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Jehovah's Everlasting Mercy

"But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children."

Psalm 103: 17

The context in this beautiful and familiar psalm is a vivid description of the frailty of man: "...we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more" (vv. 14-16). The life of every human is as weak as the grass and as brief as the flower. We may think that we or certain other humans have a large and important place in time, but that is not true. Every human is so weak that man cannot be compared to an oak — but to grass.

Man's brevity and frailty are contrasted to God's mercy and righteousness. Man's frailty is met by God's mercy and righteousness.

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

God's answer to those who know their human frailty and weakness is to declare that He gives mercy and righteousness. Our human nature never wants to admit to our weakness. But the psalmist makes clear that apart from God we are as the grass. No matter how important we think we are or what other humans think of us, we are still grass. What emphasizes our lack of importance and insignificance is the statement that, after we are gone, our place will know us no more. A generation or two after our death we will be nothing more than a name in an old record and on a gravestone — forgotten and unknown.

But Jehovah and the gifts of His mercy and righteousness are constant. Who we are and what we accomplish on the earth fades away, but Jehovah's mercy is everlasting.

What does Jehovah give? First, this passage speaks of His mercy. Mercy is God's powerful pity for miserable, pitiful objects, whereby He condescends to deliver them out of their misery and make them blessed. Directed to an object in

misery, mercy reveals itself as God's affection and compassion, powerfully able to transform its object from being absolutely miserable into being blessed, and able to experience this blessedness.

This psalm describes the misery of the psalmist in two ways. First, as a member of the fallen human race, man is full of weakness. He may appear to be flourishing and strong for a while — in his youth; but in reality man is full of weakness — as the grass. The death of teenagers and of men in their twenties demonstrates the truth of Isaiah 40:30, "Even the youth shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall." Second, the misery of man is that he is a sinner before the just God, full of sins and iniquities and transgressions (vv. 10-12). Every sinner stands before the living God as the object of His wrath and justly receives death as the wages of his sin.

God's mercy is obviously a most wonderful and completely undeserved gift. Jehovah is merciful, compassionately and powerfully condescending to the miserable sinner and delivering him out of that

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weak and sinful state and giving him to be blessed, as God Himself is blessed. God was pleased to give mercy to the psalmist. Instead of being frail and insignificant, those who receive mercy are eternally the objects of God's love.

In this passage the inspired psalmist makes God's righteousness parallel with God's mercy. While righteousness is an attribute of God, it is also a gift from God. This text presents "His righteousness" as a gift that is given "unto children's children." God's righteousness is His virtue according to which all His willing and all His actions are in harmony with His perfect holiness. God's giving of righteousness means two things. One, God imputes righteousness to an elect sinner, translating that sinner from a state of guilt for violating His holy standard, into a state of justification, i.e., judged by God as having legally met the standard of God's holiness. Two, God imparts righteousness to every elect sinner, actually giving Christ's righteousness, so that the sinner is forgiven, worthy of eternal life, and able to walk in righteousness.

God's mercy is the source of the gift of righteousness. His compassion for those in Christ is powerful to declare them to be forgiven and to enable them to walk in all good works. They have the right to an eternal standing before the holy God. They will live forever in God's family.

God gives His mercy "from everlasting to everlasting" (literally, "from age to age"). There is no age in which God does not bestow mercy. Divine mercy has no beginning and no ending.

While God's mercy comes to us in time, its origin is in the eternal God. God's mercy is not of this world nor of this world's time. Mercy is eternal because it is of Him who is the eternal One. It is the "mercy of Jehovah," the eternal I Am, who inhabits eternity and is thus transcendent above time. Thus God is unchanging in His at-

titude toward His people. Immutably He knows them and loves them in His mercy.

How can God's mercy be eternally given to God-fearers when they live on this earth for only a brief span of time? The answer is found in the mind of God. God's people are eternally with Him. He eternally willed to have a people who would experience His mercy. He eternally determined to deliver these people out of their deepest woe and give them to rejoice in His glorious holiness.

This means that God's mercy is sovereign. God did not become merciful after man sinned. He was merciful before Adam fell. God's mercy is not evoked by our misery. That is how we express *our* mercy. God's mercy has been functioning from everlasting and will continue to everlasting.

Parallel to God's everlasting-to-everlasting mercy is His gift of righteousness "unto children's children." Man's days may be "as grass" and "as a flower of the field" and his place may know him no more, but God's righteousness continues. Our days on earth may end, but God's gift of righteousness continues in one's generations. What a remarkable perspective!

That God's righteousness goes unto children's children speaks of the fact that the spiritual seed of Christ is usually found in successive generations. This does not mean that absolutely every child and every grandchild of believers is automatically given this righteousness. Rather, it speaks of the fact that God usually is pleased to use the parents' attitude of the fear of Jehovah and their instruction about this fear to communicate the same to their children.

What are the implications of God's mercy being everlasting and His righteousness continuing to children's children? This is very, very good news! Those who fear God in this life experience the miseries of a life that is as the grass: weak physically and spiritually,

anxious and in anguish, tried and tempted, troubled. That God's mercy is everlasting means that all our experiences in time are accompanied by mercy. Our faith must see our present afflictions in light of the fact that God is always crowning us with tender mercies (v. 4). Faith must constantly grasp the truth that "Jehovah is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (v. 8). When we remember that "as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him" (v. 11), then we can better deal with all the weaknesses of this life. This means that every moment of earthly life is characterized by God's ever-faithful mercy. Consider that God's forever enduring mercy was present at creation, in delivering Israel out of Egypt, and most obviously in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. Ps. 136). God mercifully enters our hearts and speaks the good news of merciful forgiveness. That God's mercy is constant gives us to know joy in the midst of the miseries of this life. We may know that in His mercy He will never leave any of His children, even unto the end of the ages.



God's mercy and righteousness are "upon them that fear Him." These gifts of God are not common or general. They are to a particular people, limited to those who fear Him.

Because we have learned that God's mercy is from everlasting, we must be careful that we do not conclude that our fear of God is first, and is the cause of His mercy. Such cannot be the case. God's everlasting mercy works the fear of God in His people. It is because of His mercy that we believe, that we repent of our sin, that we turn to Him for the experience of enduring mercy.

What is this fear of Jehovah? It is a reverent and loving awe of Jehovah God. The recipients of

Jehovah's mercy and righteousness are moved to have an awe of God. Those who fear God are not those who have no sin, but they are sinners who are increasingly amazed that they can be the recipients of the forgiving mercy of the holy Majesty. The recipients of divine

mercy and righteousness do not take the attitude that they may take advantage of His unchanging mercy by living as they please. Rather, they are awed by His awesomeness and moved to want to keep His commandments. Daily conversion is an important evi-

dence that one is receiving Jehovah's mercy.

No wonder the psalmist begins this psalm, "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." 

Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters

Preaching and the Real Battle for Worship* (2)

(The Vision of Revelation 4)

(In the first part of this speech [Standard Bearer, August 2005, p. 436], I explained the truth that the worship of God results from the redeemed church seeing God; and that they see God only when the preacher preaches God. The calling of the minister is to declare: "Behold, your God.")

Battle

This all takes place in the context of a battle, a war. This is the real war regarding worship.

Usually, the phrase "worship wars" refers to the battles in the churches between those who support contemporary worship and those who want traditional worship; between those who support

praise songs and praise bands and special music and those who call for traditional songs and congregational singing; between those who would govern the worship services according to the command of God and those who make decisions according to their pleasure.

Here, I am talking of a more basic battle—the battle of the ages between those who would worship God at all, and those who would worship another. The question is not, here, *how* will man worship, but *whom* will he worship? Here is the issue: Will we worship God, or man?

Preaching is the fundamental weapon in that battle.

Revelation is the book that describes this one, fundamental issue: Who will be worshiped, God, or man? The great question that lies behind the visions and the theme of Revelation is: Who will receive honor—God in His kingdom, or man in his? In the end, the outcome of all things is the destruction of the kingdom of man, so that God may be worshiped and glorified in His kingdom.

The terrible and final judgment will be centered in this query:

Whom did you worship? So fundamental is *worship* that the judgment comes down to this: Those who drink the wine of God's holy wrath poured out without mixture are those "who *worshipped* the beast and his image...." Decisive in the day of judgment will be the question: Whom did you worship, serve, honor, and bless? (Rev. 14:9). When the viles are poured out, they will fall upon those who refused to turn from their sin. What sin? They did not give God the glory (16:9).

And the souls who live and reign with Christ a thousand years? They are identified as those who had not *worshipped* the beast (20:4).

Think about it: If Archangel Michael's task is to ask the beautiful, rhetorical question, "Who is like unto God?" it is not surprising that we find the false worshipers in Revelation asking, "Who is like unto the beast?" (13:4).

Think about it: If the worship of God comes about because the people of God wonder at the marvelous works of God, is it any "wonder" to you that the great work of the Antichrist will be to make people "wonder" at the beast

* This article is the text of the address given for the graduation exercises of the PRC seminary for Seminarians Dennis Lee and John Marcus on June 20, 2005 in Byron Center PRC. The speech was based on Revelation 4, and is given here much as it was actually delivered, thus retaining the spoken style.

(13:3; 17:8). This word, *wonder*, used almost exclusively for the believer's response to God, now is used in the book of Revelation to describe the reaction of the unbeliever to the *beast*. Here, worship is given to the dragon and to the beast.

Think about it: If the work of the true church is to call the people of God to worship God, it is no surprise that the occupation of the second beast is to exercise the power of, and cause the inhabitants of the earth to worship, the first beast. Such is the power of the second beast that he causes all those who do not worship the first beast to be killed.

In this battle the preaching is engaged.

The minister is aware (and the congregation helps him maintain that consciousness) that the whole world challenges the contention that God is worthy. He is aware that false doctrine opposes this worship—the essence of which false doctrine is to deny God His due, His worthiness to be praised, to receive honor and power and wisdom and strength. He is aware of the enemies without.

But the minister will never have strength to battle out there, unless he realizes that the battle begins within him. It begins within us: on our pulpits, in the members of the PRC, and in our preachers.

Let me mention a couple of examples.

In order for a minister to speak about God, he must know God. In order to speak *properly* about God, one must have a true and spiritual knowledge of God. At this point, we usually say, "God can use an unbelieving man to bring His Word and save His people." I always say to myself when I hear that: "And man can live on bread—dry, stale, bread—and water, too. Barely. For a while. But he can live."

But the issue (remember my thesis here) is not that the preaching serves only to *save* the people of God; preaching serves to bring

the redeemed church to *worship* God! And for the people of God to wonder in awe and to worship this great God, the minister must first have seen Him himself, ascended Sinai to stand in the presence of God Himself, and then descended among the people with his face radiating with God's glory. The prophet must receive the vision, have the dream, hear from God, so that he can then repeat what he himself has seen.

How can an unbelieving preacher do that? How can believing but *lazy* preachers do that—preachers whose time in the Word and prayer is minimal?

There is the battle, isn't it? The minister's sinful nature inclines him rather to look for pleasure in the wilderness among the people than to trek up the steep slopes of Sinai alone. On Monday morning, it's easier to do almost anything than begin another climb. His carnal nature makes him prefer to read books about anger and intimacy and marriage and everything else under the sun than those about the transcendence and beauty and holiness and majesty of God in Jesus Christ (ask the publishers what sells—even to pastors). The battle begins within.

And that battle rages in the catechism room, where the question is: What makes the children wonder and stand in awe? Does the minister teach them to wonder at the power and wisdom, love and mercy, judgments and wrath, of God? They aren't in awe over something trivial, something man-centered, something carnal, are they? Who is like unto Jehovah, God and Father of Jesus Christ!

The glorious calling of the minister is to lead the people, as Michael leads the angels, to ask: "Who is like unto God?"

Great Things

When the gospel minister understands these issues, and engages in this struggle, great things will happen.

First, the people of God will be thrilled, and they will worship.

In awe at the grace that chose them, saved them, preserves them, they worship God. When they have a vision of the awesome holiness of God and thus a proper sense of their own unworthiness and uncleanness ("Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips!"), and then come to know that God still loves them ... loves *them* ... no one will be able to stop them from loving and worshipping God.

They will "cast their crowns before the throne" (4:10). The crown is a symbol of *victory* and of *royal honor*. The redeemed worshipers are victorious over sin, death, hell, and the devil, and have a place as children in the king's palace. That place, and that victory, they acknowledge as a gift of God to them, by casting their crowns before His throne. To God is the glory for giving us the victory, and our place in His own family.

By the way, when you grasp that, you grasp the truth that preaching *is* worship. Sometimes it is a question in our own hearts—how can preaching itself be worship? Perhaps we suppose that preaching only *leads* to worship; or, worse, that preaching is an intermission between acts of worship. But when we understand that preaching is to be a setting forth in all His glory and beauty, power and riches, wisdom and strength, *God* ... we see how preaching *is* worship—on the part of the preacher and on the part of the people. With thrilled hearts they hear a man speaking with joy of what he has seen: God's gracious love for us; His righteous judgments that fall upon the wicked—that should have come upon me but instead came upon Jesus Christ; His perfect wisdom in governing our lives.... Then we worship—during the preaching. For "mine eyes have seen (see!) the King, the LORD of hosts" (Is. 6:5).

Second, the preacher himself will be thrilled... and humbled.

What an amazing privilege to have this occupation. Nothing in all the world compares with this occupation. Every week the minister is privileged to ascend to the top of Sinai, catch a glimpse of the glories of God, and come down to the people with a glow on his face and in his heart and say: "You simply *must* hear about what I've seen." Every week *he* finds the treasure in the field, the pearl of great price, for the *joy* of which *he* sells everything he has and purchases it (Matt. 13:44-46).

But this humbles him, too. "Why is this calling mine? Why does it remain mine? I am an unworthy sinner. Yet God called me. And I so much fail."

Especially as the minister gets older, he is convicted of weakness in the pulpit. "Why haven't I come more with a sense of the beauty of God, a grasp of the majesty of God, an experience of the grace of God? Why haven't I conveyed better to the people that God is so good, so great, so wise, so powerful? Why am I sometimes more interested in going out into the wilderness with the people to play, than up to Sinai to see God? The people need me.

Then, when he's thrilled at the privilege and humbled at his own weaknesses, he'll come to the pulpit properly. With the truth in his heart and the right tone in his spirit, he will speak. Not in monotonic boredom. Not in anger and declamation. Nor in arrogance and

pride. And certainly not with the shrill tone of someone who doesn't know his own sin. But in gladness, sincerity, humility, and the boldness of the authority of God Himself, who commissioned him to say: "*Behold, your God.*"

By that, God will be honored.

Graduates, He will be honored by your preaching. And the people will be prepared to join the saints made perfect, and spend eternity both seeing and praising the God of grace. Eternity will not be long enough to exhaust the "power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" of Jehovah God.

The everlasting gospel is: "Worship Him." 

Letters

Robbing pastors?

I have been a long-time supporter of the Protestant Reformed Churches in general, and of the *Standard Bearer* in particular. Through the PRC I grew in the truth of sovereign particular grace. I have greatly benefited from their careful study of theology and from the multitude of solid, Reformed titles that godly PRC men have penned.

Most recently, I have been intrigued by the brief series of articles in the *Standard Bearer* concerning the churches' need for preachers. One does not have to look very far to find a congregation that is waiting for the Lord to provide a pastor, or has suffered from the effects of not having a man to shepherd them according to the Word of God.

Having said this, I do have a question. From the standpoint of the PRC, I am an outsider, one who has not grown up in or been able to sit under the ministry of a PRC minister. Thus, I acknowledge that I may not understand completely the workings of the PRC as a whole or the workings of individual churches in particular.

Thus, my question: Could someone please explain to me why the Protestant Reformed Churches appear to "rob" pastors from one congregation to another? Please forgive me if my question seems harsh, but from one on the outside looking in (by reading the "News From Our Churches" section in the *SB*) it appears that PRC church "A" calls a man from church "B." Then church "B" calls a man from church "C," and so on. I realize that more men are needed, but it appears to this reader of the *SB* that considerable damage and hard feelings could accompany this "musical chairs" movement of pastors around the country.

Most recently I read where two churches, after forming a trio, have called two of the missionaries from the field to become pastors of existing congregations. Granted, I do not know the circumstances of these moves, but again, it appears that good men that were producing fruit "in the field" have been removed from continuing their work in missions. I find it hard to imagine the church at Antioch recalling Paul from the mission field to come and be their full-time pastor. Nor do I

think that other churches, such as Ephesus or Laodicea, would have called Paul to be the "full-time" pastor of their congregation.

As it stands now, the missionary church in Pittsburgh is without a pastor, the church still being in a mission status. Granted, pastors are needed elsewhere, but what are these believers to think of the PRC, many of whom may be new both to the PRC and to the Reformed faith? And they are not the only ones affected. The work in Allentown and the work in Fayetteville appear to be even farther away from receiving consistent ministry.

Again, I do not wish to find fault, only to understand. Maybe other readers of the *SB* will benefit from this as well.

Lee Carl Finley
East Sparta, Ohio

Response:

Mr. Finley raises an interesting question about the ministry. There are different practices for "minister movement" in various denominations, and the PRC's tradition is consistent with historic Reformed practice. The PRC practice is that

the minister remains in a congregation until the Lord convicts him that it is His will that he take up the work in a different place—whether that’s after five years or twenty-five. This conviction comes through prayerful consideration of a request of another congregation to “come over and help” them. Prayerful consideration involves many factors, the main ones being whether the Lord is still using him effectively in his present charge and whether the calling congregation has “greater needs” (a very difficult judgment). The factors are not whether he can make more money, have a larger (or smaller) congregation, be closer to family, etc. He asks: “Lord, where dost Thou want me to serve Thy church?”

If this manner in which PRC ministers move is discarded, the alternatives would be two: either the minister remains in one congregation for his entire ministry (“life-time pastorates”), or another person, perhaps a “bishop,” determines when and where a man would move. These practices are used in some other denominations.

As to life-time pastorates: they are not required by God in Scripture; and requiring life-time pastorates usually presents its own dif-

ficulties. Exceptions in the cases of notable ministers like Spurgeon should not be used to prove otherwise. As to regular movement of pastors by others, like bishops: this violates the autonomy of the local congregation and the conscience of the individual pastor, and gives these weighty decisions to a man who does not really know the circumstances.

The manner in which PRC ministers move is the preferred one, even if it appears as though one congregation “robs” the neighbor of his pastor.

That’s not to say that there are not dangers involved. “Considerable damage” is not one of them, according to my knowledge and experience in the PRC. “Hard feelings” may exist for a time, although rarely, for most PRC members are convinced that the decisions to go and come are of the Lord. Rather, possible dangers are that ministers do not make the decisions prayerfully, that congregations lure with higher salaries, that pastors “candidate” in a congregation they would like to move to, etc. We pray that the Lord not allow the PRC to fall into these egregious faults.

In my judgment, Mr. Finley

raises a slightly different question when he speaks of the mission field. To do justice to this sensitive matter would require me to offer a boatload of caveats and qualifications. Let me only say that serving as missionary requires special gifts, special training (most often), and therefore would incline me to advise lengthy, if not life-long, labors in that specialized work.

But this previous paragraph must not be taken as criticism of any missionary who takes up labors in a congregation. The men make their own decisions, based on a multitude of factors that are known only to a few. If we judge these moves at all, we judge in charity (I Cor. 13:7).

Mr. Finley’s question was prompted by my editorials in which the need for ministers was presented. May God grant us men who love Him (John 21), who are convinced of their own sin and forgiveness (Is. 6), who know the truth (John 17) and are able to “try the spirits” (I John 4), who love the “old paths” (Jer. 6) and are willing to “endure hardships” (I Tim. 2), to be trained for the ministry in the PRC—in the congregations and in missions.

Prof. B. Gritters 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ “Intelligent Design” — Again

We have earlier reported on the growing movement among some scientists who recognize that there is no way that the universe and living organisms could develop through the process known as evolution. Many are insisting that there is abundant evidence of what they call “intelligent design.” There must be, so they insist, some Supreme Being who

designed and sustains all things of our universe. These usually do not name that Being. Apparently that Being could be called “God,” or “Allah,” or simply “The Force.” This Being, however, is conscious, intelligent, and greater than all that which is created.

These scientists usually do not propose eliminating instruction in the theory of evolution, but alongside of that, there ought to be taught the reasoning underlying the concept of “intelligent design.” These two “theories” should be introduced, so they contend, into the science textbooks in the public schools.

Their arguments appear cogent. However, these arguments prove most of all the truthfulness of Romans 1:20, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” Sadly, these scientists deliberately do not mention the scriptural account of creation. Probably many of those who insist on “intelligent design” do not themselves believe that account of Scripture.

Most evolutionists fiercely deny “intelligent design.” They in-

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sist that “intelligent design” is simply an attempt to insert the biblical creation account into textbooks without mentioning the Bible. Although “intelligent design” could as properly be called “theistic evolution,” the worldly evolutionist will have none of this. The Bible with its creation account may be taught under “religion,” but it has nothing in common with science and its theory of evolution. The same reasoning they apply to “intelligent design.”

It is surprising to what extent the evolutionists will go to suppress even the suggestion that a Supreme Being designed all things. It does not even matter what He is called, or in what manner He designed all things. The very thought or suggestion is “unscientific.”

There was a report in *World* magazine, February 19, 2005, with the title: “Science’s new heresy trial.” The sub-title stated: “A Smithsonian-backed editor is defrocked by the priesthood of science for publishing an article on Intelligent Design.” The report begins thus:

Science is typically praised as open-ended and free, pursuing the evidence wherever it leads. Scientific conclusions are falsifiable, open to further inquiry, and revised as new data emerge. Science is free of dogma, intolerance, censorship, and persecution.

By these standards, Darwinists have become the dogmatists. Scientists at the Smithsonian Institute, supported by American taxpayers, are punishing one of their own simply for publishing an article about Intelligent Design.

Stephen Meyer, who holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge and is a research fellow at the Discovery Institute, wrote an article titled “The Origin of Biological Information and the Higher Taxonomic Categories.” As Mr. Meyer explained it to *WORLD*, his article deals with the so-called Cambrian explosion, that point in the fossil record in which dozens of distinct animal body forms suddenly spring into

existence. Darwinists themselves, he showed through a survey of the literature, admit that they cannot explain this sudden diversity of form in so little time.

Mr. Meyer argued that the need for new proteins, new genetic codes, new cell structures, new organs, and new species requires specific “biological information.” And “information invariably arises from conscious rational activity.” That flies in the face of the Darwinist assumption that biological origins are random.

Mr. Meyer submitted his paper to the *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington*, a scientific journal affiliated with the Smithsonian Institute’s National Museum of Natural History. The editor, Rick Sternberg, a researcher at the museum with two Ph.D.s in biology, forwarded the article to a panel of three peer reviewers. In scientific and other academic scholarship, submitting research to the judgment of other experts in the field ensures that published articles have genuine merit. Each of the reviewers recommended that, with revisions, the article should be published. Mr. Meyer made the revisions and the article was published last August.

What was the response of the scientific community? Did they scientifically examine the arguments and either agree or disagree? Hardly!!

...major academic publications—*Science Nature*, *Chronicles of Higher Education*—expressed outrage. The anger was focused not on the substance of the article, but on the mere fact that a peer-reviewed scientific journal would print such an article.

So the wrath of the Darwinists fell on Mr. Sternberg, the editor. Although he had stepped down from the editorship, his supervisors at the Smithsonian took away his office, made him turn in his keys, and cut him off from access to the collections he needs for his research. He is also being subjected to the sectarian religious discipline of “shunning.” His colleagues are refusing to talk to him

or even greet him in the hallways.

...Critics of Mr. Sternberg say that the article should not have been published because the American Association for the advancement of Science has proclaimed that Intelligent Design is “unscientific by definition.” As Mr. Meyer points out: “Rather than critique the paper on its scientific merits, they appeal to a doctrinal statement.”

Historically, said Mr. Meyer, science has sought “the best explanation, period, wherever the evidence leads.” But now the scientific establishment is requiring something else: “the best materialistic explanation for phenomenon.” That rules out non-materialistic explanations from the onset, demanding adherence to the worldview that presumes the material realm is all that exists.

So much for the “scientific method.”

Yet for all that, the “intelligent design” teaching has not been going away. It is claimed that a number of scientists are “closet” supporters of the view. These fear that open espousal of it will result in failure to gain tenure in prestigious universities.

World magazine, May 21, 2005, reports on a controversy in Kansas on this same issue. There the Kansas State board of Education invited scientists to participate in the question whether evolution and intelligent design should both be presented in the science classroom:

On May 5, 6, and 7 the Kansas State Board of Education had three days of testimony about whether schools, along with teaching evolution, should also inform students of the scientific evidence against Darwinism; in other words, whether schools should “teach the debate.” Darwinians boycotted the hearings, insisting that there is no debate.

What was the response of the Darwinists?

“My strategy at this point is the same as it was in 1999,” wrote Liz

Craig of Kansas Citizens For Science on the group's discussion board in February. "Notify the national and local media about what's going on and portray them in the harshest light possible, as political opportunists, evangelical activists, ignoramuses, breakers of rules, unprincipled bullies, etc.... we can sure make them look like asses as they do what they do."

Can make them look like asses, that is, if media outlets serve as Ms. Craig's public relations tools—and her strategy seemed to work on the first day of the hearings. Reporters from NBC, ABC, and as far away as France descended on Topeka, and the scene they described wasn't flattering. Several reports characterized the fight as a battle over religion, likening the hearings to the 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial." They suggested that the revisions would impede Kansas' efforts to attract biotech companies.

In the *Grand Rapids Press*, May 16, 2005, there is a clear instance of the response of editorialists to the attempt to introduce ID into the science textbooks. Ellen Goodman, of the *Washington Post* Writers Group, writes:

...In 1987, The Supreme Court declared that teaching creation in the classroom was teaching religion and unconstitutional.

Now the leading argument is "Intelligent Design," an intelligent redesign of the old arguments in new clothing. As Ken Miller, co-author of one of the most respected biology textbooks, says, "So-called Intelligent Design is nothing more than creationism stripped of everything that a court would immediately recognize as religious content."

Unlike the earlier creationism, ID is agnostic on questions such as the age of the Earth, but not on the rule of an intelligent designer (or Designer) in the creation process. Unlike the earlier creationists who fought to get Darwin out of class, the new generation of intelligent designers ostensibly wants equal time to debunk him and promote their alternative.

Well, so much for scientific inquiry and the "scientific method."

■ "The Fourth Day"

In 1986 Dr. Howard VanTill wrote and published the book *The Fourth Day*. Dr. VanTill was professor at Calvin College—and the book created a bit of uproar both within and outside of the Christian Reformed Church. In *Christian Renewal*, May 11, 2005, John VanDyk presents an article that not only reflects on the original controversy, but also presents information about the current stand of Dr. Van Till. VanDyk first presents a brief background of the controversy:

Raised in the Christian and Calvinistic faith, [VanTill] was taught to see all things through the lens of Scripture. Later as a trained scientist, however, that lens began to blur as his research into science and the cosmos, and the teachings of Scripture, were compared. *The Fourth Day* was VanTill's attempt to reconcile, for himself, for his students, and for the Christian community, the two differing views of creation being presented by both disciplines, and to offer an explanation for the place and purposes of both general and special revelation. Yet despite repeated assertions that his desire was to take Scripture "seriously," what critics came to see in *The Fourth Day* was VanTill's capitulation to evolutionary theory as fact and his subsequent interpretation of God's Word to accommodate his understanding and position.

VanTill introduced the Christian Reformed community to the possibility that evolution was the process God used to create or call into being the heavens and the earth. He dubbed it "the creationomic perspective."

That is not, however, the end of the story. In 1997 he took early retirement from Calvin College and subsequently left the Christian Reformed Church, whose "official college and bureaucracy stuck with him," says VanDyk, "through some intense scrutiny and criticism dur-

ing the 1980s following the publication of *The Fourth Day*." VanDyk explains:

Now a member of an independent community church, some would argue that the physics professor emeritus has left the Reformed and Christian faith altogether. The fellowship to which he and his wife now belong is the former congregation of the Reformed Church in America, infamous for its now retired minister, Dr. Richard Rhem. Rhem was ousted from the RCA for his liberal views on the crucial issue of "salvation" as well as for his accommodationist views on homosexuality. His large congregation in Spring Lake, Michigan followed Rhem out of the RCA. The church is now under the pastorate of Ian Lawton, a former Anglican minister who joined the church, leaving Australia to do so. The church through both Rhem's and now Lawton's leadership has boarded the "process theology" train. And VanTill himself, instead of battling against creation scientists, has turned his intellectual guns on the Intelligent Design movement.

VanDyk continues by quoting some of VanTill's own thoughts in his development towards a higher and better understanding of "God":

In a speech at a conference at Claremont School of Theology in October of 2004, VanTill chronicled his pilgrim's regress entitling his speech, "*From Calvinism to Claremont: Now That's Evolution! One Scientist's Evolution from Calvin's Supernaturalism to Griffin's Naturalism.*"

In the speech, VanTill made the following statement: "I still think the fully-gifted creation perspective could be maintained with integrity, and persons within the evangelical Christian community are welcomed to do so." He continues, "If a person wishes to maintain both the possibility of supernatural divine action and a respect for what the natural sciences have learned, I think this is the way to go. However, I have found it necessary to explore a dif-

ferent theological territory, beyond traditional supernaturalism, in my quest to make sense of life's experiences."

In online dialogues with his pastor Ian Lawton, Howard VanTill speaks disparagingly of his "up-bringing (indoctrination) as a Calvinist." VanTill then says, "I must admit that the old systematic theology with its independent, omnipotent, omniscient, supernatural Ruler-God-Judge who is radically distinct from the ... created world doesn't hold up to scrutiny today."

Other excerpts are particularly telling of VanTill's current thinking: "As I see it, The Sacred is far more intimately present in the world of daily experience than the old system granted. The SUM (Sacred and Universal More) is actively present in all that transpires in the universe and in the human experience. The SUM is not, and CANNOT be, isolated from the physical/material here and now world that we see, touch, smell, hear, taste and interact with every day. Religion for today must 're-enchant' the world with the intimate presence with which the Sacred and Universal More permeates the world of which we are a part.... I'm willing to give up the old system."

Further, VanTill says, "I find myself avoiding the word 'God' because of its tight associations

with supernaturalism. I favor other terminology like The Sacred, and play with still other names like The More, or the SUM (Sacred Universal More), or the SUMMA (Sacred Universal More than Matter Alone)."

"If 'God' represents some external (other worldly) agent whose character and relationship to the world is of the sort that is presumed by traditional supernaturalism, then 'God' is culpable for horrendous failures and caprice. ...That's why I have abandoned supernaturalism's portrait of 'God' and am on a search to find a better portrait of what 'God' represents. I seek a 'God' who is intimately resident in all that transpires 'naturally.'"

"David Ray Griffin's articulation of naturalistic theism (in the vocabulary of process theology) is very attractive to me at the moment."

It should be noted that Griffin, a process theologian, says, among other things, "I think of the doctrine of creation out of nothing—in the sense of absolute nothingness—as the root of all theological evil." He advocates a "postmodern spirituality" of "re-defining the divine," and calls for "pan-en-theism: the idea that the world is in God—God is something like the soul of the universe—and God is present in all things."

It is sad indeed. He who insisted once that his deviant views concerning creation were nevertheless Reformed: in harmony with his interpretation of Scripture and within the parameters of the creeds, has evidently now forsaken even this outward claim to being Reformed. He boasts in his "evolution" from "Calvin's Supernaturalism" to "Griffin's Naturalism."

The report indicates that VanTill has forsaken consequently the concept of an infallible, inerrant Scripture. He does not anymore want to use the term "God"—though Scripture is filled with such references. Clearly he questions the sovereignty, the omnipotence, the providence, and the governance of God. He has become, it seems to me, a pantheist—whatever current theological jargon is given to the name. It ought to be a warning again that when one denies or distorts a part of infallible Scripture, inevitably he must deny the whole. There can be no room for atonement—no more assurance of forgiveness of sin. It is no longer a question of "origins," but ultimately a question of salvation through Christ's shed blood. One cannot tamper with the infallible Scriptures with impunity. 

Search the Scriptures

Prof. Herman Hanko

The Charter of Christian Liberty (1) An Exposition of the Book of Galatians – Introduction (1)

Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

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If anyone has any doubts about the worth of this epistle of Paul, let him consider that Martin Luther, the great reformer of Wittenburg, considered his *Bondage of the Will* and his *Commentary on Galatians* to be the only two

books out of the many he wrote that were worth saving. He called Paul's epistle to the Galatians "my epistle," and spoke of it in the fondest terms as "my Katherine" with whom I live in holy wedlock.

Luther's reasons for his love af-

fair with this epistle of Paul are obvious. The great battle cry of the Reformation was “Justification by faith alone, without the works of the law.” No other book, with the exception of Paul’s epistle to the Romans, so clearly and forcibly sets forth this doctrine. Galatians, along with Romans, has been the fortress of the church in the defense of the truth of salvation by grace alone.

Yet, part of the book is a personal confession of the apostle who wrote it. Who can read Paul’s own personal doxology of praise to God, prompted by his commitment to justification by faith alone, without a thrill of joy? “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). It resounds in the heart of every child of God.

Its Inspiration

The wonder of the divine inspiration of sacred Scripture makes this epistle especially intriguing, not so much because it contains proof texts for inspiration, such as II Timothy 3:16 and II Peter 1:21, but because the book demonstrates the relative unimportance of matters involving so-called secondary authorship. This becomes clear when we consider two questions that have arisen with respect to this epistle.

Over the centuries, lengthy debates have been carried on in a fruitless attempt to determine who it was to whom Paul addressed this epistle.* Some argue that the epistle was written to churches in the north central part of Asia Minor – churches unmentioned in the book of Acts. Others argue heatedly that the epistle was written to churches more to the center of Asia Minor, churches that were established by the apostle Paul on his first missionary journey: Antioch, Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium. While I rather think the latter is correct, Scripture does not decisively settle the matter.

Another question that has been the subject of endless wrangling has to do with the time of writing. Some argue that the epistle was written before the meeting of the council in Jerusalem concerning the question of the circumcision of the Gentiles, an important event in the history of the New Testament church (Acts 15:6-30). Others argue with equal intensity that the epistle had to have been written after the meeting of this council. Obviously, the whole question has to do with the interpretation of Galatians 2:1, in which passage Paul discusses what transpired during a trip he took to Jerusalem. Was this trip the one Paul made with Barnabas to bring collections to the saints in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30), or was it the trip Paul made at the time the council of Jerusalem met to determine whether the Gentiles needed to be circumcised? Cogent arguments are made on both sides of the question. But the matter cannot be settled. I leave a consideration of the question to our explanation of chapter 2:1.

The point, as far as inspiration is concerned, is this. While these questions are considered of vital importance by most commentaries, and while many are certain that the questions need to be settled before the correct meaning of this epistle can be ascertained, the fact is that they are of no determinative significance in our understanding of the book. It is true, and the church has for centuries believed it, that grammatical-historical exegesis means that every passage must be interpreted in the light of the historical context in which it was written. There can be no question about it that an understanding of the historical context sheds light on the passage. But it is not decisive for an understanding of the book.

The inability to settle such a question points us to the fact that the Holy Spirit of Christ is the Author of the whole of Scripture. He is the sole Author. To speak of secondary authors immediately leads

us into paths where questions arise and uncertainties abound. Further, the Holy Spirit wrote the Scriptures for the church of all ages, though He used men chosen by God for the task. Not only were the Scriptures written for the church that lived at the time a given book was written, but the Holy Spirit was writing to us, saints of the twenty-first century, as well. He wrote in such a way that all the saints, great and small, educated and uneducated, could understand what he wrote. He gives in each book the necessary information that each saint needs in order to understand it. If the information is not necessary, He will not waste His time and work on giving it. The issues, though perhaps interesting, are relatively unimportant. If they cannot take up the Spirit’s time when He inspired the epistle, they ought not to take up ours. The unsolved problems of Galatians are not necessary to understand the book. Every child of God may be sure of that.

What I have just said is not to be interpreted as meaning that no historical information at all is given us in the book of Galatians. We know that serious errors, destructive of the church of Christ, were introduced by evil men in the churches in Galatia. We know what these errors were. We know what effect they had on the churches in Galatia and why Paul had to combat them for the sake of the gospel. These things and much more we know. The Holy Spirit tells us. These are our concern. We will not be tempted into fruitless

* The same has been the case with the authorship of the epistle to the Hebrews. Although our “Confession of Faith” ascribes the authorship to Paul, almost from the beginning of the second century controversy arose concerning who actually was used by God to write it. Many names have been suggested, but no conclusion has ever been reached. The author is, in the opinion of the Holy Spirit, unimportant – except for the fact that He Himself wrote it.

speculation on unanswerable questions, as if the interpretation of the book depended on them.

Another characteristic of the book that sheds some light on the great miracle of its divine inspiration is its autobiographical nature. In no other of his epistles does the apostle reveal more concerning himself. He not only tells us of an important part of his life before and after his conversion, but he, as it were, lays bare his soul in as passionate a defense of the gospel of grace as one will find anywhere. I want to say a bit more about this presently, but for the moment I call attention to the fact that inspiration is a miracle that astounds us. The Holy Spirit, not Paul, is the Author of Galatians. Paul cannot in any proper sense of the word be called an author. But he did write

the book. And he wrote it, not at the dictation of the Holy Spirit, so that he functioned as nothing more than a secretary, only half conscious of what was being dictated to him, but he wrote it as if it were his own, with all the inner emotions of his heart spread out on its pages.

This, I say, is the wonder of inspiration. The Holy Spirit so worked that He alone is the Author of the work; but He works miraculously so that Paul, the Spirit's secretary, is present in every detail of the book. He is there raging against false doctrine. He is there slashing at the enemies of the gospel with a sharp sword. He is there in his sorrow, his disappointment at the unexpected suddenness of the apostasy among the Galatians, his urgency born out of concern for their salvation, his gentle and com-

forting words to those who are wind-tossed on the stormy seas of wicked theology. The Holy Spirit used Paul as a living, thinking, passionate instrument, and the power of the epistle lies in this miracle of the Spirit.

The miracle is not unlike the work of faith in the hearts of God's people. And the relation between the work of the Spirit in Scripture's inspiration and the work of the Spirit in our hearts is obvious to one who thinks about it. We believe, and faith is without doubt our activity — so much so that my faith is in quality and strength different from yours, as different as Paul's writings are from those of Isaiah. But Christ, through His Spirit, is nevertheless the "Author and Finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). 

All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee

Mr. Jon VanOverloop

The Butterfly's Metamorphosis (2)

In the previous article we considered how God created the butterfly to undergo the process of metamorphosis, to change the body of a butterfly from the lowly caterpillar to the winged adult. Allow me to remind the reader that after metamorphosis the body of the butterfly has undergone a complete transformation. Everything, including its eyes, brain, intestines, legs, and stomach, has been dissolved. The imaginal disks, however, escaped destruc-

tion, and these groups of cells have grown to form the new organs and body parts.

In this second article we consider how this process of metamorphosis results in a butterfly whose life in many ways is a beautiful picture of the life of a Christian. As God works in our hearts all our life long, from a spiritual viewpoint we also become totally different. We become a whole new creature. It is difficult to find one word that encapsulates the whole changing process that God sovereignly and graciously works in Christians. As with all pictures or analogies, no word seems to fit perfectly. The change is really a combination of processes that begins with regeneration at an instant in time, continues all our life long as we go

through daily conversion, and culminates with our perfect glorification in the new heaven and earth. It is that gradual sequence of changes that is pictured in the metamorphosis of a butterfly. Let's take a look.

The butterfly, which as a caterpillar used to be a creature of the night, most active in the shadows of the leaves, now becomes one of the day, flying in the sunny field. This behavior is not merely a physiological response of the butterfly. God designed the butterfly from the beginning of time to behave in exactly this way, so that the result of metamorphosis would remind the Christian of the great change that he undergoes in this life. Just as the butterfly is drawn to the light, so a true Christian

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longs for the Light. Think of I Thessalonians 5:4, 5: "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness." Aren't we also changed to love the Lord and enjoy the opportunities to bask in the light of God's Word? Eagerly we put ourselves in places where His light will shine on us. We anticipate hearing the Word preached.

Another result of metamorphosis is that the winged adult becomes extraordinarily beautiful. Although there are some notable exceptions, caterpillars tend to be drab and not known for their beauty. Isn't that also true of Christians before and after our transformation? Knowing about great men and women of faith who have gone before us brings some even to tears because of the incredible beauty that God expressed in them. Some, including the apostle Paul, were at one time very dark figures that were wholly corrupted by sin. Their metamorphosis made them different, so that they quickly became beautiful, in a spiritual sense. They cared not at all about how they looked to the men of the world, but instead were industrious for the causes of Christ. Men whose bodies bore the marks of persecution or disease, but who remained dedicated to the kingdom of Christ, are those who from a spiritual standpoint are truly beautiful, beautiful people. In the final manifestation of the kingdom of God even their physical bodies will transform to be beautiful. No matter how marred their bodies were, when united finally with their souls in heaven, they will be altogether glorious persons.

In addition to a physical beauty, after metamorphosis butterflies also become conspicuous in their natural environment. They don't intentionally try to stand out,

but God designed them to be extraordinarily visible after their transformation. The distant flutter of the brilliant wings of a butterfly is readily noticed when one walks through the field. This physical condition points the observant Christian to the truth of the antithesis, the marked and very noticeable difference between those who are of Christ and those who are of the world. Christians stand out, not because they try to be different, but because of what they are becoming.

Many of us have experienced this at the university or workplace, where we had to disagree openly with those around us. In doing so, we became different from the crowd. People immediately take note of us when we defend our views on a six-day creation, on taking God's name in vain, on the woman's calling as mother in the home, on abortion, on drunkenness, on civil disobedience, on the nature of the covenant, and on the sovereignty of God. Our spiritual metamorphosis makes Christians stand out.

Again it must be emphasized that the bright colors of the butterfly are not merely a product of the composition of molecules that comprise the scales of its wings. Instead God, from the beginning of time, designed the butterfly's genes to express such characteristics with a view to showing Christians, throughout all ages, that standing out and being noticeably different is a natural consequence of the transformation that God works in them. In stark contrast to the theory of evolution, nothing in God's creation happens randomly or by chance. The conspicuousness of the butterfly after metamorphosis is no exception: it was profoundly intentional.

The caterpillar, before metamorphosis, can only crawl on its short legs, but the butterfly flies. It can soar in the warm summer breeze. Regeneration, and the en-

suing process of conversion, have the same type of effect in a man's soul. His spirit is uplifted, so that figuratively he also soars. Before the change, people are often unhappy with their life, their work, and their body, and they are generally discontent. This is one of the consequences of the fall. Man lost the perfect fellowship and friendship with God, so that without God there is always something missing in his life. There is in man an emptiness, a relationship that remains unfilled. No matter how much wealth God may have given him, he is always seeking more, because he thinks that if only he has that additional item, then he will be satisfied, then life will have purpose. The metamorphosed Christian does not look to worldly goods for fulfillment, because he more and more receives the fullness of Christ. He finds meaning and purpose in life as he lives a life of service to his God, communes with the saints, and grows in the knowledge of his so great salvation. In all of this he again can experience that fullness, and he will be known for his happiness and positive perspective on life. He has a fullness that those of the world can never attain. We should and must be a happy people. We are saved, after all! We have a hope, a promise, a sure confidence that the ungodly do not have. Christ loves us and has a mansion prepared for us in heaven. What could be better than that? What immeasurable joy and comfort that brings us! We have it all. We are rich. We take flight. We also, like the butterflies, can soar, spiritually.

Notice also that the process of metamorphosis requires time set aside from the caterpillar's normal activities. The caterpillar must stop eating and find a place where it can use up much energy, with the ultimate result of receiving a new body. Remember that the butterfly loses half of its

weight as it transitions from a caterpillar into a winged adult. Although God ultimately is the one that does the transforming, much energy is also spent by Christians as they labor to comprehend God and all that is revealed in Scripture. This knowledge and new life come with a cost. Christians should be known as those who spend much energy reading the Word, meditating on it, and using commentaries to learn from the insights that others have had. Christians may also have to give up what has become a normal lifestyle, and perhaps have to do without some activities altogether, for the purpose of making time to look into the mirror of God's Word.

In Romans 12:2, we are admonished to be active in our Christian life as we grow in glory by our own transformation. Remember that our metamorphosis is manifest by an active proving of what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. And this is a demanding work. It requires that every one of our decisions, no matter how large or small, is to be made in full consciousness of our conversion. In this respect the daily aspect of living a sanctified life takes on added importance. The time that we decide to set our alarm for the morning, how much money we will spend on breakfast, how many of the ensuing hours we will spend in the gym, as well as larger decisions like to which school we should send our children, with whom we choose to spend our time, and how we choose to use our Sabbath days — all these decisions must be made with our new life in the forefront of our minds. Christians should always be striving to live sanctified lives. All of this work is an expression of the daily renewal of our lives in Christ, and is a very energy intensive process. There is no room for laziness in the lives of the converted. We are undergoing a metamorphosis, after all.

Finally, notice that the caterpillar does not consciously do the work of metamorphosis. Instead, the Lord does the work. The caterpillar, in and of itself, does not have the competence to change its own body. In fact, it does not even have an awareness that it is about to be changed into a winged adult. God sovereignly controls the millions of atoms and molecules in the tiny soupy innards of each chrysalis and places them in new arrangements within the cells of the rapidly dividing imaginal disks, so that, in the end, the butterfly has a new body. This is also true, in a spiritual way, for the Christian. He does not anticipate that it is going to begin, and it is only of grace that he is conformed to the image of Christ. He does not have the desire or the aptitude to be regenerated, the very beginning of the process of change.

The apostle John speaks of those who became the sons of God and received Christ as those "which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). Christians do not of themselves desire to belong to Christ. They don't choose to be changed, so that they will freely do that which is good and upright in His sight. Instead God, as He does to the caterpillar, sovereignly carries out the work of transforming us.

In all of this it is evident that the metamorphosed butterfly can inspire in us the confidence that God's work in us will also someday be completed. The butterfly's transformation is finished. We can see that God has already given it a new body, and a beautiful one at that. It is already capable of flying and has achieved the typical purpose for which God created it. Yet, we find ourselves imperfect and still struggling because of sin. We do not yet serve God as we ought, with a true heart. God's glory does not yet perfectly shine out of us so

*Thanks be to God
for such a
wonderful creation.*

that we are absolutely beautiful. Our spirits do not soar as they should because we do not yet experience that perfect fellowship with Him whom we confess to love. But we have the promise in Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Someday, when God ushers in the new heavens and the new earth, when Christ's kingdom is established in its final manifestation, then the figure will become reality. Our metamorphosis will be complete. In that day we will be changed, so that our spirits will be united with our resurrected bodies, and we in singleness of mind will worship God in the beauty of perfect holiness. We will then have perfect fellowship with God, so that there will be

nothing wanting in our life. Then our transformation will be complete. What a day, what a glorious day that will be!

What a beautiful picture the metamorphosis of the butterfly is of the Christian's transformation. We praise the Creator God, who created nothing arbitrarily. Everything in creation was made with specific purposes in His mind. In the butterfly's case, He designed it to grow in beauty, to stand out, to fly, and to behave differently through the process of metamorphosis, by being reborn. It's a wonderful picture of the work that God is accomplishing in our souls and bodies. Thanks be to God for such a wonderful creation. May we see God's works as they are — beautiful pictures teaching us and reminding us of the spiritual works and attributes of God. And in response may we give Him all the praise for the many wondrous works that He has done. 

Evangelism in the Established Church (3)

Hindrances to this Work (cont.)

We now focus our attention on the third proposed hindrance to personal evangelism.

3. We have not emphasized personal evangelism in the past. Why do we seem to think it is so important today? Are we not to hold to the “old paths” and warn the people when new ideas are set forth in our churches? Why is this idea of personal witnessing so important all of a sudden?

The place to begin addressing this concern is the question whether personal evangelism is in fact something new. Is personal witnessing by the believer a new practice, and, if so, to whom is it new?

If we survey briefly the history of the Christian church, we would have to conclude that personal witnessing has always been part of the life of the membership. As we noted before, it is set forth in the New Testament as the normal behavior of all new converts who have been brought to true faith. This relates to the shepherds who worshiped the newborn King (Luke 2:17, 18); the Samaritan woman (John 4:28ff.); the persecuted saints of the early Christian church (Acts 8:4); and the Christians who were scattered abroad and needed to be reminded that by holy living they had the privilege of evangelizing personally (I Pet. 3:15, 16).

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The church took seriously the need to instruct her members to live a godly life and to evangelize others, as is evident in the church of Philadelphia. Christ said to her, in the letter addressed to her in Revelation 3:7-14, that she had “kept my word and hast not denied my name,” and “thou has kept the word of my patience.” How did she do this? The angel of this church certainly set forth the word of truth and taught it to the congregation by the preaching of the gospel. The people in turn received it and broadcasted it. This is why Christ said she had an “open door.” The promise that Christ gave to her is that her enemies would “come and worship before thy feet.” Christ would give them amazing success in their outreach ministry. Such activity would not weaken the church. It will have the opposite effect: “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God.”

The history of the Reformation demonstrates as well that the ordinary members of the church received the grace of God to confess shamelessly and openly the truth of the gospel as it was delivered unto them through the Reformation. This activity played a key role in the amazing speed with which the truth spread throughout all the countries of Europe. This was true even in the face of the cruelest opposition. They were eager to speak to others of the gospel of salvation by grace through faith. Personal evangelism was used by God at great expense to the faithful – and with mighty success.

The history of mission work by the church illustrates this fact over and over. God raised up fearless preachers to travel throughout the world to preach the great gospel of justification by faith alone. Missionaries brought the same message with the same courage. They did this at the time of the Reformation already and carried on the work all through the church’s history. Also in missions, the new believers responded to the Word preached and spoke to others of their newfound joy. This contributed to the formation of the church everywhere. Story after story can be told of the lone missionary who worked diligently for years until the Lord gave him his first convert. Then things would change. God by the Holy Spirit raised up a new convert, a local person, who was changed from heathendom to the Christian faith. Usually, this person formed the necessary bridge to reach out to the community so that others eventually joined with them in worship and the formation of a church.

The establishing of a church does not mean that this outreach of personal evangelism may then stop. God’s instruction is clear: it must continue. In the way of such activity the Lord adds new members through the wonder of conversion. These new converts are encouraged by the godly example of mature Christians who had the benefit of covenant instruction all their lives. Baptism of adults blends beautifully with the baptism of infants as God gathers His church in the local congregation.

These are the “old paths” that we must acknowledge as right for the church and ought to be part of the life of everyone in our congregations. I am so convinced of this, that if you ask me what one thing is necessary if our churches will be truly mission-minded churches, I would answer that it is the personal evangelism by every member. If we do this in obedience to the instruction of the Word of God, every member will be mission-minded, and outreach, love, and care for others will be the experience of all of us. This will engender in us a true love for the lost souls that God may be pleased to save through us. And out of this personal involvement will also come a desire to do this “with the churches in common” in areas far removed and in foreign settings that require mutual cooperation. Each one of us will appreciate the

difficulties connected with mission work from our own experience. It will drive us to our knees to seek God’s blessing of courage and strength. All our members need a “heart for missions,” which can come only when we are personally obedient to Christ in doing evangelism where He has placed us.

From some points of view this is new for us, and it is probably for that reason that it becomes a hindrance to personal witnessing. It is not true that personal witnessing on the part of our membership was completely lacking in the past or that it was forbidden. It is more correct to say that it was not given its proper emphasis. There are many reasons for this. Some of these reasons I have mentioned before and need not repeat. Most of them pertain to our history and the priority given to combating error,

advancing covenant instruction, dealing with the practical applications of covenant truth, and such like. In the midst of this we did put forth efforts for mission work and God blessed these as well. The emphasis correctly was placed upon the preaching of the gospel as God’s way to gather the church. Also this was done to combat the errors prevalent in the evangelical church world that contented itself with self-made missionaries. It is time now to emphasize the equally biblical truth that every believer has the gifts and calling to evangelize through personal witnessing. A good and healthy emphasis on personal evangelism within the established church will help us to reach outside of the comforts of our covenant sphere and let our light shine in the world beyond, as Christ has instructed us to do. 

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. James Laning

The Power and Government of the Church (4)

The Calling of Churches to Federate

Two fundamental principles of Reformed church government are the autonomy of the local instituted church and the fact that a true church is called to unite with other faithful churches in a federation of churches, often referred to as a denomination.

That an instituted church is autonomous means that it is a complete picture of the body of Christ and has received from Christ the authority to preach the gospel and exercise Christian discipline.

Christ from heaven is actually the One who is performing this work through the instituted church, and no one can stand between Him and the body through which He performs it. Neither the State, nor “higher ranking” officebearers (e.g., bishops), nor any “higher” ecclesiastical body can come between Christ and His bride as she is manifested on earth in the church institute. This principle, which has already been set forth, is of fundamental importance.

But it is not the only principle that must be maintained. It is also very important that like-minded churches join together and form a federation. It is this truth that will now be set forth in more detail.

A Federation of Churches over against Independentism

A federation of churches is a group of churches in which each church, while maintaining control of its own internal affairs, willingly agrees to abide by decisions made by the churches as a whole. In such a federation, delegates from the individual churches meet together to make decisions on doctrinal and practical matters that affect all the churches. Once these decisions are made they are binding upon all the churches, and thus upon all the individuals within the denomination. Although a church or individual may protest against a decision that is made, they must abide by that decision in the meantime. And if

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their protest is not upheld, they must either submit to the decision or leave the federation of churches.

Most reject this principle today. They openly reject decisions of their denomination and think nothing of it. Many churches insist that decisions made by the broader gatherings of their denomination are not binding upon them unless they choose to ratify the decision. They can remain in the denomination, so they say, while rejecting the decisions of their broader gatherings. If asked on what basis they maintain this, they will often cite the first principle we have already mentioned – the autonomy of the local church. They act as though it would be contradictory to maintain both the autonomy of the local church and the calling of instituted churches to federate and submit to a common government.

To see the error of this, we must distinguish between the principle of the autonomy of the local church and Independentism. We maintain the former, and we deny that it implies the latter.

When talking about Independentism, we must make a distinction between churches that have adopted the principle of Independentism and a church that for a time is not part of any denomination. There are many denominations of churches in which the individual congregations, though loosely united, have together adopted the principle of Independentism. This means that although delegates from the different churches may meet together from time to time and make decisions, those decisions are not considered to be binding upon the individual churches. Each church in such a denomination can decide for itself whether it will consent to the decision or not. These are churches that have adopted the principle of Independentism. Then there are some churches that are independent in the sense that they are not a part of any denomination. It may be that such a church is independent because it has adopted the

principle of Independentism, or it may be independent for a time while looking for another church or churches with which to federate. The principle of Independentism is that against which I am writing, while granting that there may be times in which a faithful church exists for a short while apart from any others.

Those who adopt Independentism argue that since an instituted church is a complete picture of the body of Christ, it need not submit to decisions made by any gathering of churches. They argue that since God uses the term “church” in Scripture to refer either to the universal body of believers (Matt. 16:18) or to an individual congregation (Rev. 2:8), and that He uses the term only in these two ways, there are no decisions other than those of one’s individual congregation to which a believer must submit.

Decisions of Broader Assemblies: Settled and Binding

Before considering some of the implications of Independentism, it is important to see clearly that it is contrary both to Scripture and to our Reformed confessions. That it is contrary to the latter can be clearly demonstrated from Article 31 of the Church Order:

If anyone complain that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a major ecclesiastical assembly, and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the Church Order, as long as they are not changed by the general synod.

This article speaks of the believer’s right to appeal a decision of a minor assembly to a major assembly. In other words, it speaks of the right to appeal a decision of a consistory to a classis, and of a classis to the synod. But it also

states that when a major assembly meets (i.e., a classis or synod) whatever is agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered “settled and binding.” The binding nature of such a decision is not dependent upon the concurrence of any church or individual. The members of all the churches represented at that major (i.e., broader) assembly are bound to abide by its decisions. They may protest such a decision, and they may appeal a classical decision to the synod, but they must either submit to the decision during this process, or, if they cannot do this with a good conscience, they must, in the proper way, leave the federation of churches. But the point here is that the decisions of the broader assemblies are authoritative decisions. They are binding decisions, and must be viewed as such.

To prove this from Scripture we have often cited the ecclesiastical assembly that met at Jerusalem, and which is referred to in the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of the book of Acts. The occasion for this assembly is stated in the first two verses of Acts 15:

- 1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.
- 2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

Here we see that a matter of dispute in one congregation was referred to a broader ecclesiastical assembly. Then, in verse four of chapter 16, we see that the decisions made at this assembly were to be considered settled and binding:

And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were or-

daigned of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.

The decisions made at this assembly were called “decrees,” or literally “dogmas.” These positions were authoritative dogmas that were binding upon all the churches. That this is so is evident from the fact that these decisions were brought to the churches in the different cities, not for them to approve, but for them “to keep.” The decisions of the apostles and elders were to be considered settled and binding.

Some have objected to this, and have argued that this assembly in Jerusalem cannot be compared to

ecclesiastical assemblies today because the assembly in Jerusalem was guided by infallibly inspired apostles. This, however, is a mistake. The apostles were divinely and thus infallibly inspired when they wrote the Scriptures, but this does not mean that they were so inspired whenever they spoke. If such had been the case, there would have been no need for such an assembly. The inspired Word spoken through just one apostle would have been decisive on the matter. Furthermore, the decisions at this assembly were those not only of the apostles, but also of the elders. The officebearers that made up the assembly confessed that the Holy Spirit was guiding them as a

group (Acts 15:28), so that together they arrived at a decision, a dogma, that was to be binding upon all the churches.

That last point must also be noted. The decision taken was binding not only upon the saints in Jerusalem and Antioch, but upon the saints in all the churches in all the cities. Acts 16:4 says that as they went from city to city they delivered these dogmas to the saints, informing them that they were to keep these dogmas, viewing them to be the work of the Holy Spirit.

This is a very important issue in our day. In the next article, Lord willing, we will go into it a bit more. 

In His Fear

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

Displaying Our Banner

A banner was very important to soldiers involved in hand-to-hand combat. The banner was a flag placed upon a tall pole and held above the leader of the army. The soldiers had a vital interest in seeing the banner, for it served as their rallying point. They would look for the banner and then gather around it, and thus around their leader. A soldier who was separated from the banner would in effect be separated from the rest of the army and be in imminent danger of being captured or killed. The banner helped keep the army together. It ensured that the soldiers were safe, and that the army was united and strong and could fight the enemy effectively. Rallying around it, the soldiers could go into battle with confidence.

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God has given His church today such a banner, to serve the same purpose. We read of that in Psalm 60:4 – “Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth.”

This is a banner for us to carry in our battles against our spiritual enemies. It is a banner for us to hold up high for all to see. It is a banner for the people of God to rally around so that we and our children are united and safe and strong. It is a banner that enables us to go on in the spiritual warfare with confidence of victory.

The banner God has given us is the truth. The truth is the flag we hold up high. The truth unites us in the battle. The truth makes us strong. As we rally around it, we can be sure of victory in every spiritual battle.

The truth is given us in the Scriptures. This means that the Bible is our banner. For that reason, the Bible, more than anything else, must be studied and learned

so that we and our children know well our God-given banner.

We should understand, however, that the Reformed confessions, as a faithful summary of God’s Word, are also our banner. God has also given the creeds as our rallying point. They serve to unite us and to give us spiritual confidence and strength.

It is true, of course, that the creeds are not equivalent to the Scriptures. They are man-made documents and are not infallible. Nevertheless, they are the work of God. The Holy Spirit has guided the church into an understanding of the truth. The Spirit has directed the church in setting forth that truth in the creeds. And the Reformed confessions we have and use have proven, over many centuries, to be faithful to the Scriptures. While the words they contain were written by men, they set forth the truth of the Word of God.

The creeds are very valuable as our God-given banner.

First of all, they serve to unite. It is not true, as is so often said today, that the doctrines of God's Word as set forth in the creeds divide. The opposite is the case. The only true unity is unity in the truth. The creeds provide this. They are a means to unite believers, to unite churches within a denomination, and to unite denominations. They are also a means to unite the church of all ages. The creeds unite God's people in the truth that honors God and that saves and comforts His people.

They are also a valuable banner because they show where the church stands. More and more today you cannot know what churches believe. More and more today individual believers do not even know where they themselves stand. They are scattered in the spiritual battle, for they have lost their rallying point. Though they may still have the Reformed confessions, they do not know them and do not use them. In the midst of such ignorance, the confessions help us to know what we believe, and to show others what we believe.

Let us be thankful to God for the creeds as our God-given banner!



God gives us the banner of His truth for a purpose. God's purpose is that we display it.

The banner must not be hidden or kept secret. The truth may not be put on the shelf, there to collect dust and be forgotten. The banner does us and our children no good if it is not displayed. It is to be held up high so that it can be seen.

The main way in which the banner is displayed is by the preaching of the truth. Through the preaching, God's people see and come to a better knowledge of the truth. Through the preaching, they are taught what to believe and what to confess.

We need clear, faithful preaching of the truth. We live in times of doctrinal indifference.

Many say that doctrine is not needed. It is said, "It doesn't matter what you believe as far as doctrines are concerned — just so that you believe in Jesus!" As a result, many are doctrinally ignorant. These are the times when many do not endure sound doctrine, for they turn away their ears from the truth, and are turned unto fables (II Tim. 4:3).

The trouble is that this is always a temptation for us, too. We are inclined to want to do away with doctrinal preaching altogether and to hear only "practical" sermons. That is exactly why our banner must be held up high through faithful preaching of the truth, including Heidelberg Catechism preaching. It must be clearly proclaimed so that we know it well, and so that we are constantly growing in our knowledge of it.

This kind of preaching is necessary also for the sake of our children. They need to know sound doctrine, for they live in days characterized by increasing apostasy. More and more pressure is put on them to think that doctrines are simply for theologians and scholars, and not for them. Sometimes our children are mocked because they have an interest in and knowledge of the truth. We must recognize the fact that the next generation of the church is strongly tempted to forsake doctrine.

Parents, and the church, must therefore take seriously the calling to instruct the covenant children in the truth. God has given us the banner of the truth so that we might display it clearly for the next generation of His church to see and to know. Our children must be taught to appreciate and love the doctrines of God's Word. The banner must be passed on to them.

The banner must also be displayed for others to see.

We do this by how we live. Our lives must themselves be a witness to the truth. It should be obvious, from all our behavior, that the truth is important and precious

to us. Our belief in and love for the truth make our lives distinct, so that we are as lights in the midst of a dark world. Our lives are to be consistent with the truths of God's Word — lives of humble gratitude and faithful obedience to the commands of our God.

We also display the banner by our witnessing. We ought not be ashamed of the gospel. Sometimes we can be, especially when ridiculed by others for what we believe. Then we hesitate to defend the truth. We hesitate to bring others to the church where the truth is preached. We are even tempted to water down or alter the truth so that it is more palatable to others. We must not do this. We must not lower the banner. We must not let the banner fall. Even if opposed or ridiculed, we must be those who say: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. That gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and in it I glory. I love that gospel. Therefore I gladly display it for all to see, and valiantly defend it against those who oppose and attack it."



If we fail to display this banner, God will take it away.

That will happen as a direct result and consequence of not displaying the truth. If it is not displayed, we will forget it. If the truth is not preached, we will become ignorant. Then the banner will be forgotten and lost.

This is a dangerous position for the church to be in. For then the church becomes wishy-washy and God's people become vulnerable to false doctrine and to the lies of the devil. And then the words of Hosea 4:6 are fulfilled: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge!" The church is not destroyed because of a lack of zeal, or because of a lack of love, or because of a lack of good deeds. But it is destroyed because of a lack of knowledge. It is the ignorant church that goes down in defeat and that loses

the right to call itself the church of Christ.

Such will be God's judgment on the church that does not display the banner of the truth. God will say: "If you do not appreciate what I have given you, if you take for granted the precious truths of the gospel that you have received from Me, then you do not deserve them. I will therefore take your banner away!"

But when, by God's grace, the banner is displayed, the church is

kept spiritually strong and safe. When the truth is preached, God's people hear the gospel of Christ that saves and that builds up and strengthens them in their faith. The church that displays the banner will be distinct and solid and well-grounded. The knowledge of the truth will enable God's people to withstand the inroads of false doctrine. The knowledge of the truth will equip them to oppose those who attack the doctrines of sovereign grace. The knowledge of the

truth will provide them with an answer to give to those who ask them concerning their hope. The knowledge of the truth will comfort them, and their love for it will compel them to live lives of thankful obedience and good works.

We need this banner, and we need to display it. It is our rallying point. It ensures that we and our children will be safely guarded in this evil world. Be thankful for it, therefore. And take seriously the calling to use and display it. 

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Doug Kuiper

The Fundamental Work of the Deacons (10) A Mutual Understanding with Civil Poor-Relief Organizations

The church of Jesus Christ is not the only entity that busies itself caring for the needy — the poor, aged, widows, sick, disabled, and disaster victims. The civil government does so on all levels — federal, state, and local.¹ Secular private organizations such as the Red Cross do so. And even some private organizations that might be called Christian do so. I have in mind, for instance, the board of directors of a Christian retirement home, which not only oversees the home's staff and finances, but also makes provision for its residents to continue to live in the home even if they cannot afford to pay the costs of living there. The fact is that the deacons have some "competition" in their work.

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Reformed deacons must never let the "competition" win the day. In our last article, we pointed out the warning of Article 83 of the Church Order, that deacons must "be not too much inclined to relieve their churches of the poor." Article 83 applies this warning specifically to the case of the poor moving from one Reformed church to another. But the principle can be applied more broadly: deacons must never allow any other people or organization to minimize the work of the deacons, by caring for the church's poor.

What, then, are the deacons to do? Article 26 of our Church Order answers this question. The article reads:

In places where others are devoting themselves to the care of the poor, the deacons shall seek a mutual understanding with them, to the end that the alms may all the better be distributed among those who have the greatest need.

Moreover, they shall make it possible for the poor to make use of institutions of mercy, and to that end they shall request the board of directors of such institutions to keep in close touch with them. It is also desirable that the diaconates assist and consult one another, especially in caring for the poor in such institutions.

Having already treated the matter of deacons consulting with other deacons, we wish in two articles to treat the first two points of Article 26. In this article we will treat the issue of how the existence of "others" who "are devoting themselves to the care of the poor" affects the work of the diaconate.



Because our purpose at this point is to explain the fundamental work of the diaconate, we will not at this time give a detailed answer to the question of whether or not poor Christians may avail them-

selves of the help that secular organizations offer. We simply point out that the scriptural principle is this, that in their poverty God's people seek the true mercies of Christ from fellow saints and from the church through her diaconate, and that God's people not think too highly of the tender mercies of the wicked, for these are cruel (Prov. 12:10). But to explain this principle further and guide God's people in applying it requires us to make careful distinctions, which we will not take the time to do now, for this question does not bear so much on the work of the deacons.

What does bear on the work of the deacons is the fact that the people of God, if they choose to do so, could receive help both from the church and the government. Historically some did that very thing. When the teachings of the Reformation came to the Netherlands, and the government officially viewed the Reformed church as the state church, both the government and the church insisted on administering relief to the poor. Consequently, VanDellen and Monsma tell us, "certain parties would receive aid through the Church of their locality and also from the local government agency, whereas others suffered from insufficient support."² Today the same possibility exists.

It is the duty of the deacons, therefore, to do their utmost to prevent some from receiving more than they need, and others from not receiving enough. And to this end the deacons are required to "seek a mutual understanding with" others who devote themselves to the relief of the poor, whether those "others" be a government agency or a non-governmental agency.



What is meant by a "mutual understanding"?

In the Dutch, the article originally used the words *goede correspondentie*,³ which we could

translate as "good correspondence." VanDellen and Monsma say: "No doubt they meant by 'good correspondence' that each should report to the other to whom aid was extended."⁴ And Prof. William Heyns writes that the idea of "mutual understanding" is "an understanding of mutual recognition and of readiness to inform one another of the assistance that has been rendered, so that it will be possible for the Deacons to ascertain in regard to poor church members whether, and to what extent, they have received help from other sources."⁵

While not disapproving the state's busying itself in the relief of the poor, and while not discouraging the poor of the church from receiving such relief, the article nevertheless requires the deacons to let the state know what the deacons are doing, and to receive knowledge of what the state is doing in the care of the poor. A "mutual" understanding is an understanding that both state and deacons have, not the one or the other only. And such an understanding can be achieved only by communication, whether written or verbal.

Such mutual understanding was possible in the days in which the article was originally written, because the government of the Netherlands officially recognized and even partially sponsored one church — the Reformed church.

One has good reason to wonder if such mutual understanding is even possible today, especially in the western world. One reason why such an understanding seems unlikely is that both church and state today rightly emphasize a separation of church and state. Because of this separation, the church is not interested in telling the state what it is doing in terms of poor relief, and the state is not interested in knowing. A second, related reason, would be that the government considers itself obliged to give aid to any of its citizens who qualify for it, and would probably be unconcerned about the role the

church desires to play in this matter. A third, suggested by VanDellen and Monsma, is that the multitude of organizations that exist today for the relief of the poor make this practically impossible for deacons to do. Yet another reason would be the great emphasis on the privacy of the individual that is so common today. No governmental agency, or even private organization, is free to release personal information about one of its clients to a third party.

In light of this possibility that deacons cannot have such a mutual understanding with others today, VanDellen and Monsma are of a mind that this requirement of our Church Order should be eliminated. Another reason they favor its revision or elimination is that, in their opinion, the provision "obscures a principle, namely, that the Church is fully responsible for its own needy."⁶ It obscures this principle, apparently, inasmuch as it allows deacons to keep in contact with other organizations that also relieve the needy.

1. It is not our purpose to delve into the history of the government's care of the poor, interesting though that history may be. For a survey of this history, the interested reader can consult pages 194-200 of Peter Y. DeJong's book *The Ministry of Mercy For Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1963).

2. Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941), p. 120.

3. To read the entire article in Dutch, as adopted by the Synod of Dordt, the interested reader can consult VanDellen and Monsma, p. 119.

4. VanDellen and Monsma, p. 120.

5. William Heyns, *Handbook for Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1928), p. 319.

6. VanDellen and Monsma, p. 121.

I would prefer, rather than taking VanDellen and Monsma's suggested route, to proceed on the assumption that this part of Article 26 is not wholly irrelevant, even though we know that deacons today will certainly have to apply the principles of this article differently than did deacons in another century and country.



If Article 26 does nothing more than remind us of important principles, we would have reason to argue that it is relevant. This article does remind us of such principles. True, the principles might be obvious, and a matter of common sense — but they are good scriptural principles for all that. And we can always profit from a reminder of good scriptural principles.

The article underscores the principle that the deacons may never allow any organization, not even the civil government, to relieve them of their duty to care for the poor. This reminder is necessary. These "others" do exist, and do work to relieve material poverty. The deacons cannot compel these organizations to cease this work, or to cease their existence altogether. In light of this, the deacons might be tempted to let the "others" do all the work. Article 26 will not allow deacons to fall into this error.

The principle is that the deacons assert their authority to care for the poor! They must even respectfully assert that authority to the government, if need be! Such is the significance of the answer of the Synod of Dordrecht, 1578, to a question put to it:

What a church must do which is hindered by the authorities in the ministry of mercy. Answer: All diligence shall be followed that the church again be given her right in the best possible way, which first the consistory and after that also the classis if neces-

sary shall take care of, requesting the same from the government if necessary.⁷

A second principle that the article underscores is simply this, that no needy persons be helped above and beyond their need. The article says, "...to the end that the alms may all the better be distributed among those who have the greatest need." Although we discourage our people from seeking help from the government in their poverty, the fact remains that a member of the church could seek help from both the government and the deacons. If this should happen, and if the deacons are aware of it, the latter may investigate to what degree the government helped, so that the individual or family is not receiving from two sources more than what they need. It is not right of the church to bestow alms on those whose need has already been met by another source, even if her members should have come to the church first.

These principles are good. They make the article relevant for us today.



The article is also relevant because it reminds deacons of what they must strive to do, and perhaps can do successfully, in certain instances.

First, at times they might be required to show the civil government that the church through her deacons is capable of caring for the needs of a specific individual, and ought to be permitted to do so. I speak of specific cases. Suppose that in some instance the civil government becomes insistent on helping a member of the church, and requests the deacons to let the government be the sole supplier of aid. Then deacons today must also request the government to let the deacons be the sole supplier of aid. Just the thought of what might be involved in making this request might make the deacons think, "It will never work." It might be

easier to make a camel go through the eye of a needle than to try cutting through government red tape, to get the government to stop doing something it thinks it has a right to do. But it is possible! God, who governs men's hearts, could so govern the hearts of those in government who act on this request, that they grant it! But it will require the deacons to make the request, and show the government that the deacons are serious about taking care of their own poor. And the reason for making such a request will be the deacons' realization that the church must care for her poor, and that the deacons must correspond with others who are doing the same thing, so that the poor are best cared for.

Second, if the deacons become aware of any in the congregation who are on the government's welfare rolls, the deacons must teach them to seek help, not from the government, but from God through the church and her deacons. This also could be a daunting task. The deacons might meet opposition to this. But if the deacons are convinced that the member of the congregation is wrongly seeking help from the government, rather than from the church, the deacons will undertake this daunting task anyway, and will persist in it. For they must not let any "others" relieve them of their own duty to administer Christ's mercies to the poor!

No other organization *can* administer Christ's mercies to the poor. No other group of people has God *called* to do this. No other group is so privileged as to be used of God in this way. The deacons exclusively administer Christ's mercies. Deacons, do not neglect this work! 

7. The quote is from page 102 of Richard R. DeRidder's translation of P. Biesterveld's and Dr. H. H. Kuyper's book, *Ecclesiastical Manual, including the decisions of the Netherlands Synods and other significant matters relating to the government of the churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982).

Minister Activities

Rev. Slopsema declined the call he received to serve as the pastor of First PRC in Holland, MI. Rev. K. Koole, of the Grandville, MI PRC, declined the call to become professor in our seminary. Per synod's decision, the call was then extended to Rev. R. Cammenga, of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. Rev. Cammenga subsequently accepted that call. Rev. M. Dick declined the call to serve as Eastern Home Missionary for our churches. Rev. W. Bruinsma declined the call extended to him to serve as the next pastor of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada. First has since called Rev. S. Key. The Loveland, CO PRC has extended a call to Rev. W. Bruinsma to serve as their next pastor. Rev. W. Bruinsma has also received the call to become the next pastor of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, N.J.

Young Adult Activities

A word of thanks goes out to Shealagh Wierenga, a member of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada (and one of the 63 young adults who attended the Young Adults Retreat in Redlands, CA, July 4-8, sponsored by Hope PRC), for providing the "News" with a detailed summary of the week. Space does not allow us to include everything she wrote, but we certainly appreciated her taking the time to write. The theme of the retreat was "The Role of Young Adults in the Church." The first speaker was Rev. M. VanderWal, pastor of Hope PRC. On Monday, July 4, he spoke on "The Need to Find and Have a Role in the Church," emphasizing that young adults are called to love their

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

church, to know their place in it, and to be active in it. The following evening Prof. B. Gritters focused on "The Specific Role and Responsibilities of Young Adults in the Church." There was especially one word that Prof. Gritters used to describe the role of young adults in the church, and that word was "serve." He encouraged them to look up to the older people in the congregation to learn from them, to look down to the children and young people to be an example to them, and to look across to other young adults to have good friends, to be good friends, and to encourage them in the way of faith. The retreat also featured discussion topics on "Financial Support by the Y.A. of the Church and School" and "Challenges to Antithetical Living Faced by Y.A." Some of the activities included fireworks on the 4th of July, a trip to Big Bear Lake, including the added "bonus" of seeing a real forest fire on the trip back to Redlands, a trip to Huntington Beach on the Pacific Ocean, and a trip to Six Flags Magic Mountain amusement park. Shealagh concludes by adding, "I only hope that someday I can go back to visit, as they all were a great bunch of people. Well that, and the weather was fantastic! Hot and sunny the whole time — what could be better than that?!"

Young People's Activities

The Young People of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC spent the week of July 22 through 29 in and around the Wingham, Ontario PRC. They arrived mid-afternoon July 22 and camped at the home of one of the members of Wingham for the week. A time of fellowship between the Wingham congregation and the Kalamazoo young people took place Saturday afternoon with a softball game. Sunday was spent in worship. Mon-

day evening Rev. M. DeVries, pastor of Wingham, gave the first of two speeches geared for young people, speaking on "Young People Need the Church." Tuesday evening Rev. Bruinsma, Kalamazoo's pastor, spoke on "The Church Needs Young People." In addition, the young people from both churches enjoyed several recreational activities throughout the week.

Evangelism Activities

Members of the church in west Michigan were invited to attend a four-class (it turned out to be a five-class) series on "The Doctrine of the Antithesis," given by Prof. H. Hanko, and sponsored by the Reformed Witness Committee of Hope PRC in Walker, MI on the evenings of July 5, 12, 19, 26, and August 2. The sub-topics were 1) The Idea of the Antithesis; 2) The Antithesis in the Church; 3) The Antithesis in Home and Family; 4) The Antithesis in the World, Part I; 5) The Antithesis in the World, Part II.

The Evangelism Committee of Georgetown, PRC in Hudsonville, MI invited their congregation to join them in distributing literature and invitations to their church in their church neighborhood Saturday morning, July 23. Plans were to go door to door, handing out a simple gospel tract, leaving information about Georgetown, and inviting neighbors to worship with them.

Mission Activities

Rev. J. Mahtani preached his farewell sermon for the Pittsburgh Mission during the evening service Sunday, July 12, choosing as his text I Corinthians 3:10-17, under the theme, "Take Heed How Ye Build." He was installed Friday evening, July 15, as the third pastor of the Bethel PRC in Elk Grove, IL. Rev. C. Haak, Bethel's



second pastor, preached and conducted the installation service.

Rev. R. Miersma, along with his wife, Sharon, finally were able to conclude business with the banks in Ghana and received approval for the transfer of funds to the United States. Rev. and Sharon were able to leave Ghana July 28 and fly to Amsterdam. From there they flew into Sioux Falls Friday evening. We thank God that He has given safety to the Miersmas as they traveled from the now closed mission field

in Ghana, and we pray God's care for the brothers and sisters there. May the Lord preserve them and their churches in the truth and unite us to them in glory.

Congregation Activities

Rev. G. Eriks preached his farewell sermon as pastor of the Loveland, CO PRC on July 24. He chose to preach from II Corinthians 13:11 under the theme, "Brethren, Farewell." The day before, Saturday, July 23, the Loveland congregation

gathered for a farewell program for the Eriks family. The program began around 6:00 P.M., followed by a light lunch and a time to say farewell.

The congregation of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored what has now become their annual Summer Singspiration on Sunday evening, July 24, in their church auditorium. In addition to audience singing there were vocal and instrumental numbers and a collection for the Evangelism Society of First.

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Donald DeVries, and to Dan and Abby DeVries, in the sudden death of their daughter and sister,

KARI LYNN.

Our prayer is that the family may be comforted by the words of Romans 14:8, "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
Jack Brands, Assistant Clerk

ANNUAL MEETING

The RFPA Annual Meeting will be held on September 22 at 7:30 p.m. in Georgetown PRC. Rev. G. VanBaren will be the speaker.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Society of Trinity PRC express their sympathy to their society leader Mark Hoeksema and his wife Ruth, as well as to Carey and Lois Kamps, in the passing of their mother,

MRS. GERTRUDE HOEKSEMA.

We rejoice that she has received the inheritance incorruptible, and we live ourselves in that hope.

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

Bob Drnek, President
Kris Engelsma, Secretary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 1, 2005, Lord willing, our parents and grandparents,

EDWIN and CLARICE GRITTERS,

will celebrate their 55th wedding anniversary. With thanks to our faithful, covenant God, we rejoice with them as they celebrate this special event in their lives. We thank God for their Christian example to us and for their covenantal guidance and godly instruction they have shown us for so many years. May our heavenly Father continue to bless them richly in the days and years that lie ahead. "The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:5, 6).

✿ Jerry and Shirley VanderKolk

Brian and Shelly VanderKolk
Brent and Jessica VanderKolk
Joel

✿ Ed and Jeanne Karsemeyer

Shaun and Lorianne Karsemeyer
Clint and Renae VanderKolk
Todd, Ryan, Kyle

✿ Prof. Barry and Lori Gritters

Curt and Julie Gritters
Kevin and Audra Gritters
Eric and Alicia Gritters
Dan, Brad, Lisa

✿ Mike and Brenda Gritters

Darin and Amy Gritters
Mark and Candace Meulenberg
Rodney and Julianne Rau
Amber, David

✿ Roger Gritters

Caleb and Sharon Jonker
Kaylynn, Gerrit, Jordan

✿ Rick and Shari Gritters

Carli, Casey, Lindsey, Zachary
10 great-grandchildren

Redlands, CA

REMINDER:

Young people in the PRC who live away from home while attending college may, on request, receive the SB free of charge at their college residence. Please notify the SB business office as soon as possible.

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for September

Date	Topic	Text
September 4	"Teach As an Eyewitness"	Deuteronomy 4:9, 10
September 11	"Out of the Mouths of Babes"	Psalm 8:2
September 18	"Hiding God's Word in Our Hearts"	Psalm 8:2
September 25	"Relief From the Burden of Sin"	I John 1:7