

May 15, 2008
**THE
STANDARD
BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

In This Issue:

- ◆ *Sending of the Spirit of the Son* **362**
- ◆ *Pornography: Balak Redivivus (3)* **364**
- ◆ *Covenant of Sovereign Grace (12)* **366**
- ◆ *All Around Us* **370**
- ◆ *Preparing for the Office of Deacon (3)* **372**
- ◆ *Sins Requiring Suspension
and Deposition from Office* **374**
- ◆ *The Life of a Christian* **377**
- ◆ *The Ways of Her House* **380**
- ◆ *News From Our Churches* **382**

Volume 84 ◆ Number 16

The Sending of the Spirit of the Son

"And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

Galatians 4: 6,7

The young Christians in the Christian churches of Galatia were being deceived by Judaizers. The chief point of the Judaizers was that the Christians were still servants under the law. As a result, these young Christians were reverting to their old way of thinking, that they had to be good enough to be saved and to stay saved. They saw themselves as servants who had to earn a position, not as children and heirs who already had and could not lose the position.

Paul explains that the Judaizers were wrong. During the time of the civil and ceremonial laws, it may have seemed as if the Judaizers were right, but that was because in the old dispensation believers as a whole were spiritually as young children and not

as mature adults. Just as a child ought not to be treated as a mature adult, so in the old dispensation the church was like a child, not different from a servant, though one day the child would be the master of the servants (1). The Judaizers were still wrong, however, because by the performance of the civil and ceremonial laws the people of God did not earn a position. They were only being taught like children.

It is more obvious that the Judaizers were wrong now that the fullness of time has come. "God sent forth his Son...to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." They are sons (not servants). And "because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts." The only ground and reason for the Spirit of the Son being sent forth is "because ye are sons." The presence of the Spirit in their hearts enabling them to cry, "Abba, Father," is the proof that they are children of God and not His servants.

Therefore, do not be foolish and act like slaves. You are sons. And you are heirs in the Father's house.



Who is this Spirit of the Son?

God is one, undivided in His essence and in all of His attributes. And the God who is one in essence is three in person. There are three divine subjects or persons in the eternal Godhead. These three live in the entire Godhead, not just in a part of it. God the Father lives the whole divine life as Father; God the Son lives the whole divine life as Son; and God the Spirit does the same as Spirit.

The person of God the Son joined His eternal divine nature with our human nature by coming into our flesh. As God the Son did this, so God the Spirit became the Spirit of the Son. On Pentecost Sunday, Peter explained that when Jesus completed the mission that the Father had given Him to do, God raised Jesus from the dead, exalted Him to His right hand, and gave Him the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). Thus the Spirit became the Spirit of the Son. And then Jesus, the Son of God, gave His Spirit to those whom God had elected to be His sons and daughters. The Spirit whom the Galatians received is the Spirit of the Son.

How is this Spirit sent forth?

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Barrett L. Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: gritters@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: (616) 457-5970
FAX: (616) 457-5980
(e-mail: tim@rfa.org)

Postmaster:

Send address changes to
The Standard Bearer
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: cprfaudiostore@yahoo.co.uk)

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$21.00 per year in the U.S., US\$25.00 elsewhere.

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There is a parallel between God sending forth His Son in the fullness of time (4) and God sending forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts (6). God sent His Son into our human nature with the Spirit. The Son, as the Head of His people, received the Spirit at His baptism when He revealed that He was actively accepting the mission the Father had given Him to save those given to Him by the Father. Then, when God exalted Christ with all the blessings of salvation in Him, He gave Him the quickening Spirit as the means to apply the blessings of salvation to those whom God had elected. This Spirit the Son of God gave to His church. Out of the Father, through Christ, into the church.

The incarnation is necessary for the sending forth of the Spirit. Without the Son coming into the likeness of our flesh, there is no possibility of a relationship between Jesus Christ and those given to Him of the Father. God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because we are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts.



The Spirit is sent into the hearts of those who have been redeemed unto the adoption of sons.

Scripture speaks of the sonship of God's children as taking place in different phases. In the legal sense, we are children by God's act of giving us the right to be God's children. The legal right of adoption is given already in predestination. God "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:5). This means that we always have been God's children. The ground for our adoption is established in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus established the basis for our right to be children of the living God. God

sent forth His Son "to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." And God realizes our adoption in regeneration. We are born again after the image of God's Son. We are made to look like Him spiritually. And by the Spirit within us He assures us that we are God's sons.

Because God adopted us as His sons, He sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. Because of our adoption in election and in the cross of Christ, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, and this was so that we might know that we are His children.

Our text says that the Spirit was sent "into your hearts." The heart is the fountain, the center, of our life from a spiritual-ethical viewpoint. So when the Spirit of the Son dwells in our hearts, then we are truly children of the heavenly Father. And it is by the power of the Spirit of the Son in our hearts that we learn to live the life of His children.

Not slaves. But we are children of the heavenly Father!



What is the result of the Spirit of the Son being in our hearts?

The first result is that the Spirit of the Son dwelling in us cries, "Abba, Father." It is the Spirit in Christ who cries "Abba" to His Father. And it is the Spirit in us who cries "Abba" to our heavenly Father. When this Spirit cries "Abba, Father," then He enables the adopted children to cry the same (Rom. 8:15).

Also, it is a striking thing that the Spirit in us does not *say* this, but *cries* it. There is the implication of something spoken with deep emotion, with fervency and earnestness. It is not something you think about before you say it, but it is instinctively expressed, especially in the time of some trouble.

Those who cry "Abba, Father" have childlike feelings regarding God. They do not simply believe


in Him, but they love Him and enjoy Him. They love Him for the love He has for them. The adoption of wretched sinners into God's family reveals the greatness of God's love. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3:1). Adoption puts us into a family relationship with the eternal and holy God. The realization of the grace and love that characterize His relationship to us is the basis for our prayers and our cries to Him, especially in time of need.

The cry "Abba, Father" needs nothing to be added to it. The mere address of the Almighty God as our Father says it all. The Spirit of God's Son works in us the realization of the intimacy of the relationship established, and of the nearness of help for those who are His children.

The second result is the realization that we are heirs of God through Christ. The present relationship of adoption implies a future inheritance. We have a portion allotted to us by the Father.

This inheritance is ours "through Christ" because He is *the* Heir of all things (Heb. 1:2). We become heirs only as co-heirs with Christ. We are heirs because we are in Him (cf. Rom. 8:17a; Luke 22:29, 30; and Rev. 3:21).

That which is our portion is God—we are heirs "of God." We have Him forever; we sup with Him and He with us forever. This means that we have all the blessings and privileges of being in His family and of having Him as our Father. After being guided by His counsel, we are received by Him in glory where we have Him. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?"

What tremendous benefits! All because the Spirit of God's Son is in our hearts. We are nothing less than children of the living God Himself! And if children, then heirs! May the wonder of Pentecost live on within us. 

Pornography: Balak Redivivus (3)

Whether Moab's King Balak or the prophet Balaam was more culpable for tempting Israel with fornication, *both* of them had a hand in bringing God's people into great evil. The motivation was Balak's: "Destroy this people!" Balaam had the cunning: "Since God has prevented me from cursing them, let us send our women among them to cause them to sin *sexually*. This will bring them under their God's judgment."

Today, Balaam's and Balak's strategy is revived with a vengeance. Thus, the title: *Balak Redivivus*—"Balak, given new life." Satan, arch-enemy of the church, has refined his strategy, improved his methods, and developed new weapons. But the basic goals are the same. One of them is to tempt the people of God with sexual sin, especially through pornography.

The end is enslavement to the sin. Millions and millions are in bondage to sexual sin. The grip of it is so powerful that a man may be awash in self-loathing, curse himself for his stupidity, promise never *ever* to do it again...and return to it the very next day. The dynamics of this sin are like that of any other addiction, described well at the end of Proverbs 23 with regard to drunkenness: "They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again." The enslavement is like drug-

addiction: A person can never have enough. The sin accelerates as he always chases new "highs." Because it never says, "It is enough," this addiction is like the always-hungry grave, fire, barren womb, and the two daughters of the horseleech who cry, "Give, Give!" (see Prov. 30:15, 16).

God's people fall into this sin. *Reformed* men and women become prey to this roaring lion. Their natures are not immune to *any* sin. Not this one, either.

For this sin God sends judgments. For God's people, the judgments are chastisements, sent in love to correct them, to lead them back to Him in repentance and faith. But the judgments are painful. The chastisements may be very sharp.

Sometimes the sexual sins *themselves* are judgments for *other* sins. God allows one to fall into this sin as judgment for his sin of forsaking Him. His idolatry may be chastened with the steep falls into sexual sin (cf. the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 95, to see that the sin of idolatry is the sin of all of us).

May God deliver His church from the terrifying and violent whirlpool of sexual sin.

The Spear of Phinehas

When Israel fell into fornication with the Moabitish women, the end of the matter was the public execution of two, whose fornication was flagrant. Before the eyes of the publicly gathered people of Israel, the son of one of Israel's leaders led the daughter of a Moabite ruler into a tent—to commit fornication. Their names were Zimri and Cozbi. A godly

priest in Israel, zealous for God's name, followed them in. His name was Phinehas. "And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel" (Num. 25:1-15).

God praised the righteous, and violent, acts of Phinehas. "He was zealous for my sake." God rewarded him and his children: "And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel" (Num. 25:11, 13). His bold action was so important that God memorialized it in the Psalms: "Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed. And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore" (Ps. 106:30-31).

Corresponding to Phinehas' spear in the new dispensation is discipline, church discipline, church discipline that ends in *excommunication*. But not all discipline ends in a sinner's being cut off from the church of Christ and from the hope of heaven. In fact, the *purpose* of discipline is to bring him to *repentance*. Neither immediate, nor final, it is rather a *process* by which he can, by God's grace and with the church's help, *escape* the sin that ensnared him.

But the church must be willing to exercise discipline. Because discipline, according to Matthew 18, is usually initiated by the members of the church, all

Previous article in this series:
May 1, 2008, p. 316.

the members of the church must be bold. The wounded wife, perhaps sooner rather than later, will involve the consistory so that the remedy of discipline may be applied. (If her husband does not repent, she has no choice except to call the elders.) Then the elders, quietly and patiently, but very firmly and without being naïve, will closely work with the struggling sinner until he gains the victory. Or until he is cut off.

Thus, sorrow and mourning over the sin by the church are not enough—even godly sorrow and heartfelt mourning. The Israelites were weeping before the tabernacle. But God did not stay the plague until Phinehas took up his spear and dealt with the sin. Discipline is necessary.

Discipline is mercy.

It is mercy to the sinner, for whom the discipline may be a remedy!

Discipline is also mercy to the churches, among whom the “leaven” of pornography and sexual sin will otherwise spread and infect the whole. Discipline “stays the plague” among the people. God is pleased with the church that deals rightly with sin.

Preaching, Public Prayers, and the Elders

Most sexual sin is never reported to the elders. The churches can nevertheless wage war against the revived Balak and his prophets. They do this primarily by preaching, both in the pulpit and the vitally important catechism room.

Consideration of who the enemy is, and how he works, will spur consistories to instruct their ministers to preach about sexual sins, to make humble but bold and clear applications to these temptations the believers face. Preaching is the sharp “sword of the spirit” that God uses today. Preaching will warn of the ter-

rible consequences of sexual sin. But preaching will also direct the faith of the shame-filled people of God to the cross, where Christ died and paid for sin, sexual sins too. At the cross, Christ defeated the church’s great enemy. Paul can therefore encourage the church at Rome regarding the fearful power of sin: “For sin shall not have dominion over you” (Rom. 6:14).

God honors—now and in the future—the preacher and the church willing to wield this weapon against the enemy.

The public prayers of the church ought to be pleas for help: “Dear God, bring to ruin the authors, the writers, the photographers, the models, the producers, and all who are involved in this assault against the church. Holy Father, we look forward to the day of their final and public destruction. But, Lord God, forgive our sins and deliver us from evil.”

Given the pervasive nature of this sin in our society, elders will seriously consider addressing this temptation in the annual family visits. The people of God—especially, those who have teenage children at home—want elders to address the matter. As they teach their children to battle sin, this will be support for them to raise the issue in family devotions and family prayers. “The elders discussed this with us. Let’s talk and pray about that this evening.”

Christian Homes

In the homes, fathers will take the lead by blocking all the “portals” that allow the filth into their homes. They will educate themselves about all the means the devil uses to gain access to their children. And then they will do what it takes to make it impossible for their children to partake in the sin—at least in their home. With regard to the Internet (wives and mothers es-

pecially want to listen carefully here), the fathers will see to it, with the help of their wives, that what every member of the family sees on the computer (and television) can be monitored. What the father sees too.

There are many ways this can happen. Parents, husbands, and wives must learn. If the reader wants ideas, he might start by investigating the computer program “Covenant Eyes: Internet Accountability.” The reference is to the book of Job: “I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?” (31:1). The program notifies a designated person of all the web-sites that have been visited, highlighting those of “concern.” Women, what would be the reason a man would not want such accountability, or not allow it?

The Heart

But the battle begins in our hearts.

There have been those who have tried to withstand unchasteness by their own powers, by fasting and labor. But they have broken down their bodies in the attempt and yet have accomplished nothing; for evil desire is extinguished by nothing but the heavenly dew and rain of God’s grace. Fasting, laboring, and watching must accompany it, but they are not sufficient.... The cure must come from within outward, not from without inward. For disease has grown into the flesh and blood, the marrow and the veins; it is not outside in the dress or clothing. Therefore little is achieved by trying to quench lust with an external remedy. We may indeed weaken the body and destroy it with fastings and labors, but the evil lust is not thereby banished. Yet faith can subdue and check it so that it must give place to the Spirit (Martin Luther, of course).

The heart is essential. Without waging the battle in the heart, there can be no victory. I want

to flee fornication *in my heart*. I want to obey my God from my heart. I desire to observe the seventh commandment within, as Jesus taught in Matthew 5:28.


Fighting sin *within* is the basic but difficult work of daily conversion. In this work, the believer who has fallen into this sin begins with sorrow, in his heart, that he provoked God by sexual sin. (Everyone who struggles with besetting sin ought to memorize the Heidelberg Catechism's beautiful and wise Lord's Day 33.) In converting the sinner, God gives him the grace "more and more to hate" sexual sins. Then, and then

only, can he "flee from them."

In keeping with Scripture, the Heidelberg describes this work as "mortifying" our old nature (see Eph. 4:22-24 and Col. 3:5-10). We "put to death" what we find in our old nature. Because our old nature is nothing less than we ourselves, mortifying it is painful struggle—the most painful struggle we can endure. But when God gives grace to do that, we also learn the "quickening of the new man." God grants a "sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ," so that we "with love and delight...live according to the will of God in all good works."

Before he attains that victory, the believer may need the help of fellow saints. Regular meetings with the minister and an elder may be necessary, with concrete steps taken for his particular circumstances.

But God promises victory. The victory of a pure conscience, deliverance from the terrible shame, and the ability to live chastely, in marriage or single life.

Look to the holy God who justly judges sexual sins. And remember His mercy, a mercy that comes in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. 

Special Article

Prof. David Engelsma

The Covenant of Sovereign Grace (12) or The Decisive Influence of the Reformation Gospel upon the Orthodox Doctrine of the Covenant in the Netherlands

Graafland on Covenant and Election in Calvin

In his magisterial study of the origin and development of the covenant in Reformed Protestantism, *Van Calvijn tot Comrie* (English translation: *From Calvin to Comrie*, 3 vols., Boeken- centrum, 1992-1996; all quotations from this work that follow are my translation of the Dutch), the Dutch theologian C. Graafland acknowledges that in Calvin's

theology election governs the covenant of grace.

At the outset of his study of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant, Graafland recognizes that the fundamental issue in understanding Calvin's doctrine of the covenant, as it is the fundamental issue in the entire development of the doctrine of the covenant in Reformed Protestantism, is the "relation between covenant and election" (*Van Calvijn*, vol. 1, p. 81). For Calvin, says Graafland, "election is the heart of God's church. This has the result that when Calvin speaks about the covenant, he does so in direct connection with election" (*Van Calvijn*, vol. 1, p. 82).

According to Graafland, Calvin "allows the covenant to be governed by election. The covenant is *merely* 'means' for the realizing of election. Election is the main thing, and the covenant stands in the service of election" (*Van Calvijn*, vol. 1, p. 131; see also p. 148). Indeed, for Calvin, the covenant is governed by the double decree of predestination and is the means both of salvation and damnation.

The covenant as means of salvation and damnation [in Calvin's theology] still has an important function. Not for nothing is the covenant called God's "means" by which He performs His work of salvation. If it finally is ful-

Prof. Engelsma is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Previous article in this series: April 15, 2008, p. 318.

filled in or must give way to the relentless electing and reprobating action of God on the ground of His eternal counsel, it still has fulfilled an important function, exactly in the service of the execution of God's counsel. That function appears then to be as well a positive one as a negative one. It is positive for the elect. The covenant with its offer of salvation and the summons (demand) to enter into it gives to the elect the way along which they, by recognition of their own weakness and unworthiness, are made receptive to the need of God's Spirit in order to come to faith and salvation. For the reprobate this same covenant with the same offer of salvation and demand to believe has the function to expose their obstinate disobedience and thus to render them guilty before God, who on the ground of this disobedience is then also just in the execution of His decree of reprobation, which was taken already from eternity, and in His actual condemnation [of them] (*Van Calvijn*, vol. 1, p. 169).

Graafland sums up Calvin's view of the covenant this way:

The most characteristic aspect of this vision [of the covenant by Calvin] appeared to be that in it election and covenant stand in an intense relation of tension. Calvin tries to do maximum justice to the historical dealing of God with Israel and the Christian church in this world, but with this he yet repeatedly allows this history as it were to be dominated by eternity. It is the tension between the "unreal" (time) and the "real" (eternity), in which the first ["unreal time"] is the vehicle of the last ["real eternity"]. This structure Calvin has worked out in his doctrine of the covenant, according to which the intrinsic worth of the covenant appears to lie in this, that it is the "means of salvation," the means for the realizing of the salvation that has been considered and decreed by God from eternity and that realizes itself throughout time in order (anew) to flow out into

eternity (the eternal, heavenly life) (*Van Calvijn*, vol. 2, p. 7).

The Dutch Reformed theologian returns to Calvin's doctrine of the covenant at the very end of his three-volume study of the doctrine of the covenant in Reformed Protestantism. He emphasizes even more strongly and bluntly that in Calvin's theology election governs the covenant.

Calvin proceeds to subject the doctrine of the covenant to the doctrine of election. The covenant is part of election, and indeed in this sense, that the covenant is viewed as very definitely *under* election [Graafland plays on the Dutch word for "part" in the preceding phrase, "The covenant is part of election." The Dutch word is "onderdeel." The Dutch is: "Het verbond als onderdeel wordt gezien. Graafland emphasizes that for Calvin the covenant is very definitely subjected to election]. Election is the main thing, and within the framework of election the covenant receives its place as the general form of election. This general election serves to the end of realizing special election.

Graafland continues:

[Calvin] saw the decisive factor of the covenant locked up in the eternal, divine decree of election and reprobation. Because others (humanists) did not want to know anything of this, Calvin lays even heavier stress on it (*Van Calvijn*, vol. 3, p. 395).

Criticism of Lillback

Graafland is sharply critical of Peter A. Lillback's presentation of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant as divorced from, or, as Lillback conceives it, "unhindered" by, election (see Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*, Baker, 2001). Lillback's comparison of the covenant doctrine of Bullinger and the covenant doctrine of Calvin is

"drastically deficient," according to Graafland. Lillback states that Calvin "stands in full union" with Bullinger on the covenant. The truth is that whereas Bullinger treats the doctrine of the covenant without any mention of election, "this...is for Calvin impossible." "When Calvin speaks about the covenant, he does that in a direct connection with election" (*Van Calvijn*, vol. 1, p. 82).

Still more devastating is Graafland's criticism of Lillback for proposing that Calvin viewed election as governed by the covenant.

It is noteworthy [writes Graafland] that Calvin exactly in his commentary on Romans 9-11 speaks frequently about the covenant (39 times). For P. A. Lillback this is a proof that Calvin's doctrine of election is governed by the covenant.... It will actually become plain in the continuation of our investigation [of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant] that the truth of the matter is precisely the other way round, namely, that from this study it appears that Calvin's doctrine of the covenant stands entirely in the service of his doctrine of election. With regard to Calvin's exposition of Genesis 17, it is plain in any case that (in contradiction of the judgment of Lillback) Calvin's doctrine of the covenant is full of references to election (*Van Calvijn*, vol. 1, p. 88).

Graafland exposes Lillback's forcing of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant into the mold of a doctrine of the covenant that is "liberated" from God's election.

A striking gap in the study of P. A. Lillback of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant is the virtually complete lack of attention paid to the pneumatological [having to do with the work of the Spirit of Christ] dimension of the covenant, which is exactly of decisive significance for Calvin. The cause of this is to be found in the fact that he [Lillback]

one-sidedly emphasizes the mutuality and conditionality of the covenant in Calvin. Also by this pneumatological deficiency, the relation between covenant and election in Calvin is not correctly understood by him [Lillback].

What Graafland finds strangely and seriously lacking in Lillback's study, Graafland supplies, as the teaching of Calvin: "The positive reply [to God's offer of grace] in connection with the covenant takes place by the accompanying working of the Spirit as fruit of God's election" (*Van Calvijn*, vol. 1, p. 150).

Looking for Covenant Deliverance to Saumur!

What makes Graafland's honest analysis of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant especially compelling is that Graafland himself wants nothing of a covenant governed by the eternal decree. Graafland is as opposed to election's governing the covenant as are Peter Lillback, the men of the federal vision, and the disciples of Klaas Schilder and Benne Holwerda. Graafland indicates his own opposition to Calvin's doctrine of the covenant in typical contemporary Dutch Reformed fashion. Graafland speaks of the "shadow" that election casts over the covenant. Election "threatens" the covenant. There is "tension" in Calvin between election and covenant (this "tension" describes Graafland's feeling, not Calvin's).

To one important chapter, Graafland gives the worrisome title, "*Het verbond onder druk van de verkiezing*" ("The Covenant under [Oppressive] Pressure of Election").

O, that dangerous, frightening, troublesome decree of election!

Such is Graafland's opposition to a doctrine of the covenant that has the covenant governed by election that when, at the very end of his study, he looks about

for a doctrine of the covenant that will allow the Reformed churches to "break through" this "oppressive" covenant doctrine he proposes the covenant doctrine of Saumur. "In my view the Saumur doctrine of the covenant has made a serious attempt to give a new and liberating perspective" (*Van Calvijn*, vol. 3, p. 402).

In order to "liberate" the covenant from the "oppressive" decree of election, the Reformed churches must turn to the theology of Amyraut!

Amyraldianism!

This was the teaching that God conditionally elected all men without exception, that Christ conditionally died for all men without exception, and that God is conditionally gracious to all men without exception. God's decisive election of a man to salvation (in distinction from His earlier conditional election), and therefore the final salvation of everyone who is saved, depend squarely upon that man's performance of the condition of faith.

Graafland is right. The covenant theology of Saumur will certainly "liberate" the covenant from election. This is exactly what the Saumur school intended, in deliberate opposition to the Canons of Dordt. And the purpose was to bring God's election into bondage to the will and work of the sinner in the covenant.

In this context, Graafland makes the telling observation that "in the recent past it has been particularly K. Schilder who in his own way has pursued this track [of the doctrine of the covenant of Saumur]" (*Van Calvijn*, vol. 3, p. 403). Again, Graafland is right. Both Saumur and Schilder cut the covenant loose from election. Both Saumur and Schilder extend the gracious covenant, the gracious promise of the covenant, the grace of the covenant, and the gracious benefits of the covenant more widely than only to the elect. And both Saumur

and Schilder make the covenant grace of God in Jesus Christ dependent upon the faith and obedience of the sinner. That is, both Saumur and Schilder teach universal, conditional, resistible grace in the covenant.

This was not Calvin's doctrine of the covenant, as Graafland freely acknowledges. It was not Calvin's doctrine of the covenant because such a doctrine of the covenant violently contradicts the gospel of salvation by grace alone proclaimed by the sixteenth century Reformation of the church.

Luther's Suspicion of Covenant

In his zeal for the glory of God in the gospel of sovereign grace, Luther, who in his early years emphasized the covenant, came to give the covenant a minimal place in his teaching. The reason was that the medieval theologians had seized upon the doctrine of the covenant to teach that man and God cooperate in salvation. For Luther, the promise of God, rather than the covenant, served to express the sheer sovereignty and grace of God's salvation of sinners.

With Luther we see the covenant increasingly recede into the background and eventually disappear from his horizon.... Luther came increasingly to the insight that the word "covenant" was not the most felicitous expression to describe God's gracious workings of salvation in Christ. It does not declare the gracious character of salvation in Christ plainly and radically enough. This becomes understandable especially when we have an eye for the background [in medieval theology] out of which Luther's theological existence proceeded.... Also in [medieval theology] the covenant (*pactum*) played a great role. But [in medieval theology] this conception [of the covenant] has exactly the tendency, within the framework of the sovereign self-limiting of God, to confer a positive and creative significance

upon man and his merits. In ecclesiastical and spiritual practice, this meant that the emphasis fell on the cooperation of man in his own salvation. It is particularly this essentially semi-Pelagian feature that accompanied medieval thinking about the covenant. Exactly against this [semi-Pelagian heresy], Luther was determined to turn with his theology of the cross, [the gospel] of God's grace alone, through the death of Christ (*Van Calvijn*, vol. 1, pp. 39, 40; see also pp. 48, 49).

We may disagree with Luther's reaction against the semi-Pelagian corruption of the doctrine of the covenant. Indeed, we do disagree with Luther's reaction, as does the Reformed tradition, although we understand his reasons for the reaction. The covenant of grace is too prominent in Scripture, too important for the life of the church and Christian, too precious to Christ, too fundamental for God's revelation of Himself, to be allowed to fade into the background of the teaching of the church. The doctrine of the covenant must be central. But it must be the doctrine of a covenant governed by election. Only this is a covenant doctrine that is faithful to, indeed an essential aspect of, the gospel of grace. Only this doctrine of the covenant does justice to Luther's valid concerns.

Summary

Very early in their history, the Reformed churches in the Netherlands confessed that the covenant is a covenant of sovereign grace. They confessed that election governs the covenant. They confessed this in two official documents, the "[Reformed] Form for the Administration of Baptism" (1574) and the Canons of Dordt (1618/1619).

In making this confession, the Reformed churches in the Netherlands simply applied the Reformation gospel of salvation

by grace alone to the truth of the covenant. They based their confession on Scripture, especially Romans 9:6ff. The Reformed churches in the Netherlands were heavily influenced by John Calvin. Even though he did not develop the doctrine of the covenant, Calvin clearly taught that election governs the covenant of grace.

The effect of this confession by the Reformed churches in the Netherlands is to bind all churches and theologians having the "[Reformed] Form for the Administration of Baptism" and the Canons of Dordt as their creeds to the doctrine of a covenant of sovereign grace, that is, the doctrine of a covenant governed by election.

Nevertheless, Reformed theologians and churches holding these two creeds have embraced a doctrine of the covenant that divorces the covenant from election. This doctrine of the covenant maintains that God's covenant grace and salvation extend more widely than the decree of election and that they depend, not upon God's election, but upon conditions that must be performed by the sinner.

For hundreds of years, this doctrine of the covenant has opposed the confessional doctrine in the Reformed tradition. Again and again, the controversy has resulted in schism in the Reformed churches. Today, the doctrine of a covenant of universal, conditional, resistible grace takes fully developed form in the teaching in Reformed and Presbyterian churches that calls itself the "federal [covenant] vision." This covenant doctrine openly denies every one of the doctrines of grace, beginning with justification by faith alone. Thus is exposed, finally, by its ripened, bitter fruits the age-old error of a covenant "liberated" from, and "unhampered" by, election.

By the rank heresy of the fed-

eral vision, God sharpens His call to the Reformed churches, especially in the Dutch Reformed tradition, to renounce, once and for all, the doctrine of a covenant of universal, conditional, resistible grace. They must return to their roots in the "[Reformed] Form for the Administration of Baptism" and the Canons of Dordt; in Calvin; and in the Reformation gospel of salvation by sovereign grace alone. They must embrace and confess a doctrine of the covenant in which the covenant is governed by election—the covenant of sovereign grace.

Then all of us must do more.

We must develop this doctrine of the covenant. We must develop it with regard to the demand of the covenant upon the members, with regard to the warnings, with regard to the full, active life of the covenant, with regard to covenant obedience and covenant unfaithfulness on the part of the covenant people, with regard to the important part of the people of God in the covenant, with regard to divine rewards and chastisements, with regard to the genuine mutuality of the covenant.

All of these aspects of the full reality of the covenant, and more, must be developed, not in "tension" with election, but in harmony with election, as the very outworking of the eternal decree.

For election's governing of the covenant is not stifling, restrictive, and oppressive, as though election will not permit the covenant and its life to be all that they can be, and all that they should be. No more is this true of the will of God regarding the life of His covenant family than it is of the will of the godly husband and father. The will of the godly husband and father governs his marriage and family. But it does not stifle, rigidly restrict, and oppress the rich, active fellowship of the marriage and the full, exuberant,

joyful life of the family. On the contrary! The ruling will of the Christian husband and father purposes the rich, active, joyful life of the family, takes pleasure in such a life, and, inasmuch as God blesses this will, effects such a life.


No less is this true of the gracious, eternal will of our covenant God.

Election allows for full, rich, active, joyous, fruitful, abundant covenant life.

Election has purposed such a life for the spiritual family of God.

The electing God takes pleasure in such a life.

Election effects this covenant life.

And just as children bless their godly father and praise his governing will for all they have enjoyed and become by that lordly, beneficent will, so does the church—the *true* church—bless the electing God and praise His election for all she has, all she enjoys, and all she is in the covenant of grace. 

All Around Us

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Seeker Sensitive Failure

By their own admission, and according to their own studies, the “seeker sensitive,” “emerging church,” mega-churches of modern-day America have failed. Under the title “Seeking but not Finding,” *World Magazine*, December 1, 2007, published the following story.

Willow Creek Church in suburban Chicago has been the epicenter of the “seeker” movement for three decades. During that time, Willow Creek has grown from start-up to around 20,000 in regular attendance. The influential Willow Creek Association has taught its 12,000 member churches—including many that do not share the mother church’s evangelical theology—how to grow.

That’s why founder Bill Hybels’ recent confession that the church’s brand of ministry has been a “mistake” came as a shock to the evangelical world’s system.

The confession came in the wake of a book published by Willow Creek. *Reveal: Where Are You?* was co-written by Willow Creek Executive Pastor Greg Hawkins and Callie Parkinson, who leads Willow Creek’s Reveal ministry. Reveal, and the book that bears the ministry’s

name, promote the results of a multi-year study on the state of the American church. The study suggests what many critics have said for years: Most churches are not doing a good job of true disciple-building.

“We made a mistake,” Hybels said at Willow Creek’s annual Leadership Summit, where the results of the survey were presented. “When people crossed the line of faith and became Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become ‘self feeders.’ We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their Bible between services, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own.”

Hybels’ words have been reported on several blog sites (including townhall.com). According to Callie Parkinson, the online conversations have generated a flood of inquiries to Willow Creek and a response by Hawkins on the Reveal website. Parkinson told WORLD that the Reveal study would result in a “broadening of the movement. There’s been a breakthrough in our understanding.” But she reiterated that Willow Creek remains not just “seeker-focused. We are seeker-obsessed.”

Many evaluations of and reactions to this study are available from the Internet and from a variety of magazines. Some justify what the mega-churches have

done. Others try to discredit the study. Others praise Hybel for his “confession” and apparent resolve to change. But perhaps the best evaluation comes from Prof. Michael Horton of Westminster Seminary in California. The article in *World* continues,

That means, according to Michael Horton, a professor at Westminster Seminary California, that American evangelicalism is likely to see “more of the same” from Willow Creek. “In the ‘seeker’ view, evangelism and outreach are spiritual technologies that must be made more efficient,” Horton said. “Having a survey tell you that you need to add ‘discipleship’ to the list of technologies that we’re trying to make more efficient doesn’t solve the fundamental problem.”

Is the use of surveys as a replacement for true spiritual discernment among evangelical church leaders at the core of the problem facing the modern church? Horton criticizes the idea of church, worship, or the gospel as “product,” and lost sinners as “consumers.” People, he said, “are not consumers who need to be satisfied. They’re sinners who need to be justified. Preaching is not a technology. It is a means of grace.”

The problems go beyond Willow Creek: Parkinson said the study included 30 churches that “were not all Willow Creek clones. The findings in the study are true of all churches.” Horton agrees with that: “The state of

Rev. Kleyn is pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

the church in America today is poor, and it's a condition that you can't blame on Willow Creek alone. It's increasingly difficult to swim against the tide of materialism, consumerism, and narcissism in the culture."

This whole study demonstrates several things.

First, it shows that church growth is not to be measured primarily by numbers. The strength of the New Testament church is not in her size but in the gospel and truth that she possesses. The Word of God is the power of the church. The Reveal study reveals that the most satisfied members were those who were part of smaller groups who actually studied the Scriptures together. In these small groups they were getting something that they were not getting in the worship services.

Second, it tells what does not work in church growth. Willow Creek, and the other mainline mega-churches, are all about innovations in worship and having a host of programs for people to be a part of. The message is, "Get involved, and you'll feel better about yourself. Your religion will help you, by you doing something." What is this, but a salvation based on the works of man? And it bears no real fruit, no spiritual growth.

Third, it shows the need for the church today to return to the age-old practice of preaching and teaching from the Word of God. This is what churches need. This needs to be the central element in worship. This is the work that the church is given to do. If members are to be "involved," their involvement must first be that they sit under biblical preaching.

So, are they learning these lessons? An Ohio radio commentator, quoted by the Baptist Press, summarized the seeker-sensitive movement this way.

The size of the crowd rather

than the depth of the heart determined success. If the crowd was large then surely God was blessing the ministry. Churches were built by demographic studies, professional strategists, marketing research, meeting 'felt needs' and sermons consistent with these techniques. We were told that preaching was out, relevance was in. Doctrine didn't matter nearly as much as innovation. If it wasn't 'cutting edge' and consumer friendly it was doomed. The mention of sin, salvation and sanctification were taboo and replaced by Starbucks, strategy and sensitivity.

Are they learning? It maybe sounds like they are, but maybe not. Greg Hawkins, Willow Creek's Executive Pastor, summarized the "new direction" of the church this way (wordpress.com).

Our dream is that we fundamentally change the way we do church. That we take out a clean sheet of paper and we rethink all of our old assumptions. Replace it with new insights. Insights that are informed by research and rooted in Scripture. Our dream is really to discover what God is doing and how he's asking us to transform this planet.

Can we expect something different, a new direction? The answer is, "No." The reason: nothing really has changed, and there are two things here that show this.

First, the premise is wrong. They are still "seeker-sensitive" and not biblical in their method. They may be acknowledging some failure, and that the Bible has some things to say about the nature and method of church outreach and growth, but they are still letting the "consumer" determine the direction of the church.

Second, there is a basic misunderstanding of the reason for the existence of the church. God doesn't ask the church to "transform this planet" but to preach

the gospel of the cross to sinners, in the power of the Spirit. The church exists to keep alive the name and witness of God in a world that is perishing, so that men and women may be saved from that destruction and so that the name of God may be honored also in the earth.

The lesson for us is to continue in what we have. The lesson is to love what we have and to be thankful for it. The church does not need innovations. The church needs the pure preaching of the gospel of Christ.

This has application especially in the area of ministering to the youth in the church. In the Reformed church world the emphasis has not been so much on church growth from the outside and on church size, but on maintaining what we have. That fits with our covenant perspective on church growth. You might say that the mega-church mentality has not come into Reformed circles, but its methods have. We see Reformed churches, in an effort to keep the youth, adopting many of the same innovations in worship and programs for their youth that you find in the emerging church movement. And, just as Willow Creek has discovered, so Reformed churches are discovering, this is not working. The youth are not spiritually alive, and the youth are not committed any more to the church. Again, the message is, the church needs preaching and teaching. The youth of the church need instruction. They need catechism. They need to hear the sermons. They need to be incorporated, not segregated. They, as sinners, need the means of grace as much as any other. Without it, they will die, spiritually.

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (I Cor. 1:18).



Preparing for the Office of Deacon (3) Being Qualified and Being Involved

One who sincerely desires to hold office in the church is likely to prepare himself for that office, the better to serve in it if God should call him to it. Prayerfully, he will educate himself regarding the office. Also prayerfully, he will be thankful for the presence of that office, and of godly office-bearers, in his congregation. In our last article we elaborated on these two points. In this article we note two other things that he must do to prepare for office, particularly that of deacon: he must be qualified, and he ought to be actively involved in the life of the congregation.

Be qualified

One who prepares for the office of deacon must know that God does not permit just any church member, any true believer, any child of God, to hold that office.

Whole segments of the church may not hold office in the church, including the office of deacon. Children may not. Non-professing members may not. Women may not. New members of the church, and especially those new to the Christian faith, may not. Some men may not—particularly those whose lives give evidence of spiritual weakness, or lack of natural gifts.

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

Previous article in this series: May 1, 2008, p. 332.

To say that some may not hold office is not to classify them as inferior Christians. Rather, it is to acknowledge that because the church belongs to God, God has the right to determine who holds office. And it is to recognize that He has made His will known in the Scriptures.

In Acts 6:3 and 5, and I Timothy 3:8-12, one finds God's qualifications for those who hold the office of deacon in God's church.

The qualifications for office include the need to be filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 6:3, 5). This means that a man's faith and life give evidence that Christ lives in him. He must be strong in faith and have wisdom to know how to act to God's glory. This will lead the deacon to be the kind of man I Timothy 3:8-9 prescribes for the church: "grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." He who is called to serve others must control his own spirit and tongue, must use his possessions in a right way, and must have a pure conscience in every respect by obedience to the law.

The qualifications also regard the deacon's family life (I Tim. 3:11-12). The deacon himself must be devoted to his wife with all his heart, and must rule his own house and family well.

Notice what these verses do *not* require a deacon to be. They do *not* require a deacon to be descended from generations of men who have served well in the offices. They do *not* require a deacon to come from a family with a high social or eco-

nomical status. They do *not* require him to be a sociable, outgoing person. They do *not* require him to be a financial expert—although they do forbid him to be greedy, and he should give evidence of being a wise steward of his own possessions.

They require him to be a godly man, strong in faith and upright in walk.



One who desires to hold the office of deacon in God's church must understand these qualifications, and ask the question of himself: "Am I qualified?"

Let us be clear: the deacon must be able to say "Yes" to that question. When a man is installed into office in a Protestant Reformed church, he is asked whether he feels in his heart that he is lawfully called of God's church, and therefore of God Himself, to this office. Because God calls none who are not qualified, implied in the question is another: "Do you consider yourself qualified for this office?" Consciously the deacon ought to say "Yes" to the question asked of him by the minister at his installation, knowing what the question and answer imply.

To judge oneself to be qualified is *not* to say that one is without sin. It is *not* to say that one does not have spiritual weaknesses. It is *not* to say that one considers himself to be better than other Christians.

But to judge oneself to be qualified is both to understand what God's qualifications for office are, and to say that God has

graciously given one the spiritual power to be what God demands His officebearers to be.

One who desires office must, in all honesty and before God's face, judge himself to be qualified for office by God's grace.

Should one in all honesty and before God's face conclude that he is not qualified, he has two alternatives.

The first is to cease desiring the office altogether.

This alternative must be chosen by those who realize that those circumstances of life that cause them to be disqualified will not change. A woman, for example, who desires the office of deacon and prepares for it, must cease doing so as soon as she realizes that God does not permit her to hold office.

This alternative must also be chosen by those who have no desire to fight their besetting sins, on account of which they are not qualified. If one is truly so bold as to say that he has no desire to fight those sins, he acknowledges that he has deeper spiritual problems. Then, so long as he is not willing to fight his sins, he must cease desiring the office of deacon.

The second alternative is to become qualified.

This alternative is recommended for those who, realizing that their sins are the reason why they are not qualified, and that God is not pleased with them on account of those sins, and that God gives His people grace to turn daily from their sins to obedience, seek that grace. This becoming qualified, then, requires a man to grow in faith, to seek the sanctifying grace of God in prayer, and to begin to live a godly life.

Is this something a person can do? Can I "become" qualified?

If we were speaking at the moment of the lack of natural gifts that God requires of officebearers, such as the ability to teach, which God requires of elders, we would say that one cannot just "become"

qualified. A man cannot do anything to gain the gift of the ability to teach. Perhaps he can improve the ability that God gave him (seminary aims at doing this for prospective ministers); but if he lacks it, he cannot gain it.

However, I am speaking of spiritual gifts and graces. I am speaking of the ability to turn from sin and live in obedience to God's law. I am speaking of the gifts of spiritual sobriety, the ability to guard one's tongue, the ability to rule one's body well, contentment with one's possessions, and godliness in ruling one's family. To enable us to do these things, God gives grace. One who judges himself to be lacking in these areas can "become" qualified by seeking God's grace in prayer and by living in obedience to God's law.

And I am speaking of how one carries out his responsibilities in his home. The prospective deacon will make his family life a priority in his life. He will marry a godly woman. He will encourage his wife to be a godly woman. He will, "to the utmost of his power," raise the children God has given him in the fear of God. He will judge whether he has been deficient in this area; and if so, he will become qualified—he will seek God's grace to change.

Be honest, those of you who desire the office: are you qualified? By God's grace?

Be involved

Then, the one who desires the office of deacon must be involved in the life of the congregation.

By "being involved" I have in mind his attendance at Bible studies, his conscious efforts to fellowship with members of the congregation on Sunday and during the week, and his willingness to serve in other capacities if asked.

To this I should add that he ought to show a special measure of love and care toward the poor and sick in the congregation.

He ought to give for benevolent needs as he has been blessed. He must rejoice in fellowship, not just with the strong and healthy men of the congregation, but also with the less fortunate. He must be ready to visit the fatherless and widows in their needs (James 1:27). He must pray in his own private and family devotions for those in the church whose needs are great. He must show he has a heart of mercy!

To put it in a nutshell, the man who desires the office of deacon, and who asks what he can do to prepare for that office, should be concerned to serve his church to the best of his ability at the present.

And, to put it negatively, the man who desires the office of deacon, and does what he can to prepare for the office, should not turn down any request to serve in another capacity simply because it is not what he wanted.



This is not just earthly wisdom. I am not telling you how to attract people's attention to you and to how good your heart is. I am not telling you how to manipulate them into giving you what you want.

Rather, I am saying that if you desire additional responsibility in the church of Christ, you must be sure you are fulfilling the responsibilities that you currently have!

For to be involved is to exercise the office one has, in relation to Christ, of prophet, priest, and king. It is to exercise the office of all believers.

To be a living and active member of the church is the calling of the child of God. The Reformed believer confesses this when he acknowledges, with the Reformed church of which he is a part, that it is his calling "to join and unite [himself] with [the true church], maintaining the unity of the church," and "as mutual members of the same body,

serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them" (Belgic Confession, Article 28). And we all confess this when we say that the doctrine of the communion of the saints implies "that every one must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21, Answer 55).

That this is our duty is made plain also from Scripture passages such as Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4.

To be busy in the calling that is already ours in the church is simply to serve our Lord who put us in His church for a purpose,

and requires us to submit to His will.



All these things, then—educating himself, supporting his office-bearers, being qualified, and being involved—the one who desires to hold office must do prayerfully and before the face of God.


In a sense, the fewer people who know about his desire, the better. His wife no doubt will, and will encourage him in it, and pray for him. But he does not need many to know that he desires the office, and to see how hard he is working to prepare for it.

He needs to submit himself to God, who accomplishes His pur-

pose through His church apart from any shenanigans of men, and to live before Him whose eyes are on those of humble and sincere heart.

He needs to say: "I am thy servant; I am here to do thy will." And then he must do what is clearly God's will for him with a devoted heart.

And God, if He so pleases, will see such devotion, and cause the church to nominate and later to choose this man for office in the church.

Or, if God does not please to do that, He will still see such devotion, and pronounce that servant faithful, who served God according to God's will, with contentment in his heart. 

Decency and Order

Prof. Ronald Cammenga

Sins Requiring Suspension and Deposition from Office

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

Church Order, Article 80.

Introduction

Article 80 is closely related to Article 79 of the Church Order. Article 79 describes the proper procedure that is to be followed when suspension and deposition of office-

bearers become necessary. Now in Article 80 the Church Order mentions "the gross sins which are worthy of being punished with suspension or deposition from office."

The article includes a list of sins that make an officebearer worthy of suspension and deposition. The list is not intended to be exhaustive, as if these sins and only these sins warrant de-

position from office. Rather, the list is intended to be illustrative. The article contains a list of the *main* sins that make an officebearer worthy of ecclesiastical discipline and being stripped of his office. But there certainly are other sins that could be added to those listed in Article 80. In the language of Article 80 itself, these are the "principal" sins that call for deposition from office.

Prof. Cammenga is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

At the same time, these sins do *require* suspension and deposition from office. Article 80 does not contain a list of sins that *might* expose a man to suspension and deposition from office. Then, even though a man has made himself guilty of the sins listed here, it still remains in the judgment of the consistory whether or not he will be suspended and deposed. Rather, the proper understanding of Article 80 is that these sins must be dealt with by a consistory in such a way that the officebearer who has made himself guilty of them is suspended and deposed from office. It is not the case that he *may* be suspended and deposed, but he *must* be suspended and deposed, if indeed he is guilty of the sins that are here listed. Such is the nature of these sins, and so serious are the consequences of these sins that they disqualify a man from serving, at least for the time being, in the special offices in Christ's church.

General Character of These Sins

Before turning to the specific sins that are listed in Article 80, we should notice some things about the general character of the sins that are mentioned.

First of all, these sins are "gross" sins. Twice Article 80 speaks of "gross" sins. This was also the terminology in Article 79. A gross sin is an especially grievous sin. A gross sin is a sin of the worst sort, gross by virtue of the nature of the sin itself and the consequences that attend the sin. All sin is sin. But there are sins that are especially gross. There are various forms of sin against the ninth commandment, the commandment that forbids lying. One of the grossest forms of lying is "perjury," lying under oath before either the civil or ecclesiastical authorities. There are various forms of violation of the sixth commandment. One of the grossest forms is "habitual drunkenness." There are

various forms of sin against the seventh commandment. One of the grossest forms is "adultery," the sin against the seventh commandment that involves someone who is married. "Gross" sin is punishable by suspension and deposition from office.

Second, the sins that are enumerated in Article 80 are sins that are public in character. Already Article 79 had referred to "any public, gross sin." This article speaks of "public schism" and "public blasphemy." An officebearer makes himself worthy of suspension and deposition when he sins publicly. Private, personal sins are not necessarily just cause for an officebearer to be put out of office. But public sin, just because it is public, exposes the officebearer to ecclesiastical discipline. The nature and consequences of public sin, both in the congregation and before the world, make suspension and deposition necessary.

Third, included in the list of sins mentioned in Article 80 are sins referred to already in Article 79 as sins that are "worthy of punishment by the authorities." A sin that involves the breaking of the law of the land, and has the consequence of fine or imprisonment by the civil authorities, requires suspension and deposition from office. This is the nature of several of the sins enumerated in Article 80, such as perjury, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness that results in such a thing as driving while intoxicated, and brawling. Sins that are punishable by the civil authorities are also sins that require suspension and deposition from office.

Fourth, all sins that "render the perpetrators infamous before the world" also require suspension and deposition from office. This would be the sad consequence of all the other sins listed in Article 80, but this may very well be the consequence of others sins as well. Any sin, therefore,

that "give(s) great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme" (II Sam. 12:14) requires the officebearer's suspension and deposition.

Some Reformed churches have removed this phrase from Article 80. W. W. J. Van Oene defends its deletion from the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

In older editions of our Church Order one could find the expression "all sins and gross offences which render the perpetrator infamous before the world." This expression has been dropped, because in the first place what the world thinks and regards as decent and proper is not a standard for the church; and in the second place the standards of this world change. In our days, for instance, people are no longer ashamed to admit to their homosexual practices, and various religious bodies openly and unashamedly admit those who are guilty of it to their pulpits (*With Common Consent*, p. 331).

The issue, however, is not whether the standards of the world are to be the standard in the church. This is not at all what the disputed phrase in Article 80 is suggesting. But what the phrase reflects is Scripture's own insistence that officebearers "must have a good report of them which are without" (I Tim. 3:7). The officebearers will never be able to stop the mouths of the gainsayers (Tit. 1:9-11) if they are themselves a reproach in the world.

And last, the officebearer is subject to suspension and deposition from office when he makes himself guilty of sin "which in any private member of the church would be considered worthy of excommunication." Any sin and impenitence in any sin that in the ordinary member of the church would require the exercise of discipline, in the case of the officebearer require suspension and

deposition from office. Such is the Reformed view of the sanctity of the office of Christ in the church.

Particular Sins Requiring Suspension and Deposition

I Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7 and 2:3, and other passages expressly condemn the sins that are mentioned in Article 80 in officebearers. Article 80 is solidly grounded on Scripture. The sins mentioned in Article 80 are of two kinds. First, there are sins that have to do with the officebearer's abuse of his office: false doctrine or heresy, public schism, public blasphemy, simony, and faithless desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another. Second, there are those sins that have to do with the officebearer's walk generally, his deportment in the world: perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, and filthy lucre.

Let's look at each of these sins in order.

False Doctrine or Heresy

It is significant that this is the first sin mentioned as requiring suspension and deposition. This is certainly so because the Reformed churches, in line with Scripture, hold that the main calling of the officebearers, whether minister, professor of theology, elder, or deacon, is the maintenance of the truth. God's glory and the church's spiritual well-being demand this. By false doctrine or heresy is not meant that the minister, for example, teaches something that is wrong. This must, of course, be addressed, and this must be corrected. But this does not require suspension and deposition. What is in view here is the deliberate teaching of false doctrine. This would be especially teaching anything contrary to the creeds, which creeds the officebearer by signing the "Formula of Subscription" has promised to uphold (Church

Order, Articles 53 and 54). Heresy is false doctrine that is condemned by the church. Knowingly and stubbornly to teach false doctrine and to promote heresy in the church requires suspension and deposition from office. How Reformed churches in our day neglect this important calling. Ministers and professors of theology teach false doctrine and openly espouse heretical views, teachings that contradict the creeds. Rather than being removed from office, they are permitted to retain their office and spread their evil influence in the churches. The very first sin that makes suspension and deposition necessary is the teaching of false doctrine or heresy.

Public Schism

Schism is the sin of creating division and disunity in the church. The officebearer has a particular calling on behalf of the unity of the church, "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3). Rather than laboring on behalf of the unity of the church, the officebearer is responsible for scattering the sheep of Christ. He may do this in various ways. He may do this by promoting false doctrine and heresy. Since the unity of the church is grounded in the truth, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:5, 6), false doctrine and heresy are always inimical to the unity of the church. Public schism might also take the form of opposition to the settled and binding decisions of the assemblies, whether of one's consistory, or the classis or synod. Whatever form it takes, public schism warrants suspension and deposition from office.

Public Blasphemy

Blasphemy is disdain for the holy things of God and the right worship of God. The man who is

guilty of blasphemy mocks at God and the Word of God. Ordinarily the officebearer would be guilty of this in the course of the discharge of the duties of his office. In the case of the minister, he would make himself guilty of this sin in his public preaching, teaching, and writing. Open disdain for the holy things of God requires that the officebearer be stripped of his office. From a certain point of view, the officebearer's most sacred calling is to bring glory to the name of God. Public blasphemy of God is such a blot on the office as to make a man unworthy of retaining the office.

Simony

Simony is the sin of attempting to obtain church office by buying it or bribing one's way into it. The name for this sin is derived from Simon the Sorcerer, who offered the apostle Peter money for the power of bestowing the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18, 19). Simony was a prevalent sin especially at the time of the Reformation. Church offices were bought and sold, and often made available to the highest bidder. Even though this may not be a serious threat in Reformed churches today, the warning against this sin serves as a necessary reminder that officebearers must receive their offices in the church in the lawful, church orderly way.

Faithless Desertion of Office or Intrusion upon the Office of Another

These sins pertain primarily to ministers. These too were common sins committed by officebearers in the early days of the Reformation. Articles 10 and 15 of the Church Order address these evils. Article 10 binds the minister to the service of the congregation that has called him and in which he was ordained. Article 15 forbids ministers to preach indiscriminately, without

a fixed charge. Leaving one's congregation in an irregular way or improperly, without having received the proper release, makes one subject to this sin and worthy of suspension and deposition.

Perjury

Perjury is the sin of lying under oath, before either the civil or the ecclesiastical authorities.

Adultery or Fornication

Adultery and fornication are sexual sins, transgressions of the seventh commandment of God's law. A man who is unfaithful to his wife may not be allowed to minister to the wife and bride of Christ.

Theft

The public offense of stealing, whatever specific form it may take, calls for ecclesiastical discipline. It may be theft from the employer, theft from a business, theft from the neighbor, or even theft from the church itself. The thief brings dishonor to the office of Christ and makes himself worthy of suspension and deposition.

Acts of Violence

Any number of specific sins could be included as acts of violence. Threats against another person, as well as malicious destruction of the property or possessions of another would be acts of violence.

Habitual Drunkenness

Article 80 speaks of habitual drunkenness. The officebearer who falls into the sin of drunkenness once would have to be dealt with, and confession of his sin and reconciliation with the church would be required. But what warrants suspension and deposition is habitual drunkenness, that a man is a drunkard, addicted to alcohol.

Brawling

The brawler is a violent, quick-tempered man. He blows up easily and comes to blows with his neighbor, perhaps even with his brother in the church. Or the brawler may be abusive to his wife and children. A man who is a brawler may not continue in the office of Christ.

Filthy Lucre

Filthy lucre is dishonest gain. Acquiring wealth dishonestly, in violation of the law of the land and the principles of Scripture, makes a man worthy of suspension and deposition. In our day, filthy lucre would include all the various types of fraud, including computer fraud, as well as cheating on one's income taxes or refusing to pay income taxes altogether.

Article 80 concludes the Church Order's treatment of suspension and deposition of officebearers. It ought to be clear that the Church Order maintains a high view of the special offices, the office of Christ in the church. May that high view of the offices continue to be embraced in the Protestant Reformed Churches and their sister churches, not only by the officebearers, but by every individual member. And may Christ Jesus continue to give to our churches men who are qualified for office, as well as men who serve honorably in office.



The Life of a Christian

"And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do"

I Chronicles 12:32

The Cyberspace Age

Each age in history has its own spirit, flavor, or *zeitgeist*. The *zeitgeist* of today

Mr. DeVries is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

is such that people, young people in particular, are increasingly retreating into the imaginary world of cyberspace. We all have heard of the various social networking sites such as *FaceBook*, and *MySpace*, which are very popular with many of our youth, but now we must also add online virtual worlds in which one can "live" a second life. In an attempt to keep with the theme of this rubric, an effort will be made to help the modern-day men and women of Issachar to understand more fully the times in regard to the issue of

virtual lives, so that they will better know what Israel must do.

These virtual worlds already abound on the Internet, and it is my opinion that in the near future everyone will become aware of their prevalence. As an example, usage on one virtual world site, *Second Life*, continues to climb dramatically. In 2006, total usage on that site was 51 million hours. By way of comparison, in 2007, users spent over 220 million hours, with as many as 58,000 people logged on at once, and over \$78 million has been trans-

ferred in and out of the system.¹

In just the past year, according to the trade organization Virtual Worlds Management, companies, venture capitalists, and media firms have pumped a billion dollars into developing virtual worlds, and have invested more than \$425 million dollars in 15 virtual worlds companies during the fourth quarter of 2007 alone.²

Our parents' generation probably never dreamed that there would be virtual worlds created for people to conduct a virtual life in. Being a man or woman of Issachar today means being able to apply unchanging biblical principles in a rapidly changing world. We must spend some time to gain an understanding of these novel topics and prayerfully consider the consequences of the activities that modern technology affords.

What are Virtual Worlds?

There are many examples of virtual worlds that exist in the ether. These could include *Webkinz*, *Club Penguin*, and games like *World of Warcraft*. There is a close relationship between the online game industry and the virtual worlds industry, as they are financed by similar entities and served by the same software companies. For the purposes of this article I am going to focus on one virtual world that has been getting a lot of press lately, *Second Life*, created by Linden Labs in San Francisco.

Second Life is a free Internet service that enables you to create and take control of a character that represents yourself (called an avatar).³ *Second Life* provides the software that enables you to

guide your avatar through a 3-D landscape, chat with other avatars by text or audio, and build objects with tools. *Second Life* is not a game; it's more like an animated version of real life. There is no way to win and no specific objective.⁴ Popular activities in *Second Life* are changing your appearance, buying upgraded clothing, hanging out and talking to other avatars, building a house, creating or shopping for things to put in your house. You do pretty much anything in *Second Life* that you can do in real life. You could go fishing, bowling, watch TV, or even get a job in-world. Remember, there is a real person behind every avatar in *Second Life*.

Uses of *Second Life*

Touted as a "virtual world," *Second Life* is more than a game or social-networking site; it's also a venue for financial transactions. The casual user will have many opportunities to spend money and make money while participating in *Second Life*.

There is also a lot of money to be made by talented programmers who are setting up a virtual presence for large corporations online in *Second Life*. Sibley Verbeek, founder and CEO of Electric Sheep Company, has reported that his company has been hired to build in-world presences for such clients as AOL, Major League Baseball, the NBA, Nissan, Pontiac, and Sony.⁵ Corporate staff meetings and training sessions also seem to give *Second Life* an aura of legitimacy. IBM and Sun Microsystems are two of the big players that have recruitment centers and locationless employee meetings in the virtual world of *Second Life*.

There has even been an attempt by many to re-create actual

cities in *Second Life*. For example, the city of Dublin, Ireland has been re-created in *Second Life*, and you can visit it the same way you would in real life. Many other cities are getting on board and attracting avatars to their city in hopes of creating interest and having that interest turn into a boost for real tourism.

One notable trend is the recent attempts at converging virtual worlds with reality. An example would be the juxtaposition of a real meeting with a virtual one. Some observers think that virtual worlds may soon merge with 3-D representations of the real world, such as Google Earth or Microsoft Live Search Maps, thus creating a synergistically fused paradigm in which the virtual world would seem even that much closer to the real world.

Increasingly people are logging on to *Second Life* to work, shop, or go to class. Philip Rosedale, founder of *Second Life*, claims that over 100 colleges and universities are holding classes inside *Second Life*.⁶ If a rival university recruits prospective students on *Second Life* or hosts seminars, there is pressure on others to do so too.⁷

Also, many churches have touted the winning of souls on *Second Life*. Numerous churches have developed sophisticated presences in *Second Life* with a building that you can navigate to and participate in a service if you so desire. There is even a SLbible (Second Life Bible) available that you can purchase and have attached to your avatar. This feature would automatically post parts of the Bible into the chat that you are having with another participant.

The Appeal of *Second Life*

Despite all these supposed legitimate uses for delving into a virtual world like *Second Life*, the

¹ Kirkpatrick, D. *Second Life Still Living Its First One*. <<http://cnn-money.printthis.clickability.com>>

² Virtual World News. *\$425 Million Invested in 15 Virtual Worlds Companies in Q4 2007*. <<http://www.virtualworldsnews.com>>

³ Kirkpatrick, D.

⁴ Newitz, A. *Your Second Life is Ready*. <<http://www.popsoci.com>>

⁵ Rose, F. *How Madison Avenue is Wasting Millions on a Deserted Second Life*. <<http://www.wired.com>>

⁶ Kirkpatrick, D.

⁷ Bugeja, M. *Second Thoughts About Second Life*. <<http://chronicle.com>>

most often cited reasons people give for foraying into cyberspace is to fulfill their desire to live out their dreams, fantasies, and deepest feelings, all the while remaining anonymous and thereby hoping to suffer no consequences. Equally pernicious, the people behind the avatars feel little or no responsibility for the actions that they take in the virtual world. *Second Life* players can be anyone or anything, and do nearly anything.

"Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:3). This passage describes how children of wrath are given over to the lustful desires of their flesh. We want to make sure this isn't our motivation for a virtual life in cyberspace.

In the Old Testament, when the people wanted to give themselves over to their own lust, God said that they "lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106:14, 15). Those who are engrossed in living out their desires online in a virtual world could best be described as ending up with "leanness in their soul," just as those in the above passage who were given over to these lusts.

At the extensive World Gospel Mission Website, there is a section devoted to virtual worlds. They state this about the appeal of having a *Second Life*:

Many spend time in *Second Life* because, for one reason or another, they are happier in this "second" life than they are in "real" life. They leave the struggles of life behind momentarily when they go online and interact with others using a fictional persona they have created in this alternate world. They are searching for purpose and trying to create it for

themselves there. After all, at the same time it offers "near unlimited freedom," *Second Life* claims that "this world really is whatever you make it, and your experience is what you want out of it."¹

Others are attracted by the possibility of making money, harassing and assaulting others, promoting their products, and pursuing virtual sex. Much of what goes on in the "mature" areas on *Second Life* has to do with meeting others for a possible virtual sexual experience.

Some claim that cybersex, not being "real," isn't damaging or immoral. This demonstrably is false. Marriages have broken up over virtual infidelity, friendships have been destroyed, and the Bible clearly states that thought is as real and as subject to moral examination as action.² "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication" (1 Thess. 4:3).

Problems Encountered in *Second Life*

With its emphasis on anonymity and living out your life with "no consequences," it is not too hard to imagine that a "Second Life" can be wrought with problems.

A common occurrence in *Second Life* is what is referred to as "griefing," when players harass another for the sake of doing it. This "griefing" can be as simple as someone running into your avatar or as severe as someone trying to "kill" your avatar, although it is not possible actually to kill an avatar in *Second Life*.

Even worse is the prevalence of all manner of sexual deviance. Pedophilia became so rampant that Linden Labs eventually banned it. Currently, that and gambling are the only two things

¹ World Gospel Mission. *A Handbook for Representing Christ in Second Life*. <<http://www.wgm.org>

² Mansfield, R. *How to do Everything with Second Life*. New York: McGraw Hill Company, 2008.

banned in *Second Life*. It is possible to stay away from sex and violence in *Second Life* by not traveling to regions designated "Mature Content" or by staying in private sectors set up by an institution, say a college, in which a password and verification are needed to enter. However, if you wander around areas marked "mature content," you will come across just about anything.

The felonious nature prevalent in *Second Life* was elucidated recently in an article in the *Grand Rapids Press* entitled, "Virtually Losing Your Shirt." In that article the Ginko Financial scam is described, in which several thousand *Second Life* participants lost the Linden Dollars (currently 270 Linden dollars are equal to one USD) that they invested in a fraudulent virtual investment program on *Second Life* called Ginko Financial. Reportedly the total lost was around \$75,000USD.³

Another vexing issue is the possibility of addiction. The virtual world of *Second Life* can captivate the users to such an extent that many forget their real lives. It is wise to be cognizant of this eventuality when considering if our young children should spend time in something that could lead to the estrangement of our youth.

Focus on the First Life

There may be justifiably good reasons for delving into the whole milieu of the virtual worlds, such as academic simulations, training, business meetings, marketing, and such like, in which we would represent ourselves just as we would in real life. Unfortunately, however, it seems that for many, the motivation is not for education or business, but to live an alternate life to the one God has given.

The separation between the virtual world and real life can become increasingly tenuous. As

³ Semuels, A. *Virtually Losing Your Shirt*. Grand Rapids Press, January 27, 2008

Mansfield writes in his book, *How to do Everything in Second Life*, "After you've been a resident for awhile, you sometimes catch yourself blending *Second Life* into your real life.... Your dreams are about *Second Life*." As a person becomes more and more involved in this realm, the deeper he will slide.¹

Eventually our conscience treats the symbols on the computer as if they are real. One's "avatar" symbolizes the deepest wishes, aspirations, and vices of the individual. The inappropriate actions in which one engages via his or her "avatar" will cause great spiritual harm to his own spiritual character.

The specific danger that was faced in the age of Issachar was individualism, each tribe going its own way. This divides the church of God. The modern-day men and women of Issachar should be careful to keep their own young people from isolating themselves in the anonymity and false world of cyberspace to a degree that could diminish real fellowship in the body. I believe Simon Chan, a Singaporean theologian, puts it well in this quote:

Technology has created what we

¹ Mansfield, R.

call virtual reality. It can give you a sense of intimacy. But whether it is real intimacy or not is quite another matter. I think this is where the Christian understanding of community enables us to look beyond what modern technology can offer, because the Christian understanding of real communion is embodied communion. Communion means bodily presence. That's at the heart of our incarnational theology, God coming to us in person; it's the meaning of the resurrection of the body. So no matter what virtual reality technology can create, it will never be an adequate substitute for communion.²


"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1), expresses that kind of embodied unity called for by God in the church today.

We are commanded to walk in truth, and one can safely assume that walking in truth means living in reality before the face of God, and not finding refuge in some imaginary world. False, anonymous worlds then, by their very nature, would hamper the molding of one's own spiritual character and the putting on of the new man of Christ.

² World Gospel Mission.

On the contrary, those who habitually "live" on *Second Life*, some as much as twelve hours a day, cannot possibly be living a life of truth and embodied fellowship.

CRC pastor Leonard Greenway wrote that some Christians "believe that God has given every individual his own unique creatural distinctions in life, and that it is sinful for anyone habitually to reshape his individuality and to twist his personality for dramatic purposes."³ We are uniquely and wonderfully created by God, curiously wrought as distinctive individuals. We are set apart from any other person, and God has a purpose for us with the intent of accomplishing it. Therefore we must live our real lives in such a way as to be in constant communion with God, determining His path for us as the modern-day children of Issachar.

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). 


³ Gritters, B. *Renewing the Battle: Drama, Television, and Movies* (5). <<http://sb.rfpa.org>>

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

The Ways of Her House

Care for the House

f the good housewife the Proverb-poet writes that she does not eat "the bread of idleness, for she ever

looketh well to the ways of her household" (31:27).

There was a time when, especially in our large cities, some housemothers thought that this looking to the ways of her house referred to her care of the marble hall-ways; and when she knew that the spotless flooring glistened with whiteness, as she had overseen the work of her maid,

the reading of Proverbs 31:27 gave her quiet self-satisfaction at the thought: "Such a woman who looks to the ways of her house, I am too."

This took place, even very frequently, in days of petrified piety, when many a housewife became very angry at seeing the least bit of dirt on the polished floor, but had no concern about

Reprinted from When Thou Sittest In Thine House, by Abraham Kuyper, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1929. Used by permission of Eerdmans Publishing Co.

the *baptized* maid-servant who had to clean it.

They were evil days, when the marginal readings of our Bible¹ ceased to be read, and the beautiful interpretation of our fathers was forgotten: "The ways of the house here means the whole course of *the household life*, so that the housewife keeps oversight over her *children*, over her *servants*, over the work that each has to do, and looks well to the *furniture*, and also to the *means* which her husband allows her."

This explanation was beautiful and rich, and at the same time made it plain why there is added to it: "and the bread of idleness she does not eat."

This the woman does who prides herself on the spotlessness of her floors, and for the rest lets her household affairs go as they will.

But this doeth not the woman who literally is busy from early morn till late at night looking after all the interests of life in her house, to watch over and to direct them, and knows the ways of that life to its minutest particulars.



A pious and scholarly expositor added to this:

A good housewife does not remain seated in her chair, as though from the domestic throne to give out orders and instructions, but with her own eye she looks to the ways of her house, i.e., she has her hand in everything, and rules her house not as an officer by orders, but much more as becomes a careful mother, in person.

This does not mean, of

¹ The Bible in common use among Reformed believers in the Netherlands in Kuyper's day had notes ("Annotations") of explanation and application appended to every verse, by the translators of the "authorized version." These are the "marginal readings" to which Kuyper refers. —Ed.

course, that she gives *no* rule and *no* definite instruction. For where these are wanting, life loses its course. There things go haphazardly and slipshod, and domestic life makes no progress. You see this plainly in those neglected households where one always drudges and is never done, and where endless confusion rather makes the impression as though one was ever on the *move*, instead of quietly *dwelling* in one's house.

Both are necessary. There must be fixed order in the life of the house. And that order must continue because the housewife continually has her eye upon it and is with it. Only then can you say: "*She looks to the ways* of her house."

And when you apply this to everything the marginal reading sums up, and to the order in which this is summed up, you need not fear that such a woman will eat the bread of *laziness*. Rather the question rises, how this delicate woman stands it.



Consider that the *order* in which the Annotator sums up her activities is not: First the chambers, the furniture, the money, and then the servants and the children. But reversely: first the children, then the servants, and only after that the furniture, money, and chambers.

The children come first. They are the live goods. The pledges entrusted to you of God, who have been baptized into His holy name. And a housewife who leaves her children to the care of a nurse, to a "bonne" or governess, that she herself might go out more freely, can take better care of her furniture, and more uninterruptedly keep at work on her embroidery, will bear her judgment of God because she has neglected her duty as mother.

And though in the days when the marginal readings were put

in the Bible there was no social question as yet, even then, in the estimation of our fathers, the servants came *before* the furniture, chambers, and stairs.

Also servants are live goods, they are human beings, members of the church, baptized persons, and a housewife who does not look to her servants, to care for them and to provide for their body *and* soul, shows that she does not understand what it means that God has given her human beings in her service, that He has entrusted to her individuals who have a soul to lose.

Also, what is added about "the means which her husband entrusts her with" is not considered by every housewife a matter of sufficient importance. Also money is given of God. This also for His sake may not be carelessly handled. All money is *entrusted*, and therefore of *all* money we are accountable to God.

Two things only the Annotator forgot.

The housewife has also first to care for the *friends and guests of the house*. Especially in a house with busy ways of life, her task is thereby very comprehensive.

And in addition to this is the *husband*. He too needs looking after. Not merely in clothing and food, but also in his way of life and formation of his character. And again, a housewife does not understand her calling when she exerts no beneficial influence upon the formation and development of her husband's character.



Against this pious interpretation of the task of the housemother, the spirit of our age meanwhile more and more opposes itself.

A woman who thus almost loses herself in the ways of her house is scornfully looked down upon as a "housesparrow." A woman should be vivacious, interesting, especially in social con-

versation. And, therefore, all this more ordinary life of the household, by way of a small barracks, must be finished by strict orders in the early morning-hour. For the rest it must be handed over to the servants, that the wife may have leisure to read, to play, or to go out, and to develop herself for a higher sphere of life.

According to God's Word the woman thereby *lowers* instead of raises herself.

Not as though the "house-drudge" is the scriptural ideal. The sort of characterless women, who sink away in their household affairs and are nothing else than the copy of them, rather diametrically oppose the word of the Proverb-poet.

"To look well to the ways of her house" one must stand *above* it, occupy a higher viewpoint, and thus in spiritual contact live with that holier world from which direction must come down with respect to the life of the household.

For a woman who fears God, the leading of the ways of her house is a matter of prayer.

For the "housedrudge," therefore, we make no plea.

But when you ask what is of greater benefit to our people, and what advances the kingdom of God more effectively, whether it is a woman's life that goes up in much reading, in much visiting, in much going out and for the rest in public "Christian activity"; or the life of a woman who is bent upon being the warm and inspiring center of the domestic circle, upon devoting herself to bringing up the young and developing the

older children, upon taking to heart the physical and spiritual well-being of the servants, and upon maintaining from house to house cordial friendly relationships between the families—who, then, hesitates to acknowledge that the last, by far the most interesting, creates the richest, the most noble, womanly existence?



Undoubtedly life out of the house has certain conformableness to duty, but never otherwise than by continually receiving leading and direction from the center of the domestic life.

Everything out of the house that does not touch *your* heart is abstract and barren. And according to God's ordinance your heart finds no other fireside from which it can borrow its glow than in the household thought-out of God, worked-out of God, created of God.

Where the household life is sound and healthy, you find people, old and young, who are healthy of heart.

And a people, even as people, never has more real strength, and as a nation can never take a higher standpoint, than when from the warm and inspiring home-life power and glow of enthusiasm stream out also in the veins of national life.

That so many serious-minded folk labor to stem this hand-over-hand increase of life out of the house in society, in coffee- or beer-house, is not because by itself there is evil in such a beer-house. But because by it the elasticity of the home-life suffers

loss. And that loss affects injuriously the moral fiber of the rising generation.


As long as the household flourishes, everything is to be hoped. Where the home-life begins to weaken, the worst is to be feared, not merely with respect to your national future, but even for your church-life.

And therefore there depends so much more than one can say upon the housewife.

According as *she* takes her duty seriously or lightly, she actually has in hand the welfare of the family-life, and through the family-life the future of the church and fatherland. And of this she will give account to God.

Account to God for herself, but account also for her daughters, how she has trained them, as women, for the task that awaits them in life, and what mind and spirit she has developed in the female personnel of the house.

In those daughters of the family, provided the mother leads them aright, the good tradition of a former generation can be revived again, and so pass on upon those that come after, to the good of church and fatherland, to the benefit of all that are alive, and to the praise of the name of our God.

But there can also be fostered in those daughters an *unhomelike*, an *anti-homelike*, spirit, which as a hereditary cancer enters into our families. And then it will be God who will visit the sins of our duty-ignoring housewives by punishing them in the ways of their children. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

School Activities

On Thursday evening, March 27, members of the Society for PR Secondary Education met together at Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI

for their annual Society meeting. In addition to the usual electing of new board members and the approval of the yearly budget, the men also gave approval to a library/computer lab expansion

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

project. Studies by Covenant's Long-Range Planning Committee showed that Covenant's current library/computer lab was a top priority to be updated and expanded, both books and student body having outgrown the present space some time ago. The cost of this project will be approximately \$590,000, with funds coming from Covenant's Library Expansion Fund and an anonymous donor family. Construction will begin as soon as planning is completed, with the intent of having the project finished before the start of the 2008-2009 school year.

On Thursday, April 3, there was an organ/pan flute concert with Andre Knevel and Liselotte Rokyta-Fennema performing at Park Church in Grand Rapids, MI. Our Grand Rapids area PR grade schools sold tickets and found patrons to sponsor that concert, and a portion of those proceeds were given back to the schools as a fund-raiser.

Supporters and families of students attending Covenant Christian School in Lynden, WA were invited to attend Covenant's Spring Program on March 28. The invitation promised that those who gathered together with the students would be inspired and blessed as the students, through song, recitation, and picture presentations, brought a powerful message of the Christian who, like a tree, must be rooted in Christ, grow up into Him, and bring forth fruit (Ps. 1:3).

Evangelism Activities

In our April 1 column we mentioned that maybe someday soon there will be live-streaming of church services over the Internet and into our homes by way of our home computers. As a follow-up to that, we are happy to report to our readers that there is already live-streaming of the worship services of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI (www.trinityprc.org).

Rev. R. Kleyn, pastor at Trinity, writes,

Our worship services are 9:30 A.M. and 6:00 P.M. EST. We also broadcast all special services. Right now it is just live audio. We have looked into video streaming, but the technology is still a little behind, and the expense a little high. We have been doing this for about a year and a half now, and Rev. W. Bruinsma (our denomination's missionary in Pittsburgh, PA) has been able to recommend it to some isolated individuals, and we have at least four who we know listen regularly from outside our churches. We have about 15-20 who listen each service. It is also a handy tool for those who have to stay home with sick loved ones or young children, or for shut-ins."

The Evangelism Committee of the Randolph, WI PRC sponsored a lecture on April 11 at their church. The lecture, entitled "Reaching the Nations with the Gospel of Grace," was given by Rev. J. Mahtani, pastor of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL.

Congregation Activities

The entire congregation of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI was invited to what was billed as Spring-break Roll and Bowl, or a night of unlimited bowling and roller skating, pizza and pop, a game of laser tag, and fun and fellowship, on April 9 at Rollaway Fun Center in Lowell.

Members of First PRC of Holland, MI were invited to gather together on April 15 for pictures of a recent trip to Germany and Russia by the delegation of the Contact Committee, Prof. R. Dykstra and Mr. P. VanDerSchaaf.

The newly formed Men's Society of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI had their first meeting of the year on April 18 at 6:30 A.M. at Faith Church. Plans called for the men to study the book of I Peter.

The Men's Society of the Hull,

Iowa PRC hosted the annual combined Men's Society meeting on March 24. Their Bible study was centered on I Corinthians 11, with an after-recess discussion entitled "Questions About the Formula of Subscription."

Sister-Church Activities

On Friday evening, March 28, Rev. A. Stewart, pastor of Covenant PRC in Ballymena, NI, presented a lecture at the Rest Convalescent Home in Porthcawl, South Wales on the subject of "God's Magnifying His Word," based on Psalm 138:2.

Young Adult Activities

The Young Adults and Young People's Societies of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada had a combined meeting on April 6. Their topic of discussion was "What Life Consists of," based on Luke 12:16-21.

The Young Adult Society of First PRC of Holland, MI invited all the seniors in their congregation to a game night on April 18. Besides the fun and camaraderie anticipated, the seniors also enjoyed a menu of various appetizers and desserts.

Denomination Activities


Members of the churches in West Michigan were able to enjoy two concerts this spring given by the Psalm Choir. The first concert was on March 30 at Faith PRC in Grand Rapids, MI and the second on April 13 at the Grandville, MI PRC.

Our Protestant Reformed Seminary, located in Grandville, MI, sponsored a series of three public lectures on Southern Presbyterianism in April. The schedule was: Tuesday, April 15 at 1:30 P.M., "Development of the Reformed Faith in the South"; Wednesday, April 16 at 1:30 P.M., "Distinctives of Southern Presbyterian Theology

and Ecclesiology"; and Thursday, April 17 at 7:30 P.M., "Notable Southern Presbyterian Theologians and Preachers." The speaker for all three lectures was the Rev. Eugene Case, pastor of the First

Presbyterian Church of Woodville, MS (PCA). All the meetings were held at the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI.

Minister Activities

On April 16, the Doon, Iowa PRC extended a call to Rev. W. Langerak to serve as foreign missionary to the Berean PRC in Manila in the Philippines. 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Martin and Clara Hoekstra in the death of his sister,

GERTRUDE HOEKSTRA.

Also to Dennis and Lorelei Burgers in the death of her father and to Brian and Stephanie VanEngen in the death of his father,

HARLAN VAN ENGEN.

May they find comfort in God's word: "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. Steven Key, President
Gerald Brummel, Asst. Clerk

ADVANCE NOTICE

The Loveland Protestant Reformed Church will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary on September 19, 2008. If you plan to attend, please call Ray Ezinga at 970-667-5702 or email tammyjvan@aol.com

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

On April 10, 2008 the Lord took to her heavenly home the wife of William T. Feenstra, mother of four, grandmother, and great grandmother,

SHIRLEY ANN FEENSTRA.

The council of Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Redlands expresses Christian sympathy to Elders John Feenstra, Glenn Feenstra, and Ron Van Voorthuysen, and to deacons Peter Smit and Jonathan den Hartog on the passing of their sister and aunt.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (II Timothy 4:7).

Rev. Martin VanderWal, President
Elder John Feenstra, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to Audrey Den Besten, and to Henrietta Kamminga and family, in the death of their brother,

JOHN DEN BESTEN.

May they find their comfort in God's word in II Timothy 2:19: "... the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his."

Rev. William Langerak, President
Ron Kooienga, Assistant Clerk

REMINDER

The *Standard Bearer* is published only once per month during June, July, and August.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Calvary PRC express their Christian sympathy to elder Alvin Bylsma and his wife Brenda in the death of Alvin's father,

MR. PERCY BYLSMA.

Confessing as found in I Corinthians 12:26, "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it..." may we together turn to the words of Christ found in John 14:18, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."

Edwin Westra, Vice President
Glenn Kooima, Asst. Clerk

CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 2007 appointed Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan the calling church for the 2008 synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2008 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 10, 2008 at 8:30 A.M. in the Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 9, at 7:30 P.M. Rev. Slopsema, president of the 2007 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Harry Langerak, 1508 Ferndale Ave. SW, Grand Rapids, MI. Phone: (616) 453-7317.

Consistory of
Hope PR Church,
Harry Langerak, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary-Martha Society of Hope PRC in Redlands, expresses its deepest sympathy to fellow members Janice Baker and Neva Feenstra and their families in the loss of their mother and mother-in-law,

MRS. SHIRLEY FEENSTRA.

May the family be comforted by these words found in Psalm 121:7, 8: "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore."

Rev. Martin VanderWal, President
Brenda Gritters, Secretary