on the basis of Scripture, "a particular grace by which Jesus directs life, blesses the Word, opens the ear and bends the will, but and everything is dependent upon this - as instrument, so that he remains the One who does it, and the one to Whom, therefore, is all the glory!" (p. 98).

The second section, "Tested by the Result", begins by pointing out



“One cannot earnestly proceed with general grace without destroying the way of Salvation” (p. 103). In this section Kuypers takes the reader through the history of redemption in order to lay out the way of salvation. Then the author shows us the Messiah as the Son of Man and the Eternal Word and he makes it very clear: “particular grace is taught by Jesus in the clearest terms” (p. 165).

The third section is entitled “The Unfathomable Mercies” and focuses on God’s great love for His own and how Jesus endured God’s wrath “against the sin of the whole human race” (p. 208). In one chapter Kuypers addresses the “flow” and the “to whom” of preaching.

The fourth section considers the texts and the concepts in Scripture which all too often are used to attempt to disprove particular grace.

All in all, these forty short chapters - none is longer than ten pages, most are shorter - should help clear our minds again so that we return to a Biblical view of grace. This is as sorely needed today as it was in Kuypers’s day. Will the reader agree with every idea Kuypers writes? Probably not. Only God’s Word is to be agreed with *in toto*. However, Kuypers is attempting here to open up for his readers the wonderful truth of Scripture.

A word must be said about the appearance of the volume. It is clearly printed on nice stock. The binding is handsome.

Take it up and read it, and your heart will be blessed.

Van Rijswijk, Cor. *Abraham’s Sacrifice (The Word Of the King Series)*. Neerlandia, AS / Pella, IA / Romsey, Hants, UK; Inheritance Publications, 2001. 43pp. \$7.90 U.S., \$8.93 CN. hardcover.

This little book telling the famous Biblical story of Abraham taking Isaac up the mountain is beautifully illustrated in black and white by Rino Visser. It is well written and even a child who has learned to read can read it to himself. However, parental involvement would make the story even more memo-

There is so little material on the Old Testament from the Reformed perspective in English. These volumes will certainly have a place.

orable. Like many of the children’s books from Inheritance, this one is highly recommended.

Hoeksema, Homer C. *Unfolding Covenant History; An Exposition of the Old Testament. Volume 1 - From Creation to the Flood. Volume 2 - From the Flood to Isaac.* Series editor; Mark H. Hoeksema. Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association. 2000,2001. xxxviii, 327 pp.; xvi. 3ll pp. \$27.95 each, hardcover.

These volumes have been available for many years in a different for-

mat: mimeographed and spiral-bound. Most students and readers were unaware of their existence. Some have had them in their libraries, however, and they can testify to the value of these books. Now many more, through this new and attractive publication, can benefit from their insights.

Homer C. Hoeksema, an ordained minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches, began preparing these books in 1959 when he became a professor in his church’s seminary. He held the post of professor until his death in 1989. He was able to work through the period of the Old Testament judges in these syllabi for his classes. Professor David Engelsma, Hoeksema’s successor, will complete the series, the Lord willing. The plan is to cover all of the Old Testament historical material. The editor expresses the purpose of these volumes in these Words: “The increase of the faith of the people of God ... becomes the purpose of this work. When, through a fuller and clearer understanding of the scriptures, faith is enriched, truly the ultimate end of the glory of Our covenant God is achieved.” (p xvi, V. 1). Professor Hoeksema’s son, Mark, has done a very commendable job of editing his father’s work.

Volume One contains a new introduction - one for the whole series - by the editor. He deals with the nature and reality of history, the view of the Covenant underlying the approach of these volumes, and the divisions of Old Testament history.

The meat of the first volume covers some 1650 years of biblical history. A lion’s share of the pages covers the subject of creation and the Fall.

It understandably begins with God (where else can we begin?) and then moves on to the work of His hands. Much space is given to the activities of the first week in history. Biblical exposition and theological discussion are wedded together in an admirable way. The last third of the book takes the reader from the years of Cain and Abel through the catastrophic flood in the days of Noah which demonstrated God's judgment on sin, and His grace and covenant friendship to Noah. Several helpful diagrams appear which aid in understanding the chronology of these events.

Volume Two takes the reader from the days following the receding of the waters to the blessing of Jacob by Isaac. The Biblical teaching of the sword-power of the state receives lengthy treatment. The covenant with Noah, Nimrod, Babel, Shem's generations, the place of Abraham, the place of Isaac, the conflict of Jacob and Esau, and Isaac's blessing of Esau are all included. In fact, this volume covers the material in Genesis from chapter 8:20 through chapter 28.

Congratulations go to RFPA for making this series available to a broader readership. There is so little material on the Old Testament from the Reformed perspective in English. These volumes will certainly have a place. Has the author said everything on these texts? No. Will everyone agree? Probably not. However, his writings will provoke discussion and further study. How soon before the next volume will be ready? Readers eagerly await that day.

* * * *

Hoeksema. Herman. *Behold, He Cometh! An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. Second Edition with addition of Scripture and subject indexes. Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000. xvii, 772 pp., \$32.00. hardcover.

When this book first appeared in 1969 Dr. William Hendriksen, renowned amillennial expositor of the Book of Revelation and minister in the Christian Reformed Church wrote in a review that appeared in

***A student of the Book
of Revelation can
hardly do better than
this!***

The Banner: "The treatment of the text is definitely Reformed in character in that it always ascribes all the glory to God and traces his way in history... I warmly recommend the book."

With its republication, the text has not changed. It is the same book we have been using through the last thirty-three years. What makes it different - and more usable - is the addition of forty-four pages of indices: Scripture and subjects.

First, for those not acquainted with this fine volume, here is a bit of background. Rev. Hoeksema preached through the Book of Revelation twice in his ministry, once soon after World War I and the second time during World War II, the latter time to very large crowds of hearers. The series of messages in

this volume - fifty-three in number - thoroughly expounds the comforting truth in this last book of the Bible. At one time, these appeared as articles in The Standard Bearer. The approach to the Bible text is clearly amillennial. A student of the Book of Revelation can hardly do better than this!

The new feature of the book - new in this edition, is the index. This is a very fine and valuable addition, one that will be of great help to anyone who studies this last book of Scripture. Actually, there are two indices, one of Scripture texts referred to in the exposition, and one listing the many subjects discussed. Such a large and complete volume is not useful without this kind of index. Numerology is central in the symbolism found in Revelation. The index shows clearly where there are discussions of the numbers used by inspiration. Other very important imagery used, and the continual references to the Old Testament, are listed in the indices.

If you have an interest in studying this comforting and timely book (and every believer should), by all means get a copy of it. It's more than worth the trip to the bookstore! The words of Hendriksen still ring from this reviewer: "I warmly recommend the book."

Rev. Jerome Julien is the Stated Clerk of the United Reformed Churches in North America.



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* * * * *

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* * * * *

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(continued from page 23)

row have no gospel to declare."

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