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Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

April 1993



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"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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Preaching the Resurrection

Thomas C. Vanden Heuvel

The happiest day on the entire church calendar is the day of the resurrection of Christ Jesus. The first Easter was the most glorious dawn in human history. The fact of the resurrection of Christ forms the central message and foundation of the Christian church.

In Acts 2:23,24 we have a statement of the fact of the resurrection, the anchor of our faith: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."

Note three things:

- 1. The historical fact: "Whom God raised up"
- 2. The divine approval: "Freeing him from the agony of death"
- The perfect victory: "Because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him"

THE HISTORICAL FACT

The Christian religion is built on a historical event. J. Gresham Machen said: "Christianity is not something that was invented, it was something that happened." The resurrection of Christ is recorded in all four gospels. No one saw it happen. The writers of the gospels tell the effect of it. They don't try to prove it. They just state what they saw and heard and what happened to them.

Listen to the account of St. John in John 20:1-9. Mary Magdalene came before dawn and saw the stone rolled away. She jumped to the natural conclusion that the body was stolen. She ran to tell Peter and

John. Peter and John both ran to the tomb. John describes the looking of Peter, John and Mary with three different Greek words: Mary saw (blepō) - a superficial looking on the outside, and she concluded Christ's body was stolen. Peter saw (theoreō) - a close examination. He looked at all the details very carefully, analyzing everything he saw but withholding any judgment. John saw (eidon) - and believed. He understood and immediately came to the conviction that Jesus was alive.

What did they see? First, they saw the stone rolled away. Why was it rolled away? Surely, not to let Jesus out. If He could enter rooms without using doors, He didn't need the stone rolled away to leave the grave. Yet the stone was rolled away. It was rolled away to let the witnesses in. It was part of the demonstration of the fact that Jesus was alive. Second, they saw the empty tomb and the grave clothes lying undisturbed, just as an empty cocoon with the linen cloths lying flat. Come and see the place where the Lord lay. He is not here. He is risen!

THE DIVINE APPROVAL

On the first day of the week, He arose. God cut the cords of death and loosed Him from the snares of death. God did it! What does this mean?

First, it means God's approval of Christ's work of atonement. Jesus had said: "Father into Your hand I commend my spirit." Jesus laid His sacrifice before the Father's throne. The Father accepted it and raised Him from the dead. Second, it means He was raised for our justification. His righteousness is ours by

faith. Third, it means regeneration or new life. The good news of the gospel is that the power of God displayed on that first Easter will also be displayed in us, in our spiritual resurrection. Fourth, it means our sanctification. When God the Holy Spirit raises us up from the death of sin, He sets us on a new track, He gives us a new view of life, a new motive for living, a new direction and a new purpose. Colossians 3:1: "Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above"

THE PERFECT VICTORY

Christ conquered death. In Christ's resurrection, death was put out of commission (Hebrews 2:14,15). Paul triumphantly sings in I Corinthians 15:54-56: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

These great truths make it possible to preach.

The resurrection of Christ gives authority to preaching.

The resurrection of Christ gives power to preaching.

The resurrection of Christ gives confidence to preaching.

The resurrection of Christ gives urgency to preaching.

WOE IS ME IF I PREACH NOT THE GOSPEL!



Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Christian Unity

R.B. Lanning

"...the present situation

is far from stable."

Christian unity is a subject to which Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Iones gave much thought and concern in the latter years of his public ministry. Two lasting monuments to his convictions in this regard are found in the volume of his addresses issued by The Banner of Truth Trust in 1989 under the title, Knowing the Times. The first dates from 1962 and stands in the book as chapter nine, "The Basis of Christian Unity." The second appears as chapter thirteen, "Evangelical Unity: An appeal," an address which the Doctor gave to a gathering of British evangelicals in 1966.

There is much here to speak to the condition of conservatives in the Christian Reformed Church today and also to that of their like-minded brethren who recently have withdrawn from our denomination. We are faced with the immediate problem of how those still within and those now without should continue to relate to one another. Moreover, the present situation is far from stable. Doubtless there will be further developments. Dr. Lloyd-Iones offers much help to those who love the Reformed faith and who long for reformation of our churches according to the Word of God.

UNITY OF BELIEF

In his first address, the Doctor tackles the problem of promoting unity of organization without first establishing unity of belief. He addresses a passage to which modern ecumenists frequently make an appeal, John 17:21, the prayer of the Lord Jesus: "that they all may be one." Dr. Lloyd-Jones proceeds to demonstrate that the ecumenical movement is guilty of having taken the text out of its context. The unity which the Lord Jesus prays for is not a unity of organization or ecclesiastical structure. Rather, "it is the unity of those who, in contradistinction to all others, have believed the truth concerning Him (Christ) and His work." This unity, says the Doctor, is not something which needs to be produced; this unity is already in existence. "It is a prayer to God to keep the unity that He, through His preaching, has already brought into existence among these people."

Secondly, Lloyd-Jones shows that this unity is a "unity of essence," a unity rooted in the fact of the believers' regeneration. It is what we are in Christ as "new creatures" (II Cor. 5:17) and not what we do by

way of organizing ourselves into a structure. "It is something which is

inevitable because it is the result of being born into a family. Christians are brothers and not merely an association of friends."

Turning to material in Ephesians 4, Dr. Lloyd-Jones takes up the dubious proposal that fellowship must come first, even in the presence of clear doctrinal disagreements. He cites the case of "a wellknown evangelical preacher" (was it Billy Graham?) who proposed to have fellowship with theological liberals in order that through such fellowship all might arrive ultimately at doctrinal agreement. The idea is that "through working together, evangelizing together and having fellowship together we shall ultimately arrive at the unity of the faith."

Dr. Lloyd-Jones shows that the structure of the whole book of Ephesians argues for a unity that is rooted in knowledge and belief of the great doctrines of the Christian faith. Christians find their unity in the fact of their being the common subjects of the saving work of the triune God: in being eternally loved and elected to life by God the Father; in being ransomed unto God and redeemed by the shedding of the blood of the incarnate Son of God; and in being quickened and sealed with the Holy Spirit as the earnest of our inheritance. It is as we come to know and acknowledge these truths that we can then stand together and walk together in the light of them.

So the Doctor insists that doctrinal understanding and agreement are essential to our unity and must undergird and inform all our relationships with other Christians. It is at this point that he offers us a most important reminder. unity is not a matter of belonging to the same denomination; our unity consists of a common belief in the truth of God's Word and a common experience of the saving work of Christ applied to our hearts by the Holy Ghost. To restrict our circle of fellowship to fellow denominationalists is a species of idolatry and a sin against the holy catholic church. In a similar

> way, to break fellowship with like-minded brethren who remain behind

when we secede from a denomination is true schism; we separate those whom God has joined together.

We must be especially concerned to maintain such unity of the Spirit in times of turbulence and change. There is not a clear and predetermined answer to every question, nor one way to address every problem. In the Bible we find the principles, and we must allow for different ways of applying them to the situation we all face. How tragic it would be if the outcome of the present situation were not reformation according to God's Word but only a multiplication of disagreements, divisions, and estrangements among Reformed Christians.

UNITY OF THE BODY

We now turn to the second of these two addresses of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. The appeal which Dr.

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Lloyd-Jones made to his fellow evangelicals shows plainly that while maintaining his previous position on the true nature of Christian unity, he was nonetheless far from satisfied with the way that unity has been expressed and practiced by evangelicals historically. By 1966 the push for ecumenical (organizational) unity among the churches (denominations) had greatly accelerated. Important questions were being asked about the church and what the church ought to be in the light of the New Testament. Dr. Lloyd-Jones points out how important these questions are and deplores the fact that only the evangelicals seem to be uninterested in them. This he attributes to their history as a matter of meetings, movements and societies which have functioned independently of the various ecclesiastical bodies and structures of the day. Evangelicals have been content to be merely parties or wings of larger and theologically quite diverse denominations. They have been caught in a trap of reaction and have had to settle largely for a role of negativity and protest. Conservatives in the Christian Reformed Church will surely recognize themselves in this description.

Evangelicals, the Doctor insists, must now begin to discuss the doctrine of the church. They must ask important questions. Are they content merely to go on being a wing of a church? Or will they go back to the New Testament and discover there what the church is really meant to be? The Doctor is prepared to answer this latter question. He calls to mind what was said in the previous address, namely, that we must always begin with unity of belief. He reminds them of the Reformed definition of the true church, "where the true doctrine is preached, where the sacraments are properly and regularly administered, and where discipline is exercised." He adds, "Surely, as evangelicals, we do not want to go back on that."

He then goes on to protest against the anomaly of the church which is all the right things on paper, in its confessional documents, but not in practice. "The church is not a paper declaration, important as that is." Here the Doctor is describing the situation that has become quite familiar on both sides of the Atlantic: that of a denomination with a bright beginning, and a glorious history, but which at present is sadly changed and degraded theologically, spiritually and practically. A church on paper, but not a church in deed and in truth. The Doctor declares that "we must come back and realize our basic view of the

"...we separate those whom God has joined together."

Christian church, and that what we need, above everything else at the present time, is a number of such churches, all in fellowship together, working together for the same ends and objects."

By way of reinforcement, the Doctor goes on to show that genuine schism, the sin of schism, is only possible where there is unity of belief in the first place. "To leave a church which has become apostate is not schism." Rather, "schism is a division among members of the true visible church about matters which are not sufficiently important to justify division." And he says therefore it is the sin of schism for evangelicals to remain in their mixed denominations, separated from one another by their various denominational loyalties. He appeals to them to separate from their historic bodies and come together in a united evangelical witness as one fellowship of churches throughout the land.

It should be mentioned here that the reaction to Lloyd-Jones' appeal was immediate and dramatic. Rev. John R.W. Stott, chairman of the meeting, came to the desk and offered a direct reply seeking to refute and discredit what the Doctor had said. Evangelical unity was shattered thereafter, because Anglican evangelicals for all their protest and dissent, were still very largely attached to their denomination, and not even an appeal to the truth and the need for a united Gospel witness could move them from that position.

It should also be said that there were other evangelicals who were prepared to heed the Doctor's call. Today in England and Wales there is a growing number of evangelical congregations standing together as a partial realization of the vision of a new, united and unambiguously evangelical Christian witness. It's a beginning, if only a small one.

There is an important message for Christian Reformed and ex-Christian Reformed people here. It is all too easy to level a charge of schism at those who have seceded. An analysis of the situation from a Biblical point of view shows that the charge is often laid against the wrong people. It may or may not be schismatic to leave a particular denomination; but it is definitely schism to allow denominational lines to become insuperable barriers that separate brethren of a common faith. We need to exercise much patience and mutual forbearance under the present distressing conditions. We must not exaggerate our differences. We must allow secondary and less than secondary matters to stand as points of permanent division. Most of all, we must keep our eyes on the goal in the quest for a true visible church, one that is holy, catholic, and apostolic. The reformation of the churches according to the Word of God has only begun. As Lloyd-Jones put it, "Let us rise to the occa-

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Breaking Unity

Derrick Vander Meulen

The charge of breaking unity is frequently being leveled against those who leave the Christian Reformed denomination. They are called "schismatics" because they can no longer, in good conscience, remain within the CRC.

This is a very serious charge breaking unity. In His high-priestly prayer, Christ prayed that His followers would be united: "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You; Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are" (John 17:11 NKJV). Paul also begged the church in Ephesus to be united: "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1,3).

Whenever we recite the Nicene Creed, we say the words: "And I believe ONE holy catholic and apostolic Church." We therefore confess to believe that in one sense at least, all believers are united. We are all called the children of God; we are all "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ"; we are Christ's flock; we are His bride. And one day we will raise our voices together with the angels and sing: "Worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing!" But while we remain in the world, we are unable to come to a united consensus on the whole counsel of God. There are differences, for instance, in our understanding of the sacraments. There are differences regarding our understanding of the extent of God's grace as it relates to our salvation. And, as John Murray states:

Though Reformed evangelicals and non-Reformed evangelicals

may embrace one another in love, in the bond of fellowship with Christ, and cooperate in many activities that promote the kingdom of God and the interest of Christ's church, yet it is not feasible, and not feasible in terms of commitment to Christ and to the whole counsel of God, to unite in creedal confession as the bond and symbol of ecclesiastical communion.¹

However, those who are in agreement as to their interpretation of God's Word ought to be united in their creedal confession. This is why

the Christian Reformed denomination calls her confessions "The Three Forms of Unity" (The Belgic Confession, the Heidel-

berg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort). Our creedal confessions are the "bond and symbol" of our ecclesiastical communion. They are what bind us together. In other words, we are united on the basis of what we confess to believe.

Some who have left the Christian Reformed denomination have had their status declared "as that of one deposed from office." Obviously our denomination takes breaking unity quite seriously, and rightly so. However, it is my contention that these strong measures have been misdirected. The charge has not been officially leveled against any who have seceded that they are teaching or writing something contrary to our Three Forms of Unity. In fact, I'm fairly certain that it is their desire to hold fast to these confessions as they have historically been understood. Might it be that they have left the denomination due to a steady erosion of our confessions within our denomination and the lack of discipline against those responsible?

No doubt many who are Christian Reformed are familiar with the adult study book entitled, A Place to Stand by Cornelius Plantinga Jr., Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary. The book is subtitled: "A Study of Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions." This is a rather in-depth study of the historical creeds of the church and of our "Three Forms of Unity." In chapter 23, Plantinga explains Articles 30-32 of the Belgic Confession which deal with church order, including the offices of the church. The last sentence of Article 30 reads: "By these means 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." Plantinga's comments on this are as follows:

He (De Bres) adds that faithful "men" must be chosen. Actually, he does not add that. The

"Our standard for unity must be ...the adherance to and the faithful promotion and defense of our confessions."

English translator does. De Bres' word is *personages* which means 'persons.' And persons, as at least half of us know, come in two kinds.²

Plantinga's point is clear: allowing women in the offices of the church is permissible according to the "correct" reading of the confession, since women too, are persons. However, he deliberately failed to comment on De Bres' final remark: that these "persons" be chosen "according to the rule prescribed by St. Paul in his Epistle to Timothy." No matter how hard one may try, there is no getting around the fact that when Paul was writing to Timothy about the offices of the church (I Timothy 3), he specified men!³

Here, then, is a clear example of confessional erosion in the Christian Reformed denomination, and this is breaking unity! This is schismatic! And the Board of Publica-

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tions is no less responsible for allowing such disregard of our confession to be printed and sent to the churches! That, too, is breaking unity!

Those churches in the denomination that have gone ahead and ordained women to the office of elder have clearly disobeyed the decision of Synod 1992. But worse than that, they have acted in a manner contrary to Article 30 of the Belgic Confession, bringing greater turmoil and disruption in our already polarized denomination. This is breaking unity! This is schismatic!

We have been created to give glory to God. Although we must strive to do this at every point in our lives, it comes into even greater expression when we meet together with others in corporate worship. Because this is so vitally important, we have the responsibility to worship our God in a way that is pleasing to Him. The Reformers realized this, especially after coming out of the Roman Catholic tradition in which there were many human inventions. They desired to regulate worship according to God's Word alone. Thus, Calvin and others adopted the principle that worship be done in no other way than what God has commanded in His Word. This is called the Regulative Principle of Worship.

The writers of our confessions adhered to this principle and included it in the confessions. Article 6 of the Belgic Confession states that "the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them (the Holy Scriptures)." And Article 32 adds: "And therefore we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever." An even clearer statement is found in Question and Answer 96 of the Heidelberg Catechism: Q - "What does God require in the second commandment?" A -"That we in no wise make any image of God, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word."

The reason I bring this up is because it is being denied by many influential voices in the Christian Reformed denomination.4 They argue that the Regulative Principle was held by the Presbyterians in Britain, but was not a part of the

continental Reformed tradition. Although that claim is debatable, the issue here is whether or not our commonly held confessions hold to this principle. And clearly they do! If there is any question as to whether the writers of the catechism intended the Regulative Principle to be followed in worship, one has only to read Zacharias Ursinus' commentary on the catechism. On this matter Ursinus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, writes: "To worship God truly is to worship Him in the manner which He Himself has prescribed in His Word."5

The point is that when there are confessional matters that are not being promoted but, in fact, eroded, we should not be surprised to see the fallout that we are witnessing of late. Our standard for unity must be, first and foremost, the adherence to and the faithful promotion and defense of our confessions. However, we have slipped into the Roman Catholic error that unity is organizational loyalty. The churches that pay quotas and obey synod are the ones that show loyalty to the denomination, thereby promoting unity. This is unbalanced and extremely dangerous for Christ's church.

When God's Word speaks of unity, the basis rests on what we believe, on teaching and doctrine. In Scripture, those who teach contrary to the doctrine are the ones breaking unity. Romans 16:17 clearly supports this: "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them." Unity of organization is at best secondary to this.

I believe that if we had first noted and avoided those who were teaching and promoting ideas contrary to what our confessions teach, the individuals and churches that have left would still be with us. Unity would have been maintained. And isn't this to be desired? Isn't unity on this basis far more true and strong than unity of organization? Our denomination is part of Christ's church, and we ought to make every effort to strive for unity in accordance with His Word as taught in our commonly held confessions. May God strengthen our beloved denomination and give us the courage to be confessionally united and say "this is truth," particularly at this time in history when the church, country and culture need it so desperately!

FOOTNOTES

- 1. John Murray, Collected Writings of John Murray; Volume 1: The Claims of Truth, Carlisle, PA (Banner of Truth), 1976, pp. 286, 287.
- 2. Cornelius Plantinga Jr., A Place to Stand, Grand Rapids (CRC Publications), 1981, p. 110.
- 3. The argument that Paul's instructions regarding the church offices are culturally bound is not valid here. The confession calls it a "RULE" which promotes "good order and decency" in the church. Those who believe that Paul's instruction is not valid for today should send a "confessional-revision" gravamen through proper channels. These channels were set up for a purpose, and for the sake of maintaining unity, should be followed.
- 4. In the "Q&A" page of the June 15, 1992 edition of The Banner, Rev. William D. Buursma was asked about the regulative principle in the CRC. He answered: "The regulative principle has never been an explicit guideline for Christian Reformed worship... The Christian Reformed Church has never bound itself to the idea that the only things appropriate in worship are those directly revealed in Scripture."
- Dr. Zacharias Ursinus, The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism, Phillipsburg, NJ (Presbyterian and Reformed), p.517. Opponents of the regulative principle will point to the 1968 Liturgical Committee Report (Acts of Synod, 1968, pp. 134-198) in which it was stated: "The Bible does not prescribe an order of worship; hence we do not contend that the church must do only those things expressly commanded for worship." This report was recommended to the churches by synod, but was not adopted. Furthermore, we are bound to the confessions, not to synodical reports! The catechism, remember, states that we must not "worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his Word" (Q&A 96).

Rev. Vander Meulen is pastor of the Eastmanville CRC in Eastmanville, MI.



Reformed Ministry

W. Robert Godfrey

This is the second address delivered by Dr. Godfrey to a conference in Seoul, Korea.

Yesterday we reflected on the subject of the Reformed life, and today we have another great, broad subject, the Reformed ministry. We saw yesterday that Hebrews 10:24,25 contains a call to every Christian to be active in Christian service: "...let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good works... encouraging one another " Every Christian has a responsibility to be engaged in service. Our service may take many different forms. Individually we may be called to prayer or hospitality or encouragement or correction or witness or many other activities. This work is all service to God and His church. In a sense this is all ministry. The root meaning of ministry is service. For this reason our Reformed tradition has spoken of the general office of believer. Every believer is a servant of God and of his neighbor. Every believer shares in the office of service. No one can be lazy or retire. All must be active.

Another way in which we have expressed the common Christian responsibility is by speaking of the priesthood of all believers. The Reformation recaptured the great Biblical truth that in the New Covenant every Christian is a priest before God. I Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light...."

This priesthood of all believers has sometimes been interpreted to mean that we no longer need a priest to represent us before God because we can each be a priest for ourselves. But the original meaning was that we do not need a special caste of priests to intercede for us because we can now all intercede for each other. Galatians 6:2 expresses this clearly: "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." We must all love one another and care for one another as priests of God.

Even in times of tension and disagreement all Christians are to work to resolve problems among themselves. Jesus taught us, "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother" (Matthew 18:15). This duty is laid on every Christian.

The responsibility given to every Christian rests on the blessings given to every Christian. We all are renewed to life by the Holy Spirit. That new life brings with it new knowledge and new strength to live for God and help others. God has graciously poured out His Spirit on all His people. From Pentecost on,

the whole church is empowered for ministry by the Spirit.

The service or ministry of all Christians is not all

we need, however. God has made clear in His Word that a *specialized ministry* is necessary in the New Covenant community. As a family has structure, with the father as head, so the church has structure. Leadership in the church is given preeminently to the ministry. To focus our thoughts on this official ministry of the church let us read Ephesians 4:7-24.

GIFT OF THE MINISTRY

Ephesians makes clear that one of the great gifts that the ascended Lord gave to His church is official leadership. Christians, for all our strengths and blessings, are still growing and developing. We have not yet arrived at the stature of the fulness of Christ. As we seek to mature, as we seek stability in our Christian lives, we need help. God has graciously provided that help through the offices He has established in the church. In Ephesians Paul begins mentioning the special, temporary offices that God used to lay the foundation of the church (apostle, prophet and evangelist) and then moves on to the central continuing office: pastor and teacher. The New Testament as a whole leads us to conclude that Paul is talking about one office here with the dual responsibility of pastoring and teaching.

How are we to understand our need of this gift of the pastor-teacher? What is his role in the life of God's people? One of the most careful reflections on this gift is to be found in the work of John Calvin. Near the beginning of Book Four of Calvin's greatest work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he writes:

...it is by the faith in the gospel that Christ becomes ours and we are made partakers of the salvation and eternal blessedness brought by him. Since, however, in our ignorance and sloth (to which I add fickleness of disposition) we need outward helps to beget and increase faith within us, and advance to its

"...if you do not spend time at your studies you will not be a faithful preacher."

goal, God has also added these aids that he may provide for our weakness. And in order that the preaching of the gospel might flourish, he deposited this treasure in the church. He instituted "pastors and teachers" [Eph. 4:11] through whose lips he might teach his own; he furnished them with authority; finally, he omitted nothing that might make for holy agreement of faith and for right order. (Institutes, IV,i,1)

We must notice several points that Calvin compresses in this relatively brief statement. First he shows the

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connection between the faith of the Christian and the gift of the ministry. In fact, the title of the Fourth Book of the *Institutes* shows that connection. The Fourth Book is entitled, "The External Means or Aids by Which God Invites Us Into the Society of Christ and Holds Us Therein." Calvin argues that participation in the body of Christ is worked through external aids. The Spirit does not work to renew our souls

"...the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God."

apart from the external help of the church. The Spirit works an internal change in us through the external institution of the church. The Christian does not live alone or solely in immediate and direct contact with God. The Christian lives in the community of the church and God ministers through the established means of the church.

Second, Calvin indicates why God operates in this way. God has established the church in the way He has because of our weakness. Weakness is in fact a recurring theme in Calvin. At many points in his writing he explains the structure of the covenant community's life in terms of weakness. For example, when discussing why God established sacraments in His church, Calvin characteristically speaks of our weakness which needs visible support through the visible word of the sacraments.

In his brief statement Calvin elaborates on the theme of our weakness with three specifics: we are weak in *ignorance*, in *sloth* and in *fickleness*. Calvin here summarizes the full range of our continuing need as Christians. We are weak in the ignorance of our minds which need constant *instruction* in the faith. We are weak in the sloth or laziness of our wills which need constant *exhortation to faithfulness*. We are weak in the fickleness of our emotions which need *constant stabilization* to be faithful.

To help us in all these areas of need God has given us a great treasure. That treasure is the ministry of His church. Calvin writes, "For neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth" (Institutes, IV,iii,2). Very much in the spirit of John Calvin, one of the great Reformation confessions - the Belgic Confession of 1561 - expands on this theme: "We believe that this true Church must be governed by that spiritual polity which our Lord has

taught us in His Word; namely, that there must be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of

God and to administer the sacraments; also elders and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the Church; that by these means the true religion may be preserved, and the true doctrine everywhere propagated, likewise transgressors punished, and restrained by spiritual means; also that the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted, according to their necessities" (Belgic Confession, Article 30). Notice how forcefully this point is made: God preserves His church and true religion through the faithful ministry of the church. Here is clearly a high and vital calling - a great gift from Christ to the church.

WORK OF THE MINISTRY

What must the pastor-teacher do to fulfill this high and necessary calling? He must clearly supervise and teach his flock. He must speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) so that minds and natures will be renewed and built up (Eph. 4:17,23,24). The pastor accomplishes this preeminently through preaching.

Preaching

Paul powerfully develops the ministerial responsibility to preach in II Corinthians 4-6. We must preach Jesus Christ (4:5) out of the fulness of our faith: "We also believe, therefore also we speak" (4:13). He reminds us that we are to persuade (5:11), to appeal and implore (5:20), to urge (6:1) and to tell (6:2). Paul clarifies the specific character of this preaching in II Corinthians 5:20: "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg

you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." When we look closely at this verse, we see that the preacher is described as an ambassador. An ambassador speaks officially and authoritatively for the one he represents. He does not speak on his own authority, but only as he is commissioned to speak. The focus here is not on the dignity of the person, but on the work that the person does. In fact in Greek the word usually translated ambassador is not a noun, but a verb. We might better translate this verse: "in the place of Christ we are ambassadoring, seeing that God is making his appeal through us."

The preacher is Christ's official representative. When he faithfully does his work, God Himself is heard through him. As the Reformers maintained, the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.

This calling and responsibility is so high and awesome that the preacher must dedicate himself and his strength to it. He must be as careful a student of the Word as he is capable of being. For this reason the Reformed tradition has always stressed the importance of a welleducated ministry. We recognize that the Bible lays down no specific educational requirements for the ministry, but we also recognize that the preacher of the Word must use every opportunity to draw close to and understand as fully as possible the Scriptures. Education in the original languages of Scripture, in exegesis and hermeneutics, in theology and church history is of inestimable value to the preacher. Dr. Yun Sun Park understood the importance of this kind of study of the Bible and devoted much of his life

From that thorough knowledge of the Word, the preacher speaks for Christ. He does not and may not speak his own ideas or opinions. As an ambassador he speaks only the Word given to him. We must be sure that we do not corrupt the Word in any way. We are cautioned in II Corinthians 2:17: "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the Word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God." The warning here is not to be like

an unscrupulous salesman who misrepresents the product in order to make money. Rather we must speak as Christians who are intensely aware that we speak as those who speak for Christ and will be judged for what we say. Paul makes

"...the study is where we meet with God in the careful examination of His Word."

a very similar point in II Corinthians 4:2: "...we do not use deception, nor do we distort the Word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Our calling is not to change the Word - any change or mishandling of it is distortion - but to present it clearly and faithfully.

We are greatly aided in that task by the labors of those who have gone before us. The doctrinal heritage left to us by the great teachers of earlier generations helps us immeasurably in interpreting the Word. Especially the Confessions of Faith to which we subscribe are summaries of the Word of God to guide and direct us in our work. But also, works of Biblical commentary and theology support our preaching and we are privileged to be the inheritors of that work.

Many of us may identify with the words of John Knox—the great Reformer of Scotland. He said of his own ministry: I consider "myself rather called of my God to instruct the ignorant, comfort the sorrowful, confirm the weak, and rebuke the proud, by the tongue and lively voice, in these corrupt days, than to compose books for the age to come."1 Many of us are more likely to use primarily the lively voice than the written word. But we recognize that the ministry of the preached word rests significantly on those books written to help us, and we remember again with gratitude to God the powerful writing ministry of Dr. Yun Sun Park in that regard.

One more crucial dimension of preaching must be mentioned. I frequently remind my students of this factor. Good preaching requires time. You may have great talent, a great education and a great library, but if you do not spend time at your studies, you will not be a faithful preacher. My pastor observed recently that we must not allow the study to become an office. An office is where we meet people - and

that of course is necessary at appropriate times - but the study is where we meet with God in the careful examination of His Word. As ministers we must guard that time to study.

For the preacher, preaching is the primary contact he will have with most of the people in his congregation. He must prepare well for that contact. Think of it this way. If you preach to 500 people for one half hour, you are occupying 250 hours of the time of the people of God! How faithfully prepared should your sermon be to justify occupying 250 hours.

In all that we have been saying about preaching we have recognized a great authority that attaches to the preaching of the Word. This authority is always ministerial; that is, it does not reside in us as individuals, but exists as we faithfully minister the Word. The authority is always God's and His Word's. We as ministers must be humble and cautious in exercising this authority, recognizing that our calling is to speak only as God has spoken.

Pastoral Work

The work of the ministry, of course, is not exhausted in the work of preaching. The responsibility of the pastor extends far beyond that. The pastor is *shepherd* and *guardian* and *overseer* (Acts 20:28); and the protecting of the flock depends on more than just preaching. We can touch only briefly on some of the dimensions of this pastoral work.

The pastor must also be a *man of prayer* interceding for his people. The apostles provide a crucial example here. In Acts 6:2-4 they declared: "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among yourselves, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayers, and to the ministry of the word." Ministers must devote themselves to prayer.

The pastor must be a visitor especially in times of special need to comfort and encourage. The pastor must be a teacher in informal circumstances whether with families or various small groups. catechetical instruction of the young must be a prime concern. The pastor must help the Christian community fulfill the words of Psalm 78:3,4: "... what we have heard and known; what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done." (This text is especially precious to me because it was sung at the baptisms of my children.) Great encouragement for the pastor in these matters can be found in Richard Baxter's classic work. The Reformed Pastor.

Another responsibility of the pastor is to be involved in the discipline of the church. The true church is the church that takes discipline seriously. Neither significant error nor well-known immorality can be tolerated in the church. Both doctrine and life must be disciplined by the church.

The aim of discipline is always to restore the sinner to God through repentance. Such discipline begins with gentle rebuke and escalates as needed to sanctions and punishments. The ultimate discipline is excommunication where the impenitent is set outside the church. Such discipline is always painful and difficult, but necessary to try to bring the sinner to his senses and to protect the church from the spread of contagion.

Calvin's Geneva provides an excellent example of a wide range of ministerial work faithfully done. Calvin and his fellow ministers labored in preaching and teaching. Calvin preached several times each week and taught various other classes to ministers and students. Calvin visited the sick including plague victims until he was ordered to stop by the City Council because they felt his life was too precious to be exposed to disease. The Venerable Company of Pastors - as the meeting of ministers was known worked hard to maintain the doctrinal purity of the church and prayed for the church.

Calvin encouraged the elders in their work of supervising the moral life of the church members. Elders were to visit in homes before each administration of the Lord's Supper to encourage members in faithful living for the Lord. The consistory, composed of elders and a minister, exercised discipline on those who were unrepentant.

Calvin also encouraged the dea-

Calvin also encouraged the deacons in their care for the needy. In Calvin's day Geneva became a city of religious refugees, doubling the size of the city. This clearly put great strains on the city; and the deacons creatively worked to help the poor and sick and to provide help with resettlement and job training for those newly arrived in the city.

In all of these remarkable accomplishments Calvin and other leaders of the church were often criticized. Some citizens so opposed Calvin that they named their dogs after him - a great insult in Geneva. But Calvin and the church persevered in doing what was according to the Scriptures. Their example is a testimony to us calling us on to faith-

fulness in our day. In all of the work of the ministry, from preaching to discipline, whether in the sixteenth or the twentieth century, a crucial ingredient is courage. It is so easy to become flatterers and man-pleasers. It is so tempting to avoid the application of the Word that may be offensive. But God calls us to courage - not to recklessness or self-conceit or arrogance to be sure. But he does call to courage. Paul writes in I Corinthians 16:13,14: "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love." Luther needed great courage in testifying before the emperor and princes of the Holy Roman Empire about the gospel. Calvin needed great courage to defy the City Council in 1538 and face exile to maintain the discipline and purity of the church. John Knox showed great courage when Mary Queen of Scots appealed to him to stop criticizing her in sermons and to speak to her privately. He responded that he had been "called to a public ministry not to wait at princes' doors to whisper in their ears."² The church today needs courageous men who know the Word of God and labor to minister it faithfully to His people. Without compromise or presumption, ministers must courageously call people to Christian truth and Christian living.

WEAKNESS OF THE MINISTRY

The high calling of the minister fills us with awe because those of us who are ministers recognize how very weak we are. We struggle as all Christians do to live the Christian life. Just because we are ministers does not at all insure that we are immune from problems, sins or weaknesses.

Perhaps as ministers we face one temptation that is unique to our calling and arises precisely from the importance of our calling. We are tempted to abuse our authority by becoming domineering. Paul declares of his own ministry, "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we

work with you for your joy" (II Corinthians 1:24). Calvin echoes this point: "Thus it is the duty of a good pastor not only to restrain every desire to domineer, but to regard the ser-

vice of the people of God as the highest honour to which he may aspire."³

How do we confront and resist this temptation? How do we pursue the Christian life? I believe that God has provided help for us in the structure of His church. God has established colleagues and connections for us. He has appointed other office-bearers with whom we work. Let me expand on this point.

In the local church ministers work with elders and deacons. Elders and deacons are not called by the ministers, but are called by God. They have a God-given responsibility for the well-being of the church and of the minister. Especially the elders are to exercise a mature supervision over the life of the church including the work of the ministry.

The exact relation of the minister to the elder has been debated in the history of Reformed theology. The debate is between the three-office view and the two-office view. The three office view says that ministers, elders and deacons are each separate offices. The two-office view says that the only offices in the church are those of elders and

deacons and that the office of elder is subdivided into teaching elders and ruling elders. I Timothy 5:17 is usually quoted to support this view: "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." Whatever the precise relation of the minister to the elder, it is clear that the elder with the minister provides leadership and spiritual oversight in the church and that the elders as a body oversee the work of the minister. This oversight should not be a source of conflict or competition. Rather it should be a valuable source of help in growing in grace and faithfully fulfilling the work of the ministry. Elders must help the minister see himself and his work clearly -both in his strengths and in his weaknesses.

As Presbyterians we believe that God has not only given ministers support and help on the local level,

"...the Reformed tradition has always stressed the importance of a well-educated ministry."

but also provides broader connections for them. In the presbyteries, synods and assemblies of the church, ministers and elders gather for encouragement, instruction and discipline. We are not alone in our work or in our struggle against weakness, but God has provided us with rich support.

Ministers individually and in corporate relationships must face their weaknesses as all Christians do, and that is by living the Christian life. The foundation, disciplines and pattern that are vital to every Christian are especially important to the minister. The minister must labor to see that his work does not become simply a profession. He must not be a time-server, but he must be constantly renewed in a sense that he is called by the Lord and accountable to the Lord as the servant of the Lord. He must cultivate genuine humility and a sense of dependence on the Lord for his strength. He must live by grace and by faith, not by sight or by pride.

The minister's life can be discouraging. Paul faced that frequently. We think of his chronicle of sufferings in II Corinthians 11:23-30. Luther gave classic expression to it

The Law of the LORD as Our Delight

NELSON D. KLOOSTERMAN

Lesson 15

Deuteronomy 26:1-15

The Liturgical Climax of Covenantal Instruction

Key Verse: 'Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the land which You have given us, just as You swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.'

Deuteronomy 26:15

Offering the firstfruits (read 26:1-11)

Deuteronomy 26 can be divided into three sections: verses 1-11, the liturgy of the firstfruits; verses 12-15, the liturgy of the triennial tithe; and verses 16-19, the liturgy of covenant renewal. We are considering the first two sections in this lesson.

Earlier in Deuteronomy 18:4 we learned that the firstfruits offering belonged to the priests. When Israel had settled in the land of Canaan and had taken up farming, she was to gather and offer to the LORD the first part of her harvests at the sanctuary. This was Israel's Thanksgiving Day. Where these offerings were to be brought is specified carefully: 'the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide.'

Bringing the offering was followed by a confession of thankful dependence upon the LORD, who had kept His promises made to the forefathers by bringing Israel into Canaan and blessing her life there.

This confession was followed by an act of the priest: as mediator between the LORD and His people, the priest was to place the basket of harvested grain in front of the LORD's altar, to serve as a divine 'meal.'

Then the worshiper again expressed his faith, this time in story form, a narrative whose plot moved from Israel's humble beginnings, through Egyptian slavery and the Exodus, to settlement in the promised land. Personal desperation and misery were met with divine power and fidelity. The elements of this confession were two: admission of misery and unworthiness, along with a declaration of divine deliverance leading to the blessed enjoyment of the earth's fruitfulness. Together they provided the grand theme of every Israelite's 'story': grace, pure grace. As he offered the firstfruits of the land, the believer confessed that he had nothing that he hadn't first received, and demonstrated this confession by sharing the meal of firstfruits

with members of dependent classes among Israel, the Levite and alien.

Notice the *effects* of grace here. Grace creates a receptive heart and fashions a thankful people for joyful sharing. Notice again that the worshipers were *commanded* to rejoice together and to enjoy the bounty of the land across lines of citizenship and class.

Liturgy and space

We should pause to emphasize a facet of this liturgical activity often overlooked: the *spatial* dimension. Observe the liturgical movement and location prescribed in these verses. Everything leads to and centers around the altar, the place of atonement. The entire book of Deuteronomy, to say nothing of the rest of Scripture, emphasizes spatially, metaphorically and explicitly that *covenant blessing depends upon atonement*. This close connection between atonement and blessing of every kind (physical, material, social, economic, political, intellectual, scientific) is symbolized in this offering. The truth being symbolized is that divine blessing proceeds from sacrifice and is reciprocated as sacrifice when the worshiper 'returns' in thanksgiving with what the LORD has given him.

Even the prescribed confession(s) emphasize divine grace as the source of both prosperity and the duty of thanksgiving. (Question 1)

Reconciliation as the road back to creation

Another lesson taught here by this liturgical, spatial symbolism is that anyone who wishes to honor God as Creator and Provider must approach Him by way of the altar, by way of the atoning blood. In New Testament terms, no one can honor God as Creator who doesn't have Jesus Christ as his Savior. Read carefully the core answer of the *Heidelberg Catechism* in Lord's Day 9:

- Q. What do you believe when you say: I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth?
- A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . is for the sake of Christ His Son my God and my Father;. . . .

This emphasis is necessary today in view of growing interest in a form of 'creation spirituality' that recommends loving and respecting the creation without having to come to Jesus Christ. The impulse here is to forge an ecumenical link among all world religions, blending their primitive cosmologies (religious perspectives of the creation of the universe) to permit cooperation in caring for the environment. Christians need to remember and testify that there is no path to the Creator other than Jesus Christ, whose blood opened the way back to Him. (Question 2)

The triennial tithe (read 26:12-15)

Recall from our study of Deuteronomy 14:22-29 that every three years, the tithe was to be brought to the nearest town for use by the Levites, the aliens and others in need. This instruction is summarized here in verse 12.

As with the offering of firstfruits, so here too a liturgy is prescribed for the triennial tithe. In contrast to the confessional declaration associated with the firstfruits, the tithe liturgy focused on the righteousness and purity of the worshiper. He had kept all the prescriptions associated with the tithe, especially those regarding ceremonial purity (v. 14; recall that the dead were unclean, as were all who came into contact with death). This righteousness becomes the basis for appealing to the LORD to remember and bless His people and their land, as He had sworn to do.

This liturgical climax to Israel's covenantal instruction defines the triennial tithe in terms of the two-directional love which the LORD commanded as the fulfillment of the law: love for God and for the neighbor. Love for the LORD was shown in safeguarding 'the sacred portion' from ceremonial contamination, and love for the neighbor in bringing his tithe to town for the Levite, alien and needy.

In other words, the triennial tithe liturgy unites both tables of the law. Love for God and love for neighbor cannot be separated; and yet rebellious man tries throughout history to do precisely that. Every false religion, every form of paganism and humanism, and every ideology promising heaven on earth commits this fatal flaw of separating the first and second tables of the law. (Question 3)

Notice in verse 15 the move from first person singular to first person plural, from I-me-my to we-us-our. This is characteristically covenantal, echoed by our Savior when He taught us to pray in the plural: 'Our Father in heaven. . .give us this day our daily bread. . .forgive us our debts. . .lead us not into temptation. . .but deliver us. . . .'

The liturgical climax of covenantal instruction

How many law-codes do you know that end their prescriptions with an order of worship? Throughout our study of Deuteronomy 12-26 we have seen that Old Testament law is *Torah*-law.

Torah-law is preached legislation and treaty instruction which regulates life between the LORD who is Israel's Deliverer-King, and Israel who is His subject vassal-servant.

Torah-content is very important. But we need also to meditate deeply about the *form* and *arrangement* of Torah, and about the *context* of Torah.

The fact that the LORD's tutelage in Deuteronomy's law-section ends with liturgical instructions teaches us that worship is the crown and goal of obedience. Loving God as Father-King required Israel to be conscious of His presence at mealtimes (clean/unclean foods); to confess His life at the cemetery (shaving hair/cutting flesh); to respect His holiness in military camp (observing habits of hygiene and etiquette). This was whole-hearted, full-time covenantal obedience. Holiness and the antithesis aren't simply 'catechism words' or theological terms, but a way of life. (Question 4)

Don't ever fall for the silly notion that Old Testament believers practiced an external, formal, impersonal religion or relationship with God. Nothing is further from the truth! Awareness of God's character and activity was woven into the fabric of Israel's life.

For New Testament believers the difference is that these principles, this divine character and activity, are more clearly and fully revealed, more powerfully displayed, more securely fixed in Jesus Christ our Lord. It was to Him that Torah led the child Israel, and it is in Him that Torah is full-filled.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

Questions for Reflection and Reply

- Explain the importance of space and architecture in our worship of God. Illustrate how the arrangement and decor of a worship center can enhance and detract from biblical worship. Mention architectural features that distinguish Protestant from Catholic worship.
- 2. Mention ways in which our allegiance to Jesus Christ can provide distinctive contributions to modern discussions about the environment. How has Christ's atonement begun already now to overcome effects of the curse in creation?
- 3. Explain how love for God is the root of love for neighbor. What happens to neighbor love when it is not rooted in love for God? Should our worship embody love for both God and others? How?
- 4. This liturgical climax teaches us that 'worship is the crown and goal of obedience.' Explain how this claim differs from saying: 'Obedience is the crown and goal of worship.' Are both claims true on the basis of Scripture? How does this relate to our earlier statement that covenant blessing proceeds from and returns to the altar?

Lesson 16

Deuteronomy 26:16-19

Covenantal Instruction Concluded with Mutual Promises

Key Verse: 'This day the LORD your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments; therefore you shall be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul.'

Deuteronomy 26:16

The covenant concluded (read 26:16)

The sermon containing the commandments that would direct Israel's life in Canaan is over now. Verse 16 serves as a bridge between the preceding stipulations and the covenant formula that follows. In content, verse 16 ties back to Deuteronomy 12:1:

These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth.

We have printed verse 16 as the key verse for this lesson. Notice the following details.

The phrase 'this day' lends to these concluding verses a sense of urgency, immediacy and summons. God's people have been listening to Moses' sermon, recounting God's faithfulness and their unfaithfulness, setting forth His expectations for their life in Canaan. Now the time has come for Israel to 'own' the covenant for herself. Later Joshua would urge the people to covenant renewal with similar words:

And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Josh. 24:15).

'Owning' the covenant requires Israel to pledge her loyalty to the One who, in a very real sense, created her. The name of Israel's God and King is the LORD, 'I Am Who I Am.' It was He who elected her from among every other nation and brought her from death (slavery in Egypt) to life (the fertile land of Canaan).

Observe again the personal and penetrating piety required of Israel. Keeping the LORD's commandments with full heart and soul is richly Old Testament. It differs radically from that burdensome piety loaded on the backs of God's children centuries later by the scribes and Pharisees who neutralized God's commandments with their traditions. (Question 1)

Moses: the mediator of the old covenant (read 26:17-19)

In these concluding verses Moses clearly functions as a mediator between the LORD and Israel. In a style consistent with covenant agreements he summarizes in the presence of both parties what Israel has acknowledged as one partner to the covenant and what the LORD has declared as the other partner.

Let's study the content of each covenant declaration in more detail.

Moses begins with Israel's side:

Today you have proclaimed the LORD to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice (v. 17).

Although there is a translation difficulty here that need not detain us, we may understand this verse to reflect the formula whereby Israel accepted the obligations of the covenant. Accepting the LORD as God entailed submitting to His commandments and listening to His voice alone. Conversely, promising to heed God's law points to a prior relationship with God that provides the context for that obedience.

Observe that Israel's oath declaration comes first, as if she initiated the covenant. Although it is certainly true that the covenant *originated* with God, whose love was its sole source, yet here there appears a striking *mutuality* of covenant partnership and obligation. Like wife and husband, Israel and the LORD are speaking vows to each other. (*Question 2*)

This is the LORD's oath:

Also today the LORD has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as He has spoken (vv. 18-19).

The giving of the law on the LORD's part was to confirm His promise that Israel would be His special possession, whom He would glorify above the nations and whom He would sanctify in His service. That law was based on divine election; it arose from God's special love which created a special people to live in a special way.

Covenant as context for law

The covenant is a relationship between God and His people wherein the seed of gracious election blossoms into the flower of our sanctification.

God's election stimulates our obedience, and our holiness is the crown upon God's initiative. God and His people, grace and holiness, converge at 'the place the LORD our God chooses,' the place where blood atonement is rendered: the cross of Jesus Christ, foreshadowed in all the ceremonies of the entire law, proclaimed and presented in the church of Jesus Christ by means of Word and sacrament. (Question 3)

Deuteronomy 12-26 teaches us that God's covenantal law (and God's law is, finally, strictly covenantal) functions properly only within the context of that relationship established by election for holiness.

The apostle Peter put the same truth this way:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

The apostle Paul explains it to the Ephesians this way:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

To pastor Titus he writes concerning

our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works (Titus 2:14).

Covenant law as our delight

As we conclude our study of Deuteronomy 12-26, we need to reflect on the question: What is the relationship of the New Testament believer to God's covenantal law? Books have been written in answer to this question, so we can hope only to scratch the surface of this very broad subject.

In our first lesson we asked the student to find all the references in Psalm 119 that speak of the LORD's law as the believer's delight. A concordance check would have led to verses 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92 and 174. We do not exaggerate when we say that delighting in God's law is a prominent Old Testament theme!

But can we find a similar emphasis in the New Testament?

Writing to believers in Rome about the struggle of indwelling sin, Paul describes it as a contest between the inner and the outer man:

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members (Rom. 7:22-23).

Regardless of whether Romans 7 describes pre- or post-conversion experience, the apostle's statement in verse 22 must be understood as the *believer's* confession. The law of God — including the Old Testament, theocratic, covenantal, treaty stipulations we have been studying — delights the believer. Its wisdom, righteousness, goodness and mercy excite heartfelt love in Christ's disciples. (*Question 4*)

Our prayerful effort in this Bible study series has been devoted to increasing among God's people their love for and understanding of His covenantal law as that points us to the Lord Jesus Christ and redemption in Him. May the LORD be pleased so to bless this study that our lives may be filled with worship to His glorious praise, and that our worship be living and vibrant in service to His holy will. Together these form the essence of our covenant response.

Questions for Reflection and Reply

- Read Mark 7:1-13. Mention examples of the Pharisees invalidating the Word of God by their tradition. Mention examples of the same today.
- 2. Find passages in the Old Testament that speak of the relationship between the LORD and Israel in terms of marriage, of husband and wife. Where in the New Testament do we read of the church's relationship to God in terms of marriage?
- 3. In light of the definition of 'covenant' given in the lesson, explain how our obedience serves to assure us that we are elect. Why can't our obedience be seen as the basis of election? Are all those under God's covenant elect? Defend your answer from Scripture.
- 4. Explain two or three of the most meaningful things you have learned from studying Deuteronomy 12-26. How will these affect (1) your worship of God and (2) your work in His service?

when he observed: "The work of the ministry is to try to teach old dogs new tricks and to make old rogues pious, and that largely in vain." But we know that our work is not in vain in the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58). We live as the apostle did, assured that God has promised, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9). Our task is to sow the seed and wait upon the Lord to grant the increase

We know that God has given a central role to the ministry in the life of His people. As Calvin so forcefully put it: "...this human ministry which God uses to govern the church is the chief sinew by which believers are held together in one body" (Institutes, IV,iii,2). The ministers are the sinews or tendons or tough cords that hold the church together, instruments of the Word and the Spirit to build up the people in faith

Our Lord has promised a rich reward for our faithfulness. The Apostle Peter reminds the minister (I Peter 5:1-4) to "shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; not yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock." For such ministers is the promise: "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

God grant that when our Savior appears, we will receive that crown of glory. And may we follow the example of the heavenly elders casting down those crowns acknowledging that the Lord alone is worthy to receive "glory and honor and power" (Revelation 4:11).

FOOTNOTES

- W. Stanford Reid, Trumpeter of God, A Biography of John Knox, New York (Scribners), 1974, p. 33.
- Reid, Trumpeter, p. 227.
- John Calvin, The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, Grand Rapids, Michigan (Eerdmans), 1964, comment on 4:5, p. 57.

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What We Believe But for the Grace of God

The Significance of the Canons of Dort for Today: Sovereign Grace, Human Responsibility and "Cheap Grace"

Cornelis P. Venema

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6:1-2)

As these well-known words of the apostle Paul imply, it is possible to conclude wrongly from the teaching that we are saved by grace alone, that it doesn't matter then how we live. If God's grace fully answers to our need as sinners, if we do not have to add anything to it to complete our salvation, then we are free to revel in salvation as God's gift, without worrying about how we live in response to this gift. We can bask safely in the sunshine of God's favor and grace, without having to live in obedience to His commandments. Indeed, we can continue to sin with impunity, knowing that this will only magnify the largeness of God's grace. The greater our sin, the greater God's grace!

Not only were there apparently some in the church at Rome whom the apostle feared would wrongly draw this conclusion, but there have also been those who have done so throughout the history of the church. In the period of the Reformation, one of the most common complaints against the Reformer's teaching of salvation by grace alone was the alleged consequence of this teaching for the Christian life. Luther and Calvin were frequently charged with undermining any legitimate motive for or interest in pursuing a godly, sanctified life. After all-so it was alleged against their teaching-what good are good works, when they do not purchase so much as an iota of our salvation! If good works do not contribute anything, if they do not merit even the slightest part of our salvation, then the sinner will be inclined to sin that grace might abound.

This common complaint against the Reformer's teaching has also been leveled against the teaching of the Canons of Dort. Sometimes it takes a rather general form, and it is argued that God's sovereignty in grace is incompatible with an emphasis upon human responsibility. At other times it takes a more specific form, and it is maintained that an emphasis upon the sovereign grace of God makes the believer irresponsible and careless in the Christian life. Sovereign grace easily becomes "cheap grace," a grace that comes free of charge and without any corresponding obligation to obedience.

SOVEREIGN GRACE AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

Most Reformed believers have a first-hand acquaintance with the argument that, to stress God's sovereign initiative and work in the salvation of His people, threatens to undercut the need for a proper human response to the gospel. This argument was certainly prominent in the Arminian position, to which the Canons of Dort sought to provide a Biblical answer.

In its extreme form, this argument likens the Canon's position on unconditional election, particular redemption, irresistible grace, total depravity and the perseverance of the saints, to treating sinners like "blocks of wood" pushed and pulled about by God's sovereign will. In this caricature of the Canons, it is suggested that they teach a doctrine in which sinners are either compeled to enter or, alternatively, prevented from entering the kingdom against their wills! Furthermore, sinners are kept within or excluded from the grace of God, regardless of their conduct or walk before the Lord. This reduces the role of the believer to that of a mere puppet in the hands of God.

Because the Canons ascribe the whole of our redemption to God's gracious initiative and provision in Christ, Arminians have insisted that they do not leave room for the free and lively involvement of sinners in their coming to and continuance in the way of salvation. In their view, unless God's election is "conditional" upon the believer's own self-willed response to the call of the gospel to faith and repentance, we cannot escape a kind of determinism which removes the seriousness of the gospel's call and undermines the responsibility of the believer.

What, advocates of this claim ask, prevents the Canons' insistence upon God's sovereign election and grace from belittling the responsibility of sinners to answer the gospel call in faith and repentance? Doesn't this insistence reduce the believer's role to that of a passive bystander in the work of salvation? Just as the authors of the Canons feared the Arminian position would make God an inactive bystander at the critical juncture of the believer's response to the gospel, so the Arminians feared the Calvinist position would reduce the sinner to an inactive recipient of the grace of God.

THE CHARGE OF "CHEAP GRACE"

This argument often takes the specific form that an emphasis upon sovereign grace cheapens the grace of God by treating it as though it were a gift, freely given and without strings attached. Since the whole of our salvation is God's doing, and since there is no place for merit in the obtaining of God's free gifts, there is really no incentive for responsible Christian conduct.

The authors of the Canons of Dort were well aware of this charge against their teaching. In the conclusion of the Canons, "Rejection of False Accusations," they acknowledge that there are those who insist:

...that this teaching makes people carnally self-assured, since it persuades them that nothing endangers the salvation of the chosen, no matter how they live, so that they may commit the most outrageous crimes with self-assurance; and that on the other hand nothing is of use to the reprobate for salvation even if they have truly performed all the works of the saints.

This charge is really a different form of the issue considered in our previous article, whether an emphasis upon the gracious work of God in the salvation of His elect people undermines the missionary activity and calling of the church.

Perhaps the force of this charge is best illustrated by a story told about

a certain Lutheran minister of the gospel.¹ This minister of the gospel, when asked on his death bed whether he had the assurance of salvation, is said to have replied triumphantly, "Oh yes, I cannot ever remember having done a single good work!" The

point of the story seems to be that an emphasis upon salvation by grace alone is a kind of double-edged sword. On the one hand, it permits the believer to found all of his confidence upon God's grace alone and not on his good works. And on the other hand, it removes any real urgency to live a life of good works. Why not sin, in order that grace may abound! Why not "sin boldly," even recklessly, since God's grace is freely given and freely received!

A CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE: THE "LORDSHIP SALVATION" CONTROVERSY

It is interesting to observe that a controversy has arisen among the evangelical churches in North America, sometimes termed the "lordship salvation" controversy, that has striking parallels with these historic debates about God's sovereign grace and human responsibility, particularly the debate whether sovereign grace "cheapens" the gospel's demand to respond in faith and repentance.

This "lordship salvation" controversy involves a dispute between those who advocate a radical doctrine of free grace and those who insist that God's grace does not remove, but accentuates, the responsibility of the believer to repent and live in obedience to God's commandments. Though this is not the place to provide a comprehensive summary and evaluation of this con-

troversy, the respective positions taken in this controversy serve to highlight the questions of divine sovereignty, human responsibility and "cheap grace."

On the one side of this controversy, there are those who advocate the position that grace is purely a gift and may not be made "conditional" upon the repentance of the sinner. Any language which treats repentance and submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ as an *indis*-

"Why not 'sin boldly,'
even recklessly,
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and freely received!"

pensable condition for the reception of the promise of the gospel and fellowship with God in Christ is regarded as a threat to the graciousness of God's grace. When repentance is treated as an inevitable and necessary component of any saving response to the gospel, then it becomes impossible to preserve the sovereignty of God's grace and the assurance that it gives. Any emphasis upon the obligation to obey God's commandments, as an inseparable component of a saving response to the gospel call, is considered tantamount to a new form of salvation by works. This emphasis, moreover, robs the believer of his eternal security, the comfort which comes from receiving salvation as an irrevocable gift.2

On the other side of this controversy, there are those who advocate the position that, though grace is a gift freely imparted through the gospel, it demands the response of faith and repentance. Without a believing and obedient response to the call of the gospel, it is not possible to be saved. No believer may receive Christ as Savior without also receiving Christ as Lord. This position considers the first a form of "easy believism" in which the believer need only assent to the gospel promise without becoming subject to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This position also insists that the comfort of the gospel promise may not be treated in a presumptuous manner, as though God in the gospel throws a security blanket of acceptance over

· AN AFFIRMATION ·

In view of the recent actions of Classis Grandville of the Christian Reformed Church with respect to our pastor, Rev. A. Besteman, and with respect to the retired pastors, Rev. Peter Honderd, Rev. Edward Knott and Rev. Richard Veldman, members of our congregation, the council of the Beverly Christian Reformed Church (Independent) of Wyoming, Michigan hereby affirms without qualification that their position (ordination) in the active and inactive ministry remains the same, and that they retain the honor and the title Verbum Dei Ministerium of their office as they have heretofore.

His people, irrespective of their perseverance in faith and repentance.³

Without wanting to defend everything that has been written by those defending the second side of this controversy, it is apparent that the first side, the advocates of a radical doctrine of free grace, seems to have fallen prey to a view which diminishes human responsibility and threatens to cheapen the obligations of discipleship. And, since advocates of this view typically cite the Reformer's teaching of salvation by grace alone in their defense, it becomes necessary to ascertain whether their view is indeed in the line of the Reformation. Is it possibly the kind of position authorized by the Canons of Dort? Don't the Canons teach a similar view of the radical graciousness of the gospel promise, and the eternal security which this promise grants to believ-

THE BIBLICAL BALANCE OF THE CANONS

I have taken the trouble to summarize the usual form in which the position of the *Canons* is criticized, and provided a brief sketch of the present debate concerning "lordship salvation," to set the stage for evaluating the *Canons'* position. Do they emphasize divine responsibility at the expense of human responsibility? Do they give an occasion for a cheapening of the gospel obligations of faith and repentance? Furthermore, do they contribute anything to the dispute over "lordship salvation"?

To these questions, I would answer that the *Canons* do present a Biblically balanced view of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. They also vigorously oppose any misunderstanding of the working of God's grace through the gospel which would "cheapen" God's

grace, or diminish the necessity of a responsible perseverance in the way of obedience to the gospel.

Responsibility to the grace of God

To appreciate the Canons' Biblical balance on the relation between God's sovereign grace and human responsibility, it is important to remember that the Canons are, by their own admission, a somewhat one-sided and focused summary of Biblical teaching. The authors of the Canons did not intend their confession to provide a complete summary of Biblical teaching in the way that the Belgic Confession and other Reformation confessions do, for example. Their focus was dictated by the five points of doctrine of the Remonstrants or Arminians. Since the Remonstrant position diminished the sovereign grace of God as the single foundation of the salvation of God's people, the authors of the Canons were obliged, in defense of the Scripture's teaching of unconditional election, to accentuate the graciousness of God in saving His people. The vigor and force of the Canons' affirmation of the Triune God's initiative and sovereign provision of salvation for His people can only be understood against the background of the crisis among the Reformed churches brought about by the Arminian party. The grand theme of the Reformation's rediscovery of the gospel-sola gratia, "by grace alone"—was at stake.

It is all the more remarkable, then, that the *Canons*, though vigorously defending the sovereign grace of God at every point it faced attack, refused to succumb to the kind of determinism described earlier. They simultaneously affirm *unconditional election* (those only are saved whom the Father elected in Christ from before the foundation of the world)

and conditional condemnation (those only are condemned who have sinned in Adam and refused to serve God in faith and repentance). They simultaneously teach particular redemption (Christ provided atonement for those whom the Father purposed to give to Him) and universal gospel preaching (seriously calling all men, without exception, to faith and repentance, promising life to all who respond accordingly). They simultaneously insist upon the sinner's total depravity (his inability to answer the gospel call in his own strength) and the sinner's real obligation to respond to the gospel's call to faith and repentance. They simultaneously speak of God's gracious preservation of His people in the way of salvation and His people's urgent perseverance in the way of salvation.

Now to some this may only seem to be a series of paradoxes, even contradictions. How may we simultaneously affirm what appear to be a series of contrary teachings? However, as G. K. Chesterton, the wellknown English writer, once remarked, a paradox may only be "the truth stood on its head to gain our attention." A paradox need not be an actual contradiction; it might be, as is the case with the Canons, a deliberate holding to both sides of the Biblical truth without letting go of either and thus losing one's balance. This is precisely what we have in the Canons: the authors refused to lose their Biblical balance, even when faced with the Arminian challenge. They were willing to hold tenaciously to both sides of the Biblical picture, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, without falling prey to the temptation of resolving the apparent contradiction in favor of one side or the other.

This is the strength of the Canon's testimony to God's sovereign grace. The authors of the Canons were willing to live with the apparent conflict or tension between these two Biblical emphases, but refused to grant that this conflict was real. They were willing to follow the Scriptures wherever they led, leaving to the Triune God the resolution of what within His counsel must be a perfect consistency and harmony. In so doing, they are a model of humility in summarizing the total teaching of Scripture, leaving to God the resolution of these differing em-

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phases. They stand in marked contrast to the *rationalism* of the Arminian position which, in order ostensibly to protect human responsibility, compromises the clear Biblical testimony to God's sovereign grace.

Costly grace

Consistent with their simultaneous emphasis upon God's sovereign grace and the responsibility of the believer to answer to that grace in faith and repentance, the *Canons* resist every attempt to "cheapen" the grace of God. This is evident in at least two important ways.

First, though the grace of God in Christ is freely given to the elect, this grace exacted an infinite cost of Christ through His atoning work. Whenever we affirm that salvation is God's free gift, an expression of His sovereign and boundless mercy toward His people in Christ, we may not forget that it is a salvation purchased for us through Christ's work of satisfaction on our behalf. As the Canons describe it, "This death of God's Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins; it is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world" (Second Main Point of Doctrine, Article

This means that, though the Canons resolutely oppose any hint of human merit or works done to satisfy God's justice and purchase our salvation, the grace of God is always a costly grace. It may be freely given to the believer, but it was not purchased without the price of the precious blood of the Savior! God the Father does not relinquish His holiness or righteousness in granting salvation to the elect. He satisfies His own holiness in the satisfaction made through the atoning work of His Son. Those who too quickly complain against the Canons' insistence on the free and sovereign grace of God toward His elect in Christ, often neglect to acknowledge this.

Here the Canons offer a similar reply to the one Calvin offered to those who complained that he offered God's grace too cheaply to sinners. Though the gospel freely promises salvation to those who accept this promise with a believing heart, this does not mean the gospel comes cheap. As Calvin retorted to his critics, the grace of God pur-

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chased for us by Christ comes at a much higher cost than the pittance of any of our supposed "satisfactions"!

Second, in their description of the believer's perseverance in the way of salvation, the Canons provide absolutely no room for the idea of "cheap grace," as we have described it in the foregoing. Not only do the Canons use language, "perseverance," that places a great deal of emphasis upon the believer's responsibility to "work out his salvation with fear and trembling," but they also characterize this perseverance in terms which clearly resist the idea that the believer could trifle with the promise of God or seize upon it as an occasion to sin!

There is, in this respect, a decided difference between the Canon's teaching of perseverance and what often today is meant by "eternal security." Whereas the language of "eternal security" suggests a safe haven of inactivity and passive receiving of God's promise, the language of the Canons suggests a dynamic walk in communion with the Lord, marked by a diligent use of the means of grace and response to the admonitions and warnings of the gospel to stay the course. The former language intimates that the Christian life is akin to resting in a gift received; the latter intimates that the Christian life is akin to a marriage relationship, in which husband and wife pledge to walk with each other in "constant faithfulness and abiding love."

Therefore, no one who reads the *Canons of Dort* carefully and appreciatively should conclude that they, by exalting God's sovereignty, diminish human responsibility. This is a false dilemma that the framers of this confession studiously avoided, even at the risk of being charged with inconsistency. Fur-

thermore, no one should confuse their emphasis upon God's sovereign grace with any doctrine of cheap grace. God's sovereign grace works in the life of the believer to produce the obedience of faith and repentance at the preaching of the gospel. It is granted to those alone who receive it in faith and repentance, acknowledging Christ as Savior and Lord. There is no place, then, in this confession for "easy believism" or an irresponsible use of the gospel.

FOOTNOTES

Whether fictional or not, it is evident that this story has been told to illustrate the way an emphasis upon free grace can be abused. Its use by critics of the Reformer's teaching resembles the way Luther's comment to Melancthon, "sin boldly," has often been twisted to make Luther appear to have advocated a doctrine of "cheap grace."

Many, though by no means all, of the advocates of this view dispensationalists. The position takes various forms, one of which is to draw a sharp distinction between "carnal" and "spiritual" Christians, the former only acknowledging Christ as Savior, the latter also actively submitting to His lordship. The best representation of this view is given by Zane Hodges in the following: The Gospel Under Siege: A Study on Faith and Works (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1981); Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1989; co-published and co-distributed by Zondervan).

3. John MacArthur defends this position and critically evaluates the former position in his *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988). Though he defends a premillenial dispensationalist eschatology, MacArthur attempts to affirm both God's sovereign grace in salvation and the indispensable conditions of discipleship in the Christian

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The Shepherd's Staff Materialism: Worshiping the "Stuff" of Life

John R. Sittema

Whoever Dies With The Most Toys Wins (bumper sticker, c. 1993)

"A Man's Life Does Not Consist in the Abundance of His Possessions" (Iesus Christ, Lk. 12:15)

Last month I began to analyze the Wolf's Teeth which elders face as they care for the sheep of the Good Shepherd. From Acts 20 we have heard again and again the apostolic warning that wolves will attack the sheep, seeking to destroy the church. Graphic image, you'll agree, particularly so to men who traipse all over the hills of Judea living and working with bleating, hungry, smelly sheep. How about those of us in the 1990s, where the only sheep we see is in the lambchop section of Kroger's meat market? Envisioning the church as the flock of God requires some concentration; seeing the enemy does too. Just what does the wolf look like today? What kind of fangs does he possess? Last month we identified four: secularism (our focus last time), materialism (today), relativism and pragmatism (articles to follow).

Today the West (especially North American culture) is being squeezed in the hand of materialism. This grip combines with secularism to pressure modern American life. Secularism you will recall, is the love of the here and now, the reduction of life to the pursuit of that which exists in the here and now, with no thought given to the eternal. The consequences of such an "ism" reigning over a culture are evident in the spirit of the age: the demand for instant gratification, pathological spending habits alongside of growing personal and national debt, the search for "relevance" but not for eternal significance, and no fear of eternal consequences.

MATERIALISM: THE IDOL OF "STUFF"

Materialism, as a further narrowing of this secular spirit of the age, focuses its heart on the stuff of the here and now, the guest for the attainment of things that satiate the 5 senses, the accumulation of mammon. Now, it's terribly important for you to remember that materialism is an idol. It is a master that demands to be served. It will dominate, consume and destroy one's life. It is not merely a misplaced emphasis, an overindulgence by people blessed with many possessions, an imbalance in lives otherwise normal. It takes hold of the heart, and is absolutely inconsistent with Biblical faith. Remember our Lord's words:

...where your treasure is, there

your heart will be also... No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the

other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money (literally "mammon," wealth or possessions, "stuff" to be owned) (Mt 6:21,24).

How are we to understand the rise of materialism in our culture? And how can we understand its penetration into the church of the Lord? I think the answer is rather easy—and uncomfortably so. We are wealthy people! We have many things, all of us. Compared with most of the population of the earth, those of us in the West are rich, plain and simple. That's true whether or not we feel rich, whether

or not we think we are wealthy compared to our neighbors.

The truth of that was brought home to me poignantly. A young couple in our congregation had been blessed to be able to adopt twin Romanian boys soon after the opening up of Eastern Europe. When they went to Romania to bring home their sons, they were greatly aided by a gentleman in that country whom they called "Mr. Black" (his name was difficult to pronounce in English). When he later had opportunity to visit in this country, he looked in amazement at our homes and at their contents. His comment? "You have so many things you don't need. Look at all the pictures on your walls, the things on your tables, the chairs you don't sit in, the clothes you don't wear!" For Mr. Black, you see, wealth was measured by utility. If one has more than he really, actually needs, he is wealthy!

Given that definition, who of us isn't wealthy?

And, in times of prosperity the church has never done well. Throughout history, the church has always been more faithful to her Lord under persecution and hardship than she has been in times of wealth and ease. She has always been drawn closer to Him when she had to pray in utter dependence

"Materialism ... is not a sin of having, but of wanting."

than when her eye and heart was drawn away from Him by the pleasures and joys of this life. Jesus knew that. That's why He warned us that we must not "store up for yourselves treasures on earth" (literally, "stack up" like cordwood, piled up for storage but not for immediate use). That's why He spoke so boldly about the inability to serve both God and the stuff of life. That's why He spoke the unnerving words of Mt. 19:23-24: "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Few words in the Bible should bother us in the wealthy West more than these!

What are the symptoms of a materialistic society? Observe with me a few:

 The health of our economy is measured by consumer spending (not saving).

 Success in most minds is measured by the accumulation and possession of things.

 Ethics are shaped by goals, not by absolute standards: if "things" mark success, their accumulation is good; workaholism is an accepted lifestyle, never mind the cost to the marriage or family.

 A pervasive dissatisfaction with one's lot in life, fueled by "infomercials" promising easy ways to become rich through real estate, thin through diet fads or gimmicks or smart through video courses.

 The word "greed" no longer connotes a sinful spirit; it's been replaced by "profit motivated," considered a positive trait, not a sinful one.

 In many cities, police report youth being beaten, even killed, for their new "Air Jordan" sneakers.

 Consistently, "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" lures large TV audiences.

Clearly, many more items could be listed. I could tell you of the young man I met in a 7-11 while buying gas, who boasted of having enough credit on his VISA card that he bought a \$18,000 sports car on it. And he was proud of that! I could speak of the many folks I've met who are constantly on the lookout to "upgrade" their house to the newer and larger variety in a more upscale neighborhood. And this despite the fact that they have no children, are seldom in their home (both work, and long hours too!), and already have 4 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms and such a large yard they have to hire out the lawnwork. Or, we could talk of the new trend in architecture: "family rooms" that are arranged around electronic entertainment centers, organized to display the latest "stuff" accumulated by the family, but rooms that require a placement of seating so as to make it impossible for the family to talk or communicate with anything except the video or audio system.

OVERCOMING MATERIALISM

How do you battle such a powerful spiritual foe? How do you as elders strengthen the flock so that they can win victory over such "principalities, powers, world rulers of this present darkness"? Allow me to suggest several very prac-

tical tools, all of which arise directly out of the text of Scripture.

First, use the wonderful prayer of Proverbs 30:7-9 to teach God's people in your care that materialism is profoundly dangerous, especially be-

cause it denies the dangers inherent in wealth. Listen to the words of the wise: "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?'..." If only all of us would know that and believe it! If only we learned our perspective on wealth and poverty from God instead of from TV. And, speaking of TV, use the opportunities God gives you (visiting families in their homes, deacons visiting with those struggling with budgets and personal debt) to make a point about TV. If you can't get the people to throw it in the trash (and you can't), you can teach them how to watch it! Teach them to call attention to the deception of TV! Teach them to observe how writers and producers portray life so that it appears that wealth is always good; that the commercials are perhaps the most deadly item on the screen, sowing seeds of discontent and greed, and particularly aim at younger "consumers."

Second, use the insightful observations of the preacher in Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 to teach God's people the emptiness of wealth unless it is used in the service of the Lord. Listen:

I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them...I bought male and female slaves...Ialso owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem...Iamassed silver and

gold...I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure...Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

What frustration to achieve, to have, to amass, to accumulate...and

"...the church has always been more faithful to her Lord under persecution and hardship than she has been in times of wealth and ease."

> to come to realize it doesn't really matter. It's like trying to catch the breeze. Futile! The only lasting meaning in things, in possessions, is in their use in the service of the Lord and His people. Remember the words of Paul to Timothy:

Command those who are rich in this world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life (I Tim. 6:17-19).

Oh, and by the way, remind all your people, and yourself as well, that materialism is not a spiritual force that afflicts only the rich. Because it is not a sin of having, but one of wanting. It grips one in the heart, not in the wallet.

Third, teach your people diligently the principles and practices of Biblical stewardship. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Ps. 24:1) is a nice memory verse, but it is a much more important and urgent living-principle. God's people must learn

more important and urgent livingprinciple. God's people must learn to live as if all they have, all they will have, all they give and all they keep for their own use—all of it belongs to the Lord, and for its use we must give account to Him. Such a living principle is hard to maintain in a materialistic age, and particularly so in such a wealthy culture. But maintain it you must, and more-you must teach it to all of God's people. The good news is that you don't have to invent the wheel in this matter. There are all kinds of resources available, not to mention the most important and immediate one you have-the deacons who sit in meetings with you! It is their high calling to develop and administer Biblical stewardship. If they do it well, you will be well-served in the battle against the spiritual foe of materialism. The box appended to this article contains resources I believe to be suitable and effective.

Finally, don't just talk about the dangers of materialism; actively oppose it! Don't just cluck your tongue at this younger generation and its passion for gadgets; teach them priorities! Don't shake your heads at the young people who "just don't know the value of a dollar"; instruct them about the dangers of debt! Don't lament the sin of greed; call attention to its destructive effects in the lives of all who are controlled by it! Fight back with all the weapons at your disposal. Such is your duty.

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers...be on your guard! (Acts 20:28, 31)

Dr. Sittema, editor of this department, is the pastor of the Bethel CRC in Dallas, TX.



Missions & Evangelism

Confronting the Roaring Lion

Roger S. Greenway

We observed last month that during most of the 20th century the existence of Satan and demons was not taken seriously. Liberals regarded the subject as mythological; and conservatives, while not removing Satan and demons from among their official beliefs, did not do much with the whole idea.

But recently the situation has changed and new books and articles dealing with Satan and his kingdom have appeared. In missiology the subject of "power encounters" with demonic forces has become one of the hottest issues for discussion.

In this article I want to point out some of the things the Bible teaches about Satan and his activities, particularly as they affect the progress of the gospel. We may then draw certain conclusions as to what our reactions to Satan should be.

WHO SATAN IS

The Bible reveals that Satan, also called the devil, is a real entity possessing personal attributes. Satan is not simply a "bad idea," a sort of myth some people believe in but lacking objective reality. Satan, according to Scripture, is one of God's created beings.

Colossians 1:16 says: "For by him (Christ) all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." We conclude, therefore, that Satan was created by Christ and in his original state he was created good and for God's glory.

Satan and demons are traditionally identified as fallen angels. Jesus said: "I saw Satan fall like lightening" (Lk. 10:18). Since their fall Satan and the evil spirits accompany-

ing him have been the avowed enemies of God's creation. The main focus of their attacks are human beings as creation's head, and God's new creation, centered in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Satan knows that he cannot overcome Christ's kingdom, but he is bent on hindering its growth in every way he can.

Satan, warned the apostle Peter, is the enemy of God's people and he prowls like an uncaged, roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). Since Calvary, Satan has been a mortally wounded "roaring lion," but all the more dangerous because he knows his condition is fatal.

Suggested materials for battling materialism through instruction of God's people include:

 "Overcoming Materialism," Bible Study booklet and/or audio series by John MacArthur, available from Word of Grace Communications, P.O. Box 4000, Panorama City, CA, 91412. Excellent to teach the fundamentals from a verse by verse exposition.

Materials by Larry Burkett (who is not Reformed in theology, but whose Biblical principles are most serviceable to all who seek to live Biblically in regard to their stewardship).

Your Finances in Changing Times

The Complete Financial Guide for Young Couples

The Complete Financial Guide for Single Parents

Investing for the Future

All of these materials should be readily available from your local Christian bookseller.

 The Barnabas Foundation, an organization created to serve as independent advisor to individuals, can be consulted regarding estate planning and presentations to churches. They also produce excellent training material on the issue of stewardship entitled *Firstfruits*. (Tel: 708-532-3444; Fax: 708-532-1217)

THE OUTLOOK APRIL 1993

This battle against Satan is an ongoing struggle, and sometimes furious in its intensity. It is not finished for any of us until death removes us from this world and takes us beyond the devil's reach.

SATAN'S OPPOSITION TO MISSIONS

In His parable of the Sower, Jesus identified the devil as the one that snatches away the Word of God so that people will not believe and be saved (Lk. 8:12). Let every disappointed missionary and frustrated evangelist ponder those words!

Clearly in keeping with Jesus' teaching, the apostle Paul viewed

"Missions is war, and Satan does not let go of his captives without resistance."

the resistance that many people showed to his preaching as evidence of Satan's evil work. "The god of this world," wrote Paul, "has blinded the minds of the unbelieving" (2 Cor. 4:4).

When we consider what Satan does to keep people from believing the gospel, we sense all the more how indispensable is God's sovereign grace for anyone to be saved. Firsthand involvement in evangelism makes one appreciate sovereign grace all the more.

It was after all Paul the missionary, a man who knew from experience Satan's power to prevent people from seeing the truth no matter how clearly it was presented, who wrote to the Ephesian Christians about their salvation by divine grace:

You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient ...But because of his great love for us, God ... made us alive with Christ ... It is by grace you have been saved (Eph. 2:1-5).

SATAN IS NOT TO BE IGNORED

It is a dangerous thing to ignore Satan or deny his existence. That only gives greater power to his kingdom and leaves Christians more vulnerable to his attacks.

The only safe way to deal with Satan is to take seriously the warnings and admonitions of Scripture. Be alert, resist him and stand firm against his devices, counseled Peter (1 Pet. 5:8-9). Put on the whole armor of God, urged Paul, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes (Eph. 6:12).

evil's schemes (Eph. 6:12). It is important that missionaries

> and evangelists look upon the work of bringing the gospel into places of spiritual darkness from a Biblical perspective. Missions is war, and Satan does not let go of his captives without resistance. He is sure

to put roadblocks in the way of the gospel and attack the messengers where he can. For missionaries, keeping spiritually fit should always be a matter of major concern because the devil is looking for their weak points.

Strange and unexpected things can happen when missionaries invade Satan's territory and announce the reign of Jesus Christ. Writing as a veteran missionary who had seen both the power of Satan and the power of God unleashed in frontier situations, Paul observed: "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12).

The nature of this struggle has not changed. We are fools if we think Satan is less dangerous now. Next month we will discuss Satan's role in sickness, his clever disguises, and what current discussions of exorcism are all about.

Dr. Greenway is Professor of World Missiology at Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI.

Church & World Classis Submits

Classis Submits Overtures for 1993 Ratification of Women in All Offices

We want to call the attention of our readers to the overture submitted to Classis Grand Rapids East by First CRC. It comes in the political form of an Appeal designed to convince Synod 1993 of the error of Synod 1992. If the Appeal is adopted by Synod 1993, the way will be immediately open to proceed with the ratification of the decision of Synod 1990 to open all offices to women. The CR churches will have no more opportunity to debate or resist.

Despite the favorable advice given by Dr. Henry De Moor from Calvin Seminary, this Appeal is clearly illegally before Synod. Consult Church Order Article 30, reinforced by the SIC Study Committee which reported to Synod '91, with ratification of its work by Synod '92 (see Acts of Synod 1991, pp 714-15 and Agenda for Synod 1992, pp. 221-222). The Church Order clearly states that the appellant (in this case Classis Grand Rapids East) must appeal its complaint (re: Synod 1992) to the next higher body. There is none.

This Appeal-Overture should not appear in the Agenda for Synod 1993.

The Editors

Grand Rapids, Michigan February 4, 1993

Classis Grand Rapids East, after receiving a flurry of overtures on women in office from churches in classis, sent three overtures on to Synod 1993. One overture calls for ratification of women in office by a two year process ending in 1994; another requests a local exemption for Church of the Servant CRC. A third overture, however, may catch the brunt of conservative attention: an overture from First CRC asking Synod 1993 to ratify the 1990 decision on women in office without waiting for 1994.

Classis Grand Rapids East has sent overtures to synod for years asking for ratification of women in office and the presence of women elder overtures at classis was no surprise. Classis adopted and sent on to synod a proposal from Sherman Street CRC to make a church order change allowing women to serve in all the offices of the church via the regular process of a 1993 decision to change the church order and a 1994 decision to ratify the change. The motion passed unanimously with little discussion.

However, two other overtures attracted considerably more attention.

First CRC asked that classis send an overture to synod to "appeal the decision of Synod of 1992, Art. 105,B,4 to 'not ratify the change in Church Order Article 3' and overtures the Synod of 1993 to ratify the decision of the Synod of 1990 by changing Church Order Article 3 to read: 'All confessing members of the church who meet the biblical requirements are eligible for the office of minister, elder, deacon and evangelist.'"

The church cited five grounds, including one which states that nonratification binds the conscience of members who believe the Bible allows women's ordination, that "synod has no right to bind the conscience of members and churches where the Bible does not bind," and that "by forbidding the churches where Scripture does not clearly forbid, Synod undermines its own authority and invites disobedience from the churches." First CRC also said Report 31 of 1992 "sets forth positively the biblical grounds for women in ecclesiastical office" and that numerous study committees of the last twenty years have concluded that the Bible does not prohibit women in office.

According to First CRC's pastor, Rev. Morris Greidanus, the intent behind the overture is to appeal Synod 1992's nonratification, have synod rescind the decision against ratification and place itself back in the position where it was prior to the nonratification vote, and then have synod vote again on the 1990 proposal.

Dr. Henry De Moor, professor of church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary, attended classis as an advisor on church polity matters and was asked his advice on the legality of the procedure. "I concur that the overture from First Church is different in form from the others," said De Moor. "Ratification of the 1990 change in the church order is no longer an option in 1993, so formally speaking there can be no question of ratifying 1990 in 1993; there is nothing there dangling, it is dead."

"That is why there is this procedure of an appeal to place synod back in the position where it was prior to Synod 1992," said De Moor.

After hearing De Moor's advice, Classis Grand Rapids East voted unanimously to send the overture on to synod.

Classis then proceeded to address the request from Church of the Servant CRC for exemption from the ban on women elders, citing three grounds. The longest ground was the first, stating that "because through the years a large number of members have joined COS who could not maintain membership in churches where women's gifts were not fully utilized in leadership functions, serious damage would be done to our fellowship if the decision of the 1990 Synod, which approved women serving as elders, could not be implemented." Other grounds included that Report 31 of Synod 1992 was persuasive to the congregation and that although Synod 1992 cited "prudence" as a reason for nonratification, "Church of the Servant CRC believes that because of spiritual realities prevailing among its membership, prudence is an additional reason for appointing women elders."

Explaining why he wanted classis to send his request for exemption in along with a request for ratification, Rev. Jack Roeda of Church of the Servant said it was an alternate plan if Synod 1993 did not ratify women in office.

However, Rev. Archie Vander Hart of Fuller Avenue CRC thought differently. "My own gut reaction, and I feel synod will feel the same thing, is that this is coming to the father and asking for his daughter's hand in marriage after you've already gone to see the justice of the peace," said Vander Hart.

Building on Vander Hart's metaphor, Roeda responded that exceptions allowed must be allowed. "If this father has a thousand children and makes a rule which affects 950 of his daughters, it may not apply to all of them," said Roeda.

Other delegates said that synod's disapproval but failure to discipline churches with women elders amounted to a de facto local exemption. "I find it interesting that Madison Square has been doing this for years, Grace has been doing it for years, Washington has been doing it for years, but no one got really excited until Eastern Avenue did this," said Greidanus.

Classis voted to table the matter to allow the Church of the Servant delegates to fine-tune the overture during lunch. When classis returned to the matter, Church of the Servant added an additional ground that "synod itself recognizes 'that diversity within the denomination will result in variations in practice." After several amendments, the motion read that classis "requests Synod to deal with the request of the Church of the Servant Christian Reformed Church for exemption from the decision of the 1992 Synod '... that Synod not ratify the change in Church Order Article 3...' (Art. 105,b,4,p.699) to the effect that COS be permitted to continue its practice, begun in September 1992, of installing women elders."

Rev. Mark Vermaire, pastor of Sherman Street CRC, the most recent congregation to disobey the synodical ban on nominating women elders, asked what the Church of the Servant proposal meant for other congregations. "I just have a question wondering what is meant with other churches," said Vermaire. "Would they be able to write a letter asking for the same thing?"

Roeda responded in the affirmative. "I don't think this would prevent Sherman, Eastern or Grace from asking the same thing," said Roeda. "We are saying, if you don't want to implement 1990, you must make exceptions; our local ministry would be radically affected should this be allowed to stand."

After further discussion, classis sent the Church of the Servant over-

ture on to synod along with the other two overtures.

Learning of the decisions, Dr. W. Robert Godfrey countered the two unexpected overtures from Classis Grand Rapids East — especially the proposal calling for ratification in 1993 — as divisive and dangerous to the unity of the church.

"In purely technical terms, I would guess that De Moor's advice was correct that they can overture synod to do anything," said Dr. Robert Godfrey, professor of church history at Westminster Theological

Seminary in California.

"Were the synod to adopt that overture, it would be tragic," said Godfrey. "There is this attitude that synod can do whatever it wants, which is fundamentally a lawless attitude."

"I feel there is a growing disregard for God's law in the Christian Reformed Church," said Godfrey.

"In the first place, it would put the CRC in violation of the Scripture, which is of course the most important thing," said Godfrey. "Of all the study committee reports they cite, none of those have ever been formally approved by synod; to my mind and to the minds of many in the CRC, the Scripture clearly prohibits women in office."

"Also, the efforts of the synod of 1992 to maintain unity in the church would be destroyed by such action and we would see more congregations, I believe, leaving the church and the financial problems of the church would continue to grow," said Godfrey. "I think both for Biblical reasons and also for practical and pastoral reasons this overture

is very ill-advised."

To date, none of the large conservative congregations in California have seceded from the CRC. According to Godfrey, who also serves as vice-president of the consistory of the 863-member Escondido (CA) CRC, that restraint might not continue indefinitely. "I would want if possible to act in concert with other congregations and ministers; as one committed to Presbyterian polity I don't like to contemplate merely individual action," said Godfrey. "But it would be very difficult for me to see how I could stay in the Christian Reformed Church under those circumstances."

Darrell Todd Maurina Reformed Believers Press Service

Grand Rapids East Unanimously Rejects Call for End to Women Elders; Nixes Ban on Women Delegates to Classis

Grand Rapids, Michigan February 4, 1993

Showing a highly unusual degree of unity on the women-in-office question for a regional body in the bitterly divided Christian Reformed denomination, Classis Grand Rapids East's January 21 meeting unanimously rejected an overture from retired Calvin College professor Dr. Gordon Spykman, Calvin Seminary President Dr. James De Jong and four other council members of Plymouth Heights CRC in Grand Rapids asking that four councils in classis be directed to stop disobeying synod by ordaining women elders.

At the same meeting, classis received a report from its stated clerk indicating that six churches and classes had protested the synodical disobedience in Classis Grand Rapids East. Sherman Street CRC also submitted a letter announcing that it had voted to nominate elder candidates without regard to gender, beginning with the next council elections. The action by Sherman Street and a similar announcement in another classis by River Terrace CRC in East Lansing, Michigan, upped to twelve the total number of CRC congregations which are known to have voted to admit women to all the offices. Other churches are reported to be planning similar action in the near future.

Plymouth Heights CRC, one of the few remaining moderate conservative churches in Classis Grand Rapids East, has been confronted with the women in office issue in its own classis in a way faced by few other churches. Madison Square CRC had elected women elders even prior to Synod 1990's decision, allowing women to serve in all the offices of the church. Grace CRC, which earlier had voted not to elect any elders unless women could serve and by 1990 was out of elders due to term expirations, voted after Synod 1990 to elect women to all the offices of the church. Following Synod 1992's refusal to ratify the 1990 women in office decision, Eastern Avenue CRC and Church of the

Servant CRC ordained women to all the offices of the church. The recent vote of Sherman Street CRC means that a third of the churches in classis have chosen the path of ecclesiastical disobedience.

However, Plymouth Heights is itself a divided church. In 1992, eleven of the 36 council members including De Jong, Spykman and the other four council members signing the new overture - brought an overture asking that the ratification vote be deferred until 1994 and saw their overture rejected by both the Plymouth Heights council and Classis Grand Rapids East. While Synod 1992 voted down the 1990 decision rather than postponing it to 1994, it did adopt a modified version of one of the grounds of the Plymouth Heights council minority that "in the present highly polarized situation, the peace and unity of our churches, to which Scripture calls us ... will be better served by maintaining the status quo, even with its ambiguities, than by forcing this issue to a decision that will certainly cause significant departures from the denomination."

This year, confronted with massive ecclesiastical disobedience in their own classis, six members of the Plymouth Heights council brought an overture to their consistory asking classis "to admonish councils and congregations that have decided to proceed with the ordination of women as elders and to rescind these decisions by March 1, 1993."

The overture includes a background statement of fraternal esteem for the sister congregations but indicates that the signers are "deeply concerned that their action on this matter will further erode denominational solidarity and adversely affect our joint, denominational ministries."

"We believe that as churches in Classis Grand Rapids East we have a special responsibility to foster healing and trust in the present denominational climate, since the direction of our denomination and its ministries is closely identified in the minds of many with the actions of

our classis and the churches in it," the overture states. "We note further, that the decision of our sister churches to ordain women as elders betrays the spirit of seeking the greater good in which synod reached its decisions; delegates of deep conviction on both sides of the subject of ordaining women as pastors and elders determined denominational policy in the interest of preserving our unity in Christ."

The signers also note that banning the ordination of women elders "would not interfere with using women's gifts in pastoral capacities, which we recognize could be a source of rich blessing to these

congregations."

According to the introduction to the overture, it was approved by a majority of elders but defeated by a majority of the full council at Ply-

mouth Heights CRC.

Neither of Plymouth Heights' two delegates to classis were signers of the overture. As a result, Classis Grand Rapids East faced an extremely unusual parliamentary problem: having been properly processed through the local church assemblies, the overture was legally before classis but not one delegate from any of the fifteen churches was willing to move the overture so it could be considered. After the chairman announced that the overture was about to die for lack of a mover, Plymouth Heights pastor Rev. Peter Van Elderen announced that he would sponsor it out of concern for his members. "Out of pastoral concern, I will make the motion that this be discussed by classis, but not out of support for their goals," said Van Elderen. The motion then received a second and came up for debate.

No speakers supported the overture. Rev. Morris Greidanus, pastor of First CRC and a member of the committee appointed in 1991 to gather Biblical grounds for the 1990 synodical decision to open all the offices to women, said it went beyond even what synod had asked.

"When Washington, D.C. [another church with women elders] came up, synod said you cannot have women elders, but they allowed them to fill out their terms," said Greidanus. "This motion is saying we don't even want to do that, we want to take back their ordination."

After a brief discussion, classis defeated the overture on a voice vote. Not a single delegate responded when the chairman called for those in favor of the motion.

Although it rejected the plea from the six Plymouth Heights council members, classis gave more consideration to an overture from Neland Avenue CRC, generally regarded as supportive of women's ordination, asking that classis refuse to seat women elders who might be sent to classis. Far from being a merely theoretical possibility, the churches of Classis Grand Rapids East were urged by some speakers at a special discussion session following Synod 1992 to show their solidarity with women by sending a woman delegate to classis.

Neland Avenue came to classis with three recommendations: "that classis declare that it does not approve the actions of four of its member churches that have ordained women as elders," that "classis declare that it will not seat women elders as delegates to classis," and that "classis delay further action with respect to these churches until synod addresses our overtures."

As grounds, Neland noted that the church order does not allow women elders or women delegates to classis but also noted that the decisions would "serve as guidance to all the churches of classis" and that "although the four member churches have provided classis with grounds for their actions, classis has not evaluated these grounds."

"I think the primary motivation for that whole overture was principial; what does it mean to say we live in a broader assembly, a classis, and a denomination?" asked Rev. Duane Kelderman, pastor of Neland Avenue CRC.

"We are not saying we disapprove of the actions of the four churches," said Kelderman. "We should be aware that if we initiate Recommendation A [classical non-approval of women elders], we have virtually initiated an investigation of these churches; I think it would be incumbent upon us to act."

"Let's give synod a chance to rectify this; let's wait as long as possible; we may shift the focus from these four local congregations to classis itself," said Kelderman.

Noting the flood of protests and complaints to Classis Grand Rapids East about its failure to discipline churches in ecclesiastical disobedience, Kelderman said that the protests demanded action of some sort by classis. "If we would adopt this, we then would have a recommen-

dation for action, then we have something to say to these other churches, these other classes," said Kelderman. "I think Classis Grand Rapids East, if it does nothing, really jeopardizes its credibility in the ongoing debates."

"We were trying to say as little as we could but yet get a process

started," said Kelderman.

Rev. Roger Van Harn, pastor of Grace CRC, relinquished the chairmanship of classis to state that he supported the motion despite pastoring one of the churches in ecclesiastical disobedience.

In an ironic parallel to a 1991 debate in Classis Niagara over deposing the consistories of two conservative congregations which were about to secede from the CRC, in which classis later ruled that the delegates from the two congregations faced with deposition should not have been allowed to vote, the chairman cited Church Order Article 34's prohibition on a delegate voting "on any matter in which he himself or his church is particularly involved" and ruled that since the motion dealt with four specific churches, those churches could not vote on the main motion.

Rev. Jack Roeda, pastor of Church of the Servant, protested the ruling. "What would you do if there were twelve of these congregations?" asked Roeda. "Would the decision be made by the four? Classis could be tyrannized by the minority based

on this ruling.

To avoid the appearance of making a negative statement about the churches in ecclesiastical disobedience, one delegate moved that the words "classis declare that it does not approve the actions" be changed to "classis declare that it has not approved the actions" — changing the motion from a statement of opinion to a statement of fact without opinion.

However, Rev. Roy Berkenbosch, co-pastor of Eastern Avenue CRC, said the proposal weakened the motion. "The strength of this motion as originally presented was that it would give us something to say to these churches which have objections to our actions," said Berkenbosch. "If we make this change, we are not telling them anything they do not already know."

Following further debate, the proposed amendment was voted down. On a close vote, classis passed the main motion on not approving the actions of the churches in ecclesiastical disobedience." However, Neland's proposed ban on delegating women elders to classis did not fare as well.

Kelderman defended his church's overture. "We judge that it is reasonable to put some bounds around our ecclesiastical disobedience," said Kelderman. "As we struggle to draw a balance between our loyalty to synod and our Biblical convictions, this puts us on a middle ground."

However, Rev. John Timmer of Woodlawn CRC argued that the overture was unnecessary. "If we are on record opposing these churches opening the office of elder to women, why would we seat an elder at classis?" asked Timmer.

"If that's the case there shouldn't be any problem with passing it,"

responded Kelderman.

"We have a pastoral problem here," said Kelderman, providing further grounds for passing the overture. "If we don't adopt something like this and one of these churches were to send a woman to classis, we don't know what would happen. Would other churches protest? Then we'd have a person here and have to fight."

Rev. Al Luke, pastor of Boston Square CRC, said that such a fight would be unnecessary. "It seems to me that should a church send a delegate here, we should seat her," said

Luke.

Classis Grand Rapids East finally voted not to pass the Neland motion banning women elders from classis and later approved the third overture saying that classis would not discipline churches in ecclesiastical disobedience until at least Synod 1993.

"Neland Avenue does not resent what the churches have done; if you look at the record, we have been quite supportive," said Kelderman. "After Synod 1993 acts, we have something on our table that we have to deal with; our view was to let synod try to straighten this thing out."

"Time is on our side on this one," said Kelderman.

Darrell Todd Maurina Reformed Believers Press Service

Book Review

The Body: Being light in darkness, by Charles Colson with Ellen Santilli Vaughn, Word Publishing, Dallas, 1992, 455 pp. Reviewed by Thomas Vanden Heuvel.

Charles Colson, well-known in Christian circles as the founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries and former presidential aide, has teamed up with Ellen Santilli Vaughn, vicepresident of executive communications for Prison Fellowship, to publish a book which may well be the most influential book for evangelical Christians in recent memory. It is about the church of Jesus Christ. It is a practical textbook on ecclesiology spiced with "powerful, moving stories from Christians in Eastern Europe who defied communism and lived to see its collapse, to believers in inner-city Los Angeles, Midwest suburbs and on Death Row in South Carolina."

What is urgently needed today is a recovery and restoration of the Biblical view of the church. This is what *THE BODY* gives us.

The church is not incidental to the great cosmic struggle for the hearts and souls of modern men and women. It is the instrument God has chosen for that battle. To bring hope and truth to a needy world the church must be the church (p.32).

Colson is a modern day prophet whose warnings we must take to heart. The church is called by Christ to be salt and light. Independence from the culture is what gives the church its reforming capacity and enables it to point society toward the truth (p. 239). Today the church is in Babylonian captivity, not in the clutches of a pagan emporer or a corrupted ecclesiastical hierarchy as in the early church and the church of the middle Ages, but rather in its easy acquiescence to the values of a thoroughly secularized culture (p.246).

Colson challenges the church to get out of captivity to the secularized culture. His call must be heeded by every particular church which claims Christ as its Head.

This challenge is summarized in the following six commitments:

- There must be a commitment to the truth, that is to God's inerrant Word.
- There must be a commitment to the fact that the church is the people of God and the church must be the church.
- There must be a commitment to the fear of God.
- There must be a commitment to the realization that God is sovereign over all and that we must, therefore, have a Biblically informed view of all of life.
- There must be a commitment to be agents of God's justice in society at large and to see His whole world from the perspective of His truth.
- There must be a commitment to have Luther's courage to declare our independence from culture and take our stand.

What a refreshing challenge! James I. Packer writes about this book: "With punchy prose and haunting stories, Colson challenges, humbles and inspires. If you are willing to be made uncomfortable in the cause of real and deep church renewal this is the book for you. It comes from the heart; may it go to the heart."

This book is *must reading* for everyone who wants to be part of *the body*.

THE OUTLOOK APRIL 1993

Godfrey Appointed Third President of Westminster in California

The Board of Trustees of Westminster Theological Seminary in California has named the Rev. Dr. W. Robert Godfrey to become the third President of the school. Godfrey, who has been Professor of Church History at the seminary since 1981, will begin his service as president on June 1, 1993. He succeeds Robert G. den Dulk who is completing almost thirty years of service with the Westminsters in Pennsylvania and California, the last five as President of the California seminary. Den Dulk will continue his work on behalf of the seminary part-time in development and constituency relations.

Godfrey's appointment by the board on March 8 culminated a six-month process in which a Search Committee reviewed over forty names, leading to interviews with the three leading candidates in mid-February. The recommendation of Godfrey's appointment came to the board with the committee's

unanimous support.

Godfrey is a graduate of Stanford University (A.B., M.A., Ph.D.) and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (M.Div.). He taught church history at Westminster Theological Seminary (Pennsylvania) from 1974 until his move to Westminster in California in its second year of operation. He was academic dean of Westminster in California from 1990 to 1992. An ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church, he is an enthusiastic and articulate spokesman for the inerrancy and authority of Scripture and for the Reformed faith, not only in his own denomination but also among Reformed and evangelical churches generally. He has served the denomination as an elder of congregations in Broomall, PA and Escondido, CA, and as a delegate to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church.

Godfrey's international ecumenical contacts include service on the Theology Working Group of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. In 1988 he was convener of the Lausanne Committee's Consultation on Conversion in Hong Kong, and in 1985 he presented a major study to the Consultation on the Holy Spirit and Evangelization in Oslo, Norway. Last November he traveled to Seoul, Korea to lecture in a special conference commemorating the ministry of the influential theologian and church leader, Dr. Yun Sun Park. In February 1993 he was elected Recording Secretary of the steering committee of the International Reformed Fellowship and chairman of its theological committee at its organizational meeting in Los Angeles. He also serves on the boards of Christians United for Reformation and of the den Dulk Christian Foundation.

Godfrey has taught in such conferences as the Pensacola Theological Institute in Florida, Ligonier Ministries, the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology and the International Reformed Fellowship. He has been visiting professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando, FL); and he has lectured at Biola University and Erskine Theological Seminary.

He has co-edited and contributed to a Festschrift for Philip Edcumbe Hughes, *Through Christ's Word* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985) and *Theonomy:* A Reformed Critique (Zondervan, 1990), a collaborative project of the two Westminster faculties. He is a contributing editor of *The Outlook*, the monthly journal of the Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Westminster Theological Seminary in California was established in Escondido, CA, in 1979 to serve students wishing to study for the pastoral ministry and related areas of church service. The seminary currently serves 171 students from across North America and around the world in its Masters and Doctoral programs. Its influential faculty is widely known for its scholarship, dedication to the Bible, lecturing abilities and demonstration of pastoral concern.