

Inside this *Outlook*

<i>A Thin Line</i>	<i>Mr. Matthew Tuininga</i>	2
Mr. Tuininga, who works for Florida Congressman Dave Weldon in Washington D.C., offers an editorial on the role government should play in religion.		
<i>The Key to Christian Contentment</i>	<i>Rev. Jeff De Boer</i>	5
In this meditation, Rev. De Boer challenges the readers of <i>The Outlook</i> to find contentment in all circumstances.		
<i>We Confess</i>	<i>Rev. Daniel Hyde</i>	7
Rev. Hyde looks at Article 17 of the Belgic Confession. This article focuses its attention upon the restoration of natural man to God through the Son of God.		
<i>Looking Out and About</i>		10
<i>The Riches of the Reformed Faith (III)</i>	<i>Rev. Rich Kuiken</i>	11
In his series on the riches of the Reformed faith, Rev. Kuiken takes up the Lordship of Christ as He reveals, rules, and reconciles..		
<i>Looking Above</i>	<i>Rev. Brian Vos</i>	16
Rev. Vos continues his series on the Book of Revelation. This month he looks at the church in Sardis.		
<i>Press Release of the Combined CanRC and URC Church Order Committee</i>		19
<i>URCNA Classis Southwest U.S. Report</i>	<i>Rev. Daniel Hyde</i>	20
<i>RYS Youth Conference Report</i>	<i>Mr. Ed De Graaf</i>	21
Mr. De Graaf, Director of Reformed Youth Fellowship, offers a brief report on this summer's Young Peoples' Convention.		
<i>The Anointed Savior [III]</i>	<i>Rev. Wybren H. Oord</i>	23
As our anointed Savior, Jesus Christ fulfills the role of being our King. Rev. Oord looks at the importance of this role of our Savior.		
<i>Soundbites 1989</i>		24
<i>God's People, My Parish</i>	<i>Rev. Arthur Besteman</i>	25
Rev. Besteman related two stories of men who came to America to find a new way of life and found that new life in Christ.		
<i>The Outlook Essay Contest Winners</i>		26
High School	Miss Vanessa Rubingh	26
College	Miss Susan Allgaier	28
Adult	Mrs. Kristi Hummel	30



A Thin Line

On November 2, millions of Americans will go to the polls to choose the next President of the United States. In participating in such a privilege, how should Christians evaluate the various candidates? How should we evaluate the ambitious platforms of our two major parties?

Consider the Republican candidate. Republican President George W. Bush has sought to use government to tackle society's basic problems through his agenda of compassionate conservatism. Among other achievements he has signed into law the greatest expansions of Medicare, Education, and Interna-

tional HIV/AIDS spending in U.S. history. Bush also emphasized his record of defending the United States from terrorism and establishing democracy in the Middle East. Often his ideas are couched in rhetoric referring to America and democracy as the "hope of mankind" and the "light shines in the darkness. And the darkness will not overcome it."

The Democratic candidate is no less ambitious. Senator John Kerry has promised to create and preserve jobs, while assisting low-income families by increasing taxes on the wealthy. He has promised to work to ensure that all Americans

have health care, and to further increase education spending. He has promised to restore U.S. respectability in the world. Kerry too has idealistic rhetoric, promising that "we can reach for the next dream. We can look to the next horizon. For America, the hope is there. The sun is rising."

For all of their differences, Bush and Kerry share a basic problem. Neither seems to recognize that political achievements will not make America the light of the world or fulfill our dreams. In fact, for all of three centuries of progress, America is no closer to ending man's sin and misery than in the past. The innocent are still slain, families are still torn apart, and the weak are still trampled. Meanwhile, the more people turn away from



Volume 54, No.10 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) "And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands...and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon'" (Judges 7:20).

Journal of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Send all copy to:
Editor, Rev. Wybren Oord
7724 Hampton Oaks Dr.
Portage, MI 49024
Phone: (269) 324-5132 Fax: (269) 324-9606
Email: editor@reformedfellowship.net
Website: www.reformedfellowship.net

Board of Trustees

Brian Vos, *President*; Steve De Boer, *Vice President*; Marion Groenendyk, *Secretary*; Casey Freswick, *Treasurer*; Ed Marcusse, *Vice Secretary/Treasurer*; Zachary Andersson; Henry Gysen; Don Langerak; Henry Nuiver; Fred Rozema; Herman Sjoerdsma; Claude Wierenga

Editor: Wybren Oord

Contributing Editor: Dr. Cornelis P. Venema

Production Manager: Peter Wobbema

Business Manager: Shellie Terpstra

Design & Production: AVP Services

Cover Logo: Peter Hoekema

This periodical is owned and published by Reformed Fellowship, Inc., a religious and strictly non-profit organization composed of a group of Christian believers who hold to the Biblical Reformed faith. Its purpose is to advocate and propagate this faith, to nurture those who seek to live in obedience to it, to give sharpened expression to it, to stimulate the doctrinal sensitivities of those who profess it, to promote the spiritual welfare and purity of the Reformed churches and to encourage Christian action.

The publishers of this journal express their adherence to the Calvinistic creeds as formulated in the *Belgic Confession*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Canons of Dort*, and the *Westminster Confession and Catechisms*.

All contributions represent the personal views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the members of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Subscription Policy

The Outlook (USPS 633-980) is published monthly by Reformed Fellowship, Inc. (except July-August combined) for \$21.00 per year; (foreign rates: \$27.50 per year; Canadian rates: \$27.50 per year plus 7% GST Tax. Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order and he will be billed for renewal. Anyone desiring a change of address should notify the business office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Zip Code should be included. Periodicals postage paid at Grandville, MI and an additional office. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Outlook*, 3363 Hickory Ridge Ct., Grandville, MI 49418; OR in Canada to *The Outlook*, P.O. Box 39, Norwich, Ontario NOJ1PO. Registered as International Publications Contract #40036516 at Norwich, Ontario.

Advertising Policy

1. *The Outlook* cannot accept announcements or advertising copy inconsistent with the stated purpose of the Reformed Fellowship, Inc.
2. *The Outlook* reserves the right to reject, edit or request resubmission of announcement text or advertising copy.

3. All advertisements or announcements are to be submitted to the business office at 3363 Hickory Ridge Ct., Grandville, MI 49418, and must be received at least two months before the publication date.
4. Books, pamphlets or tapes to be advertised are to be screened as to author and content prior to publication of the advertisement, and such material should not conflict with the stated purpose of the Reformed Fellowship, Inc.
5. *The Outlook* reserves the right to limit the size of all announcements and advertisements, and to limit the number of issues in which they appear.
6. All advertisements and announcements must be approved by the board of the Reformed Fellowship, Inc. prior to publication in *The Outlook*.
7. All announcements and/or advertisements approved by the Board of the Reformed Fellowship, Inc. for publication in *The Outlook* shall appear free of charge; however, a gift would be greatly appreciated.
8. This Advertising Policy supersedes all prior policies, resolutions or other statements.

Editorial Office

7724 Hampton Oaks Dr.
Portage, MI 49024
(269) 324-5132 Phone
(269) 324-9606 Fax
editor@reformedfellowship.net Email

Circulation Office

3363 Hickory Ridge Ct.
Grandville, MI 49418
(616) 532-8510 Phone

Business Mailing Address

3363 Hickory Ridge Ct.
Grandville, MI 49418
Email: reffellowship@juno.com



God, the more they turn elsewhere for salvation. Both political parties increasingly reject the idea of limited government under God, instead glorifying government as the ultimate expression of community and the primary means of solving life's problems. As pragmatism takes over, true religion is driven further and further from public life. Such developments are fearfully reminiscent of the reasoning of humanity in times past. The builders of the Tower of Babel also sought to find salvation apart from the Lord: "Let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens . . . lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4).

As Christians, what should be our response to this political situation? I believe we must begin by understanding the Biblical teaching regarding government and its role, and applying that understanding to candidates.

Government Must Recognize the Sovereignty of God

The only foundation for government is that "the authorities that exist are appointed by God" (Romans 13:1). As Abraham Kuyper acknowledged in his famous 1898 Stone lectures at Princeton Seminary, "authority over men cannot arise from men." Any government that claims its authority from itself, from the people, or from any source besides God, promotes the cause of tyranny, because it promotes a baseless authority. Because government is Christ's representative Paul commands Christians to honor and obey the authorities. Peter instructs Christians to obey and suffer under authorities. Because they ultimately

receive their authority from God, John the Baptist teaches tax collectors and soldiers to do their duty and act in accordance with the godliness that should be characteristic of servants of God (Luke 3). Authorities must acknowledge that both they and their citizens are first to honor God rather than men (Acts 3). They must act in the reality that "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

Our modern political parties have largely failed to acknowledge the source of their authority. Although they speak with the rhetoric of God, the little acknowledgment that is made that the United States is "under God" is under fire from the left and from the courts. Christians must fight for the recognition of God as the only foundation of authority.

Government Must Seek to Fulfill Its Responsibilities as Granted by God

As Calvin says, "if they remember that they are vicars of God, they should watch with all care, earnestness, and diligence, to represent in themselves to men some image of divine providence, protection, goodness, benevolence, and justice" (*Institutes*, IV:XX:6). But how clearly does Scripture indicate the tasks of government? Paul writes that the governing authority is "God's minister to you for good . . . an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil" (Romans 13:4).

The primary task of government is twofold: to provide peace for the Church and the Gospel, and to promote justice and order. First, as the Belgic Confession declares, civil governments have the task of "removing every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and to every aspect of divine worship... in order that the Word of God may have free course; the kingdom of Jesus Christ may make progress; and every anti-Christian power may be resisted" (Article 36). This does not mean governments should actively promote the preaching of the gospel. Yet, I think it is interesting to note that even the corrupt Roman government was used by God for the good of the gospel.

When Paul commanded Christians to obey the governing authorities, he was certainly aware that the *Pax Romana* established by the Roman government provided a large measure of peace, stability, and infrastructure that enabled preachers of the early church to travel with relative speed and safety throughout the Mediterranean world. Rome's respect for law, order and citizenship preserved Paul at times from the wrath of the Jews, enabling him to preach for many years. Unlike Rome, which unwittingly aided the gospel, modern governments should intentionally aim to ensure peace and order for the Church.

America has a strong record of respecting freedom of religion. This

Any government that claims its authority from itself, from the people, or from any source besides God, promotes the cause of tyranny.

Government may not do everything it has the worldly ability to do, nor can it do everything the people want it to do.

is a tremendous blessing. In a time when some citizens are calling to brand “hate speech” a crime and religion is being driven from the public schools, Christians must vigilantly ensure that our political parties continue to stand for the freedom of both the Church and individuals to speak the whole counsel of God.

Second, governments must punish those who do evil and protect the weak from evil. Included in this calling is government’s responsibility to advocate for those who have no advocate. Proverbs 31:8-9 commands rulers to “open your mouth for the speechless” and “plead the cause of the poor and needy.” It would also be fair to say that in times of crisis government is obliged to intervene for the good of all (Genesis 47:13-26). There is Biblical precedent for ensuring that in a wealthy nation, the basic needs of the poor are being met.

Certainly few today deny the government’s responsibility to defend the nation from enemies, to promote justice, or to ensure that the poor are not trampled underfoot by individuals or economic systems. Both parties are quick to accept each of these responsibilities. Many candidates, however, do not defend the unborn who are created in the image of God. They promote the marriage of homosexuals, even though natural revelation should demonstrate to them that “from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8, Romans 1).

Government Must Acknowledge That as God’s Minister, Its Authority Has Limits

Government may not do everything it has the worldly ability to do, nor can it do everything the people want it to do. Abraham Kuyper argued that since government authority originates from the sovereignty of God alone, it must act within the guidelines set for its authority. Kuyper further pointed out that government is not the only authority. The Church and the family, for example, each have their own realm which government may not violate. As Jesus teaches so clearly, just as citizens must “render . . . to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” so government must render “to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).

Governing authorities must ensure, in the words of the Belgic Confession, that it is “functioning in the sphere entrusted to them, with the means belonging to them” (Article 36). In *Christianity and Liberalism*, J. Gresham Machen warned of the effects of unlimited government, which he associated with the rise of Modernist thinking. He warned that “the materialistic paternalism of the present day” would make America a land “where spiritual adventure will be discouraged” and all will be reduced to the level of “the least gifted of the citizens” (P. 14-15).

Unfortunately, here is where our modern political parties stray most

widely from the mark. Many in the Republican and Democratic parties seek to engineer society economically and socially through an astonishing list of health care programs, welfare programs, health and wellness initiatives, family planning initiatives, faith-based initiatives, economic incentives, and even art promotions. Many such programs are not targeted towards those in genuine need, and go far beyond defending the needy from injustice. Government treads on dangerous ground when it claims the authority to provide and control education, the proper domain of parents, or to use taxpayer dollars to dictate a health care or retirement system for all people. While Scripture arguably demonstrates that government should ensure that economic and commercial systems are essentially just, this calling should not be used as a pretext to interfere with every aspect of trade and commerce, favoring one interest over another for selfish ends. None of these tasks is ascribed to government by the Word of Him who established them.

In conclusion then, how should Christians examine candidates in the coming election? Shall we abandon our nation’s major parties, since they fail to meet the standard of Scripture in so many ways? Certainly not! Securing the blessings of godly government is far too important for that.

Having recently begun working for a congressman in Washington D.C., I understand the danger of discouragement for Christians in politics. We are working with people who hate our Lord. But as Christians we must not withdraw from the center



of public debate and its most pressing issues. Rather, we must consistently provide Christian proposals for godly policy. I have seen many Christians in Washington D.C. seeking to do just this. My boss, Florida Congressman Dave Weldon has fought hard to ban cloning and embryo stem cell research, standing up for the sanctity of life against those who make a god of science and its ability to fight disease.

When U.S. citizens vote on November 2, they should not fall into the trap of accepting the world's standards for a political platform. Certainly Christians will disagree regarding specific policies and programs. But we can unite to point government to its proper responsibilities and vote for candidates who truly attempt to carry out their tasks as Christ's ministers. For ultimately the goal of every Christian, both in and out of politics, is to point to Him as our one and only Savior, the only hope and light of the world.

Mr. Matthew Tuininga lives in Washington D.C. where he works for Florida congressman Dave Weldon.

The Key to Christian Contentment

“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:11-13

To adapt a line from Charles Dickens, Thanksgiving can be “the best of times and the worst of times.” Properly practiced, Thanksgiving is a time of great joy. We remember the thorough goodness of our God for another year. Many preachers will select texts of praise to God for Thanksgiving morning. They do so rightfully. We live in the best of times by no accident. God has blessed us beyond the imagination of many.

But Thanksgiving (dare we admit it?) may also bring out the worst in us. Considering what we have may be perverted to an unsettledness about what we do not have. We may find ourselves believing it would be possible to possess peace and joy if only we had a little more to be thankful for. And therein is the great lie about what we have: our circumstances determine our contentment.

The Bible tells us that something quite different is true: our contentment at Thanksgiving time, or any time for that matter, must come from somewhere beside possessions and position in life. Contentment does not come from our circumstances but through an understanding of life rooted in Christ. And not only does the Bible tell us where

true contentment lies, it also tells us such contentment is possible for each one of us. And it does so in no uncertain terms.

I attended high school at a small Christian school in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Near the end of each year there was an athletics banquet at which a guest was invited to address the students. At the end of my junior year our guest chose to speak about Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” The substance of the address is probably not unlike one you have heard based on this same verse: When I do not feel like I can run another stride, I remember that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. How can I have calm nerves at the end of a tight game? How can I do one more repetition? Through Christ who strengthens me.

There is no question that long distance running or converting a free throw are difficult tasks. But unfortunately, the speaker was incorrect in employing Philippians 4:13 to make his point. Athletics can be difficult. But what is in view in this verse is far more difficult. In fact its promise is applied to perhaps the most difficult thing any one of us may be faced

with in this life: contentment.

Would you characterize yourself as content? Or do you suppose that you could be content if only one or two things (or maybe three or more) were changed? How many of us are convinced that contentment would be there if only we had a bit more money, a little less stress, more of something else?

If you read the entirety of Philippians 4 you will notice Paul ends this book addressing a particular personal need. Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter. In such a circumstance he required the physical care of others. The Philippians had evidently responded by sending a gift to Paul through Epaphroditus.

This leads Paul to speak to them more directly in chapter 4:11-13 about what he had learned in general about circumstances and contentment. He tells them in verse 10 that they should not think that he rejoiced simply because he had what he needed. Rather his joy and contentment were based on something else - something that always transcends whatever the circumstances of life may be. To base contentment on circumstances, Paul writes, is always deceptive.

This is precisely the point driven home in verses 11 and 12 of chapter 4. Paul emphasizes to his readers that he had known plenty of

good and bad throughout his life - and contentment was never found in either. Paul knew how to be “abased”, likely a reference to his financial want. It is true that Paul was often responsible for his own physical support - a support that could hardly be characterized as luxurious. Further, he knew what it meant to be hungry and to suffer needs of various kinds (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:11, 2 Corinthians 11:27). Paul’s life was not one of material prosperity. Rather, every appearance is that he faced personal and financial need. And to those of every age who would believe that contentment is not possible without personal and financial success, Paul would have had every reason to be discontent.

On the other hand, Paul knew good. Not only do verses 11 and 12 tell us about his lack, there also must have been times of plenty. Paul writes about both of having just enough to get by as well as having more than enough.

Such a range of good and bad is known to each of us. It is the universal human experience. What is foreign to the Scriptures is that anyone would believe that contentment is based on these things. The end of verse 11 is clear: “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:”

We are taught to be content in the range of possibilities, not because of them. The Bible teaches that posi-

tion, power, and riches as sources of contentment are fruitless. A few biblical examples are apropos. In Acts 12:21-23 we read about the awful death of King Herod. This was a man who wished to have prestige and honor above all else (v. 23). Yet there is no hint that Herod knew any contentment. Much to the contrary, the Bible portrays a family line where there is anything but peace (e.g. Mark 6).

Additionally we should consider the example of the rich young man in Matthew 19:16-30. This young man was not prepared to give up all to follow after Christ (vv. 29, 30). Rather, he believed that he would find peace and contentment in those riches.

Very little appears to have changed since the time of Herod and the rich young man. Many people believe that if they only have a “little more” they will be happy. So a big screen television leads to a new boat, to a new house, to a trip to Jamaica. None of these is inherently wrong, but they become so when we think that we will be content because of them. Looking for contentment in these sorts of things is like the donkey reaching for the carrot hung out before him - we think one more step, one more thing will do it, only to discover once we have it, contentment is still beyond us.

The Bible tells us very clearly that contentment comes from only one place: through our relationship with an all knowing and all controlling God. The secret that Paul learned in verse 12 of Philippians 4 requires a shift in focus. We turn from looking at those parts of our lives that we

How many of us are convinced that contentment would be there if only we had a bit more money, a little less stress, more of something else?



would wish to change, to the loving heavenly Father who brings all things into our lives for our good (Romans 8:28). Through Christ we are now children of this Father. Through this same Savior it is possible to be content.

Are you content? The question is not whether there are circumstances about your life that you would like to change. There are certainly at least some. The question is rather whether or not we can be content in them. Is that possible?

God says it is. Contentment is possible because of Jesus Christ: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Rev. Jeff De Boer is the pastor of the Peace Reformed Church [RCUS] in Garner, Iowa.

We Confess

An Exposition & Application of the Belgic Confession

Article 17: Of the Restoration of Natural Man Through the Son of God

So often we sing that God's grace is truly amazing. Grace is the reason for our salvation and the reason for our gratitude to our infinitely gracious Triune God. In Article 17 of the Belgic Confession, we recognize that we are now steeped in God's wonderful saving grace. We are embarking on a short journey, moving from salvation planned (Article 16), to salvation accomplished (Articles 17-21), to salvation applied (Articles 22-23).

This amazing grace of God was not a backup plan or afterthought of God. God's grace finds its origin in the mysterious eternal decree of God. That is what we said in our last article. In Article 17, though, we begin studying the objective working out of that planned salvation in the work of Christ *for us* and then to the subjective application of that salvation *to us* and *in us* by the Holy Spirit.

The Covenant of Grace

To be Reformed is more than just believing the so-called "Five Points of Calvinism." These five points are not the essence of what Reformed churches teach and believe. To be Reformed is to live in covenant with God. To think as Reformed Christians is to think covenantally. To worship as Reformed churches is to worship covenantally. To read the Bible as Reformed Christians is to read it in a covenantal way, as it has one

message – that God has come to the rescue of fallen man. This is who we are as Reformed churches. One can hardly read the Bible without seeing the term "covenant" shows up in page after page. In just the Old Testament alone, the Hebrew word for covenant, *berith*, is used 287 times.

Article 17 mentions God's promise to send the "seed," Jesus Christ, to save His people. This is the beginning of the covenant of grace. This covenant of grace is one in essence throughout redemptive history, but varied in administration.

The covenant's administration began in the Garden, after the Fall, was continued after the Flood with Noah, ratified with Abraham, and again with the nation Israel and shown in its types and shadows (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1), given a kingly dimension with David (2 Samuel 7), and finally fulfilled in the New Covenant in the Father's beloved Son, Jesus (Luke 3:22; Hebrews 9:14-28).

Its essence, to use a biblical phrase, is "I will be your God, you will be my people" (e.g., Genesis 17:7; Revelation 21:3). The bottom line of the covenant of grace is that God saves sinners by His undeserved favor (Ephesians 2:14-18) by sending Jesus Christ to meet the terms of the covenant of works for us so that we might live (Galatians 2:15-

The covenant of grace is monergistic; that is, it is initiated and fulfilled by God Himself. It is gracious; that is, it is characterized not by the words “do this and live,” but, “It is finished!”

21). The covenant of grace is good news. This undeserved favor is seen as sinners are saved by the incarnation, obedience, suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. We see this pure gospel in that whereas the condition of the covenant of works was “do this and live” (Genesis 2:17 cf. Luke 10:28; Galatians 3:10), the condition of the covenant of grace is faith alone apart from works (Romans 3:28), in Christ the Savior alone. By this “condition,” which is really an instrument, sinners receive Christ’s righteousness by imputation. Amazingly, even this “condition” of the covenant of grace is given to us by grace alone as God grants to us and creates within us saving faith through the preaching of the gospel (Romans 3:19-5:21; Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 1:29). The covenant of grace is monergistic; that is, it is initiated and fulfilled by God Himself. It is gracious; that is, it is characterized not by the words “do this and live,” but, “It is finished!” (John 19:30).

**The Revelation of God’s
Wisdom & Love**

Article 17 reminds us that just as we do not do anything without first planning a course of action, so too the accomplishment of salvation by the Triune God is in accordance with His eternal plan. Thus we see in the history of redemption a reflection of the wisdom and love of

God after Adam violated the terms of the covenant of works. As the Confession says

We believe that our most gracious God, in His admirable wisdom and goodness, seeing that man had thus thrown himself into physical and spiritual death and made himself wholly miserable, was pleased to seek and comfort him, when he trembling fled from His presence...

Thus the *eternal* plan of the Triune God is worked out *in time* by the same all-wise, all-loving God. We see His wisdom in providing a remedy for our sin and his goodness in providing this remedy apart from any merit of our own. This is why we sing, “Not the labors of my hands, can fulfill Thy laws demands...Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling; naked come to Thee for dress, helpless look to Thee for grace.”

The First Gospel

Our Confession says that when our gracious God saw man’s sinful state He came to comfort “promising him that He would give His Son (who would be *born of a woman*) to bruise the head of the serpent and to make him blessed.”

These are the words of Genesis 3:15, which have been called the

“mother promise.” We call it this because it gives birth to all of God’s promises. It has also been called the *proto-evangelium*, that is, the first gospel. The marginal note from the Dutch State Bible, authorized by the Synod of Dort in 1618-19 and published in 1637 says this about Genesis 3:15: “This is the first promise of the Gospel of life and followed immediately after the announcement of death entering the world.”

Thus the gospel was revealed for the first time and began to do its work of creating a new people out of a fallen race. This promise of the gospel then began unfolding throughout redemptive history. The tale of the two seeds, Christ and Satan, individually, and the Church and the world, corporately, began to be manifested in the first family. In Genesis 4:1-8 we read of the story of Cain and Abel. Eve named her son “Cain,” meaning, “acquired,” as he was the expected fulfillment of the seed, the Messiah, while Abel’s name means “breath” as he was regarded as nothing. Cain, though, turned out to be the first anti-Christ and seed of the serpent.

For generations there were two lines, the godly line of Seth, which “call[ed] upon the name of the LORD” (Genesis 4:26) and those who were known for their cultural exploits, culminating in the builders of the Tower of Babel/Babylon (Genesis 11). In Genesis 12 the LORD promised to save a people through the line of Abraham, which was then manifested in the struggles between Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau. When the people of God were in Egypt the Pharaoh, the latest incarnation of



the anti-Christ, ordered all male babies to be killed in order to prevent the birth of Moses (Exodus 1). The LORD distinguished His people from the nations by saving them on dry ground, while the armies of Pharaoh were drowned in the same (Exodus 14). The story of David and Goliath and David and Saul is the story of these two seeds – would David survive? – would God’s promise continue?

In the midst of covenant judgment and utter despair as the people of God were carried off into captivity, God promised that a young maiden would conceive and bring forth the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 7:14, 9:6), which, in the fullness of time (Galatian 4:4), came in the Person of Jesus Christ. He had to survive Herod’s stratagems (Matthew 2:16-18), a battle with Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4), and the hordes of angry onlookers; and just when all hope seemed to be lost at Calvary – “He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!” Here is the wisdom of God, confounding the wisdom of man; here is the goodness of God, confounding the self-saving efforts of man.

The “Lisp” of God

We see in Genesis 3, as reflected in Article 17, a picture of the God in whom we believe and for whom we live. Did you notice how this article describes God? He is described as the God of all grace, wisdom, and goodness. But more than that, our Confession speaks of God in accommodated language as the first preacher, the first evangelist: “...*seeing* that man had thus thrown himself into physical and spiritual death and made himself

wholly miserable, *was pleased to seek and comfort him*, when he trembling fled from His presence...”

As if God did not already know from all eternity that Adam would sin! Nevertheless, in Genesis 3:9 we hear the LORD calling out, “Where are you?” What we have here with the language of God “*seeing*,” being “*pleased*,” and calling out is what we call accommodation. This means that God stoops to our level, bends over to look at us eye to eye. Calvin described this biblical phenomenon, saying:

For who is so devoid of intellect as not to understand that God, in so speaking, lisps with us as nurses are wont to do with little children? Such modes of expression, therefore, do not so much express what kind of a being God is, as accommodate the knowledge of Him to our feebleness. In doing so, He must, of course, stoop far below His proper height.

This is what God would later do with Israel, saying:

Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his ways and live? Say to them, ‘As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the

wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?’ (Ezekiel 18:23, 33:11)

God uses anthropomorphic (as if He had human body parts) and anthropopathic (as if He had human emotions) language to describe Himself. And our Confession does the same here as the LORD is “responding” to Adam’s sin by “going” to him to comfort him with the gospel promise. Our Canons of Dort, III/IV, 8 describe God in this way, saying

As many as are called by the gospel are *sincerely* called. For God has most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what is acceptable to Him, namely, that those who are called should come unto Him. He also *seriously* promises rest of soul and eternal life to all who come to Him and believe. (emphasis mine)

Postscript: Addressing a Contemporary Debate

One final word about Article 17 that which relates to a major question in our day among non-Reformed believers. Were the Old Testament saints saved by faith in Christ as we are? Article 17 expresses what we as Reformed Christians have always believed about this. One aspect of continuity between the cov-

Here is the wisdom of God, confounding the wisdom of man; here is the goodness of God, confounding the self-saving efforts of man.

enant of grace in its administration both in the Old and New Testaments is that salvation has always been by God's grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone. We see this, for example, in the words of Calvin's contemporary and successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza: "The Son is fully contained in the books of the Old Testament, so that the men of those times were saved by faith in Jesus Christ who was to come."

Most of the non-Reformed believers we will encounter today deny this as they place a large chasm between what they consider two different peoples of God: Israel and the Church. This is called Dispensational Theology. Our Confession clearly teaches that Adam was saved by the same God who has saved us, through the same means, Jesus Christ. The difference, of course, is that while the saints in the Old Testament looked forward to his arrival and accomplishment of salvation, we may look back to the Savior who has already come, lived, died, and been resurrected.

Rev. Daniel R. Hyde is the Pastor of the Oceanside United Reformed Church in Oceanside, California.

Study/Application Questions for Article 17

1. How can of Genesis 3 be used in our conversations with those who believe in free will? Who had the free will to save in the story? Who sought whom?
2. What does it mean that Genesis 3:15 is the "mother promise?"
3. Trace the ways in which this promise was unfolded in the life of the people of God throughout redemptive history (See Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 19).
4. How does Galatians 4:4 show the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 7:14?
5. Why do we call the covenant made with Adam after the Fall and continued with the rest of God's people the covenant of grace?

Looking Out and About

- Mr. Matt Nuiver, a recent graduate of Mid America Reformed Seminary has accepted the call extended to him by the Covenant Reformed Church (URC) of Balmoral, Ontario.

- The Grace United Reformed Church of Alto, Michigan is preparing for a building program which will provide a significant addition to their church building.

- Classis Michigan of the United Reformed Churches held its Fall Mission Rally on September 16, 2004 at the Bethany United Reformed Church of Wyoming, Michigan. Rev. Bill Green, United Reformed Church missionary to Costa Rica, was the main speaker for the evening. Presentations were also made by young people who had been involved in STEP and MiniSTEP programs sponsored by

RYS (Reformed Youth Services) The STEP program, intended for high school age young people, had sent a team to Long Island, New York to participate in a Vacation Bible School program at the West Sayville United Reformed Church.

- Ten young adults from various churches in Classis Michigan went to Trinidad where they were engaged in a work with Rev. Steve McGee, a United Reformed Church missionary. They taught DVBS and door to door through neighborhoods bringing people the gospel message.

- The Board of Mid America Reformed Seminary met at the seminary in Dyer, Indiana on September 23 and 24, 2004. Included on the agenda this year was a seminar on

(continued on page 22)



The Riches of the Reformed Faith (III)

The Lordship of Christ

In his excellent book entitled, *Spirit Wars: Pagan Revival in Christian America*, Dr. Peter Jones, Professor of New Testament at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, CA, writes:

In just one generation, Judeo-Christian America has become an incubator of revived paganism. Behind the dazzling diversity of pro-choice culture – abortion rights, the homosexual agenda, radical feminism, the new spirituality, goddess worship and witchcraft – lies a coherent pagan spirituality bent on absolute control, intolerant of any truth but its own. ... At the heart of our culture wars are Spirit Wars. (Jones, Peter, *Spirit Wars*, Wine Press Publishing, 1997)

And indeed, that's true!

In fact, throughout this book, just as he did in his earlier best-selling work entitled, *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*, Peter Jones addresses the very same kind of spiritual warfare in which the believers in the church at Colosse were also engaged nearly 2000 years ago as they sought to combat an ancient brand of the modern day heresy also known as Gnosticism.

Gnosticism

Gnosticism, based upon the Greek word “*gnosis*”, meaning “knowl-

edge”, is an ancient heresy that essentially posits the position that all matter is evil, that salvation is attained through knowledge, and that such knowledge comes to man through a wide - variety of angelic, mediating beings (consider, e.g., the so-called New Age “channelers” of our day). Consequently in Paul's day and down through the ages, Gnostics have not denied the existence of Jesus Christ, but they do indeed dethrone and depreciate Him by denying either His full and complete humanity, or by denying His full and complete deity. They relegate Christ to simply serving as any one of a great number of supposed “angelic intermediaries” who bridge the gulf between an infinite God and finite man. Think about that.

In the October 4, 2003, issue of *World* magazine, Gene Veith wrote an article entitled, “Gods and Country. The article reads in part:

Public schools, ball games, civic organizations, and government meetings used to begin with the Pledge of Allegiance and a prayer, very often the Lord's Prayer. Political speeches from all parties used to be loaded with biblical references. Today, Christianity is not only being purged from the public square, but a new civil religion seems to be emerging to

take its place. ... The reasons given are not so much those of secularism, that religion has no place in the public square, but of religious diversity... As government officials and the public insist on recognizing the validity and equal representation of all religions, what this may amount to is a new civil religion. This one, in effect, will be polytheistic, recognizing and paying homage to many gods.

The same “spirit wars” in which we find ourselves today are really nothing new! They are essentially the same kind of spirit wars that were affecting and afflicting our brothers and sisters in the Church at Colosse so many years ago! That is why we rejoice to discover what the Apostle Paul has to say concerning a personal, practical, and proper understanding of the Lordship of Christ – One of *The Riches of the Reformed Faith!*

Christ Reveals

In Colossians 1:15, Paul moves from writing about the grace of our redemption to the glory of our Redeemer by declaring, “*He* (that is, Jesus Christ: One Person with two distinct and separate natures, fully God and fully man; the Son of God and Son of Man) *is the image* (Greek: *eikon* – English “icon”) *of the invisible God.*”

The term “*eikon*” literally means “image, figure, or likeness”. Says the great Reformer, John Calvin:

Christ makes God in a manner visible to us...and we must be careful not to look

for Him anywhere else, for everything that would set itself off as a representation of God, apart from Christ, *will be an idol.*" (Calvin, John, *Commentaries*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1981, pp.149-150).

Eikon" or "image", is a term that conveys a sense of likeness. Hebrews 1:3 declares, "*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being...*". It also conveys a sense of manifestation: that which makes manifest, visible or known, namely, with the nature and being of God being perfectly revealed in Him. We read in John 1:18, "*No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known.*" In II Corinthians 4:4-6 Paul writes:

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

By the grace and mercy of God, have you seen Him? Have you seen "*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*"? Or, has the god of this age also blinded your mind "*so that* (v.4) *you cannot see the light of*

the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image (eikon) of God"? This is an extremely critical question, a question which has not only personal but profoundly eternal implications! For as the passionate prophet John the Baptist himself preached in John 3:36, "*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.*"

Christ Rules

In Colossians 1:15 Paul writes, "*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn* (Greek: *prototokos*) *over all creation.*" When many,

This is an extremely critical question, a question which has not only personal but profoundly eternal implications!

(the Jehovah's Witnesses among them) read that "*Christ is the firstborn over all creation*", they misinterpret this to mean that "*Christ is not the Creator*, but rather, was the "*first created being.*" In fact, a number of commentators point out that the KJV translation of this text actually lends itself to this misinterpretation by reading, "*the firstborn of every creature*".

This potential confusion is readily cleared-up when we come to understand that this term "*prototokos*" (or, firstborn) literally refers not simply to "priority in time" but also to "supremacy in rank." A good analogy that helps us

come to a proper understanding of this term is what is found in Old Testament times concerning the "birthright" of the "firstborn". The Birthright bestowed upon the firstborn son caused that son to become his father's chief heir and representative. In fact, the physical and spiritual management of the entire household was committed to the "firstborn."

What we find here in this passage concerning this particular term is that, yes, Christ "*preceded all of creation in time*" – but notice — NOT as a "*created being*"! Verse 16 clearly tells us, "*For by Him all things were created ...*" – but in the sense of being fully and eternally God! We read in John 1:1-2; 14:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning ... The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

As the "firstborn over all creation", our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has also been granted by His heavenly Father "*supremacy in rank.*" For example in Phil. 2:6-11 the Apostle Paul declares:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself



and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Now back in Colossians 1:15-16 we read:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him.

Notice something very interesting: as I mentioned previously, the great Gnostic heresy which seemingly afflicted the church at Colosse did preach and teach the existence of various levels of “angel intermediaries” between God and man – perhaps using such terminology as “*thrones, powers, rulers and authorities.*” In fact, Paul seemingly makes reference to this in Colossians 2:8-10; 13-15; 18-19.

However, in Colossians 1:17 we read, “*He is before all things...*” Here we see a distinct reference to Christ’s “priority in time” as the “firstborn over all creation”, as well as a clear denunciation of the heresy of the followers of Arius who in the early centuries A.D. maintained concerning Christ that “*There was*

a time when He was not.” The Bible says, “Not so!”

Colossians 1:17 goes on to say “... *and in Him all things hold together.*” Now think about that! In Greek philosophy men like Plato and Aristotle used to refer to what they called “*the principle of coherence*” – that which would make order out of a disorderly world. As someone has so well said, “*In the Son the believer finds the true Principle of Coherence, because it is His power alone which holds all of creation together.*” Glory be to God!

***To profess this
glorious truth has
very profound
practical
implications for the
way in which we live
our lives every day.***

When I was in 7th or 8th Grade, I had a teacher named Mr. Heinz at the Eastern Christian Junior High School in Prospect Park, New Jersey. One day Mr. Heinz used this portion of Scripture as a devotional in English class. As I recall, he made the point that even scientists do not know what holds an “atom” together. According to its physical make-up, atoms, by nature, should split apart! And when you split an atom, of course, you end up with an atomic, nuclear explosion!

Mr. Heinz was making the point that because it is Jesus Christ who “*holds all things together*”, when

He returns on the clouds of glory to judge the living and the dead, all Christ needs to do is to withdraw or restrain His “unifying power” for one split-second of an instant, and the result? This “*roaring conflagration*” of which the Apostle Peter speaks of in II Peter 3:10, where he writes:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Paul declares in Colossians 1:17-18, “*He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He* (Greek: emphatic; Christ and Christ alone; He and none other) ... *is the head of the body, the church* (Greek: *ekklesia* – those who have been called out of this world by God for God); *He is the beginning* (Greek: *arche* – beginning or origin, fountain or source) *and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy* (or, pre-eminence – KJV; or, as we read in the NAS – “*that He Himself might come to have first place in everything.*”).

To profess this glorious truth has very profound practical implications for the way in which we live our lives every day. Allow me to illustrate: Many years ago my wife, Margaret, and I served on staff in northern New Jersey with Youth For Christ/Campus Life. While serving with this largely Arminian ministry, we were taught that when we would venture onto public high school campuses and attempt to share the good news of the gospel

of Jesus Christ with mostly non-Christian teenagers, we were engaging in “guerilla warfare.” That is, we were taught that we were in the *enemy’s territory*, going behind enemy lines, trying to “snatch Satan’s captives” and make them disciples of Jesus Christ. I don’t mind saying that such indoctrination could sort of get your blood flowing and was highly effective in mobilizing us for ministry! You really wanted to do the job!

Ah, but wait! As noble as was the cause, there was something terribly wrong with the picture of ministry basically being characterized as “guerilla warfare” behind enemy lines. Even though Satan is an incredibly fierce foe, even though our Lord Jesus Himself refers to Satan as “*the prince of this world*” (John 12:31), and even though the Apostle Paul himself says in Ephesians 6:12 that:

...our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

This is not Satan’s world! By way of contrast, as God’s people love to sing, “*This is My Father’s World*”! The renowned Dutch theologian and statesman, Abraham Kuyper, once said:

In the total expanse of the human life there is not a single square inch of which Christ, who alone is sovereign, does not declare, “That is mine!” (Boice,

James Montgomery, and Ryken, Philip Graham, *The Doctrines of Grace*, Crossway Books, 2002, p.56).

Are we and our children to live essentially as Arminians who believe that we are living in “enemy territory”? Do we need to withdraw in fear and safety from the world, until some future day when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

There was something terribly wrong with the picture of ministry basically being characterized as “guerilla warfare” behind enemy lines.

returns to set up His millennial kingdom on earth centered in the physical land of Palestine and THEN lives and reigns as King? No! We must profess and practice the biblical truth that right here, right now, already today Jesus rules! Today Jesus reigns!

As a result, already today we will live our lives as children and servants of the King who already now declare that “*in everything He has the supremacy*”! Pastor Doug Wilson writes in the October 2002 issue of *Tabletalk*, published by Ligonier Ministries and Dr. R. C. Sproul:

The legacy of Abraham Kuyper can be summed up

in the truth that if Christ is not the Lord of all, then Christ is not Lord at all...The claims of Christ are to be pressed in every area. We do not come to any realm of human endeavor, with our hats in our hands, asking to be allowed to apply notions that are reminiscent of the memory of Christ. The key concept is lordship. Christ is Lord – Lord of heaven and earth, and everything between. (pp. 60-61)

What that means is that Jesus Christ is Lord of our work and of our worship! Jesus Christ is Lord of our time and of our talents! Jesus Christ is Lord of our money and of our marriages, our recreation and of our relationships! And what that means is that in each and every area of life ... from housekeeping to harvests, from politics to paychecks, from terrorist attacks to the conflict in Iraq, the Bible says that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father!

Christ Reconciles

In Colossians 1:19-20 God’s Word declares, “*For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him...*” The Greek: “*katoikeo*: is translated “in all its fullness to remain forever and ever.” This is extremely significant!

The Gnostic heresy that was besetting the church at Colosse posited the position that the “fullness of the godhead” was distributed and dispensed among these *angelic intermediaries* only partially and temporarily! That is,



whatever of the divine essence the three Persons of the Trinity supposedly shared, it wasn't very much and it didn't last very long!

By way of contrast, however, Paul uses a term that represents the difference between living out of your suitcase while on vacation and un-packing your bags when you get home You're there to stay!

Colossians 1:19-20 goes on to say:

... and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.

Notice this word "reconcile." Reconciliation implies previous *enmity*, does it not? To reconcile refers to the fact of former enemies becoming friends! Recall that that "enmity" between man and God started in the Garden of Eden with the fall into sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, subsequently resulting in their being banished from the garden. Genesis 3:24 teaches us that God set "cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life."

Ever since that fateful day, *by nature* (as the doctrine of Original Sin declares), every man, woman and child who has ever lived has been conceived and born in sin, has been estranged from God, justly deserving of eternal damnation, and in desperate, dire need of coming again into a right relationship with the God who created us, through faith in His Son who died for us!

And so, that is why in Romans 8:21 we read, "that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." So too, in II Corinthians 5:18-19 Paul declares:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

If you are reading this as an unbeliever, I conclude with the very same gospel call and biblical exhortation that the apostle Paul sets forth in II Corinthians 5:20-21, namely,

Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

And to do so before the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning Christ that is set forth in the words of Revelation 19:15-16 where we read,

Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: *King of Kings and Lord of Lords.*

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Reveals! He Rules! He Reconciles! And that is why we rejoice in a personal, practical, and proper understanding of THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST as one of *The Riches of the Reformed Faith.*

Rev. Richard J. Kuiken is the senior pastor of the Reformed Bible Church in Pompton Plains, New Jersey.

Looking Above

A Series on the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Revelation 3:1-6

*“The Church in the Midst of the World:
In Danger of Falling Asleep”*

WAKE UP!! That’s the message of Revelation 3:1-6. Open your eyes and wake up!

This message, of course, is not unique to Revelation 3:1-6. When Christ was in the flesh, carrying out His earthly ministry, He spoke similar words. “Watch, therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24:42). “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matthew 24:44).

Paul also spoke of such things. He writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6, “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.”

Peter also spoke of such things. In 2 Peter 3:10, he writes, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the

heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

This message from the mouth of Christ, from the pen of the Apostle Paul, as well as that of the Apostle Peter, is now spoken in Revelation 3:1-6 from the mouth of the One who walks in the midst of the Lampstands. This message, then, is the great message to the Church in the world as she lives between Christ’s first coming and His return.

The City of Sardis

Such a message was fitting for the church in Sardis. The city was located on the precipice of a high hill at the foot of Mt. Tmolus, where the Hermus and Pactolus rivers intersect. Because of its prime location with its natural defenses, Sardis quickly gained the reputation of being a fortress, a citadel. In fact, large walls were erected all around the city, enabling the inhabitants of the city to fend off any would-be attackers with relative ease.

You can imagine the attitude that developed in such a place: an attitude of arrogance, pride, complacency, smugness, and sleepiness. What danger could possibly befall this fortress? What peril could possibly befall this citadel?

Sardis was a strong-hold. No danger could befall this fortress. No peril could befall this citadel. Sardis was safe. Or so the inhabitants thought! Sardis was a city that had become complacent and lethargic. It was a city that had deceived itself into a false comfort and had lulled itself to sleep. The Church in Sardis had followed suit. She too was infected by the complacency of the city.

The Danger in Sardis

While we read of the presence of false apostles in Ephesus, of the synagogue of Satan in Smyrna, of the throne of Satan in Pergamum, and of the false doctrines of Jezebel in Thyatira, we read of no such thing in the church of Sardis. There seems to be no immediate threat of persecution. There seems to be no immediate threat of false teachers.

The church in Sardis seemed to have it pretty good. In fact, Jesus Himself says of the church in Sardis, “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive...” (3:1). In the eyes of the world, the church in Sardis appeared to be very much alive. It appeared to be a vibrant and healthy church. It seemed that there was no danger facing this church. In reality, however, there was great danger! Jesus says, “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”

The church in Sardis, though it had the reputation of being alive, was dead. “Peace, peace!” the people cried out, when there was no peace. As William Hendriksen put it, the only peace that the church in Sardis knew was the peace of the



cemetery! The church had fallen into a lethargic complacency. The church had fallen asleep, leaving her unprepared for the coming of Christ.

Lest this article lull you to sleep, let me remind you once again that this letter to the church in Sardis is every bit as relevant to us today as it was to them in the 1st century. Recall that the letters to the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 provide us with a composite picture of the church in the world from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ. In these letters, we have a picture of the church in the world as she exists from the time of Christ's first coming to the time of Christ's second coming. These letters, then, tell the story of the time in which we presently live and describe the church in the world today. We dare not comfort ourselves by saying, "this letter was written to a different church - a church in the 1st century - therefore it has no bearing upon us, it has no bearing upon me." This letter was written to us.

This is a most sobering letter. Is not the plague of lethargic complacency a constant threat to the church? Are we not always in danger of forgetting that we are called to be in the world but not of the world? Are we not always in danger of forgetting the great antithesis between the church and the world? Are we not always in danger of compromise in order to make ourselves comfortable in the world?

If an unbeliever were to walk into your church, what would he see? Would he see more of that which he can find in the world? Or would he see something so different, so ut-

terly unique, that he realizes immediately there is something here that the world does not have! He ought to be confronted with the presence of God's holiness. He ought to be confronted with the reality of his sin. He ought to be confronted with the Lord Jesus Christ. He ought to have set before him that which the world can never give and that which the church alone can give: the Gospel of Jesus Christ - that Gospel that alone will prepare him for the return of Christ.

Would [an unbeliever] see something so different, so utterly unique [in your church], that he realizes immediately there is something here that the world does not have!

The church is not a country club! She is not a social club! She is not the Lion's Club! She is not the Rotary Club! She is not the Kiwanis Club! We cannot allow ourselves a lethargic complacency that degenerates into little more than a happy, go-lucky, feel-good group of people. We cannot allow ourselves a sleepiness that degenerates into little more than a warm fuzzy feeling when we come to church. We cannot allow ourselves to slumber so deeply that we would embrace the easy-believism that is all too prevalent in our society today - an easy-believism that sugar-coats the

gospel and makes everybody and his brother a Christian - an easy-believism that conveniently forgets the exclusive claims of the Word of God - an easy-believism that says "you can be a Christian and be comfortable in the world" - an easy-believism that forgets the gospel! We cannot allow the church to fall into such a slumber.

The Warning to Sardis

Look again at the warning of our passage. It is found in verses 2-3,

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

"Like a thief in the night..." Jesus spoke these words before in Matthew 24. Paul spoke these words before in 1 Thessalonians 5. Peter spoke these words before in 2 Peter 3. Jesus speaks them now with greater urgency than ever before. Though the message is the same in each passage, did you note the subtle differences? When Jesus speaks of the second coming in Matthew 24 and 25, He is speaking in the flesh, and each time He refers to Himself in the third person. "You do not know what hour *your Lord* is coming." "The *Son of Man* is coming at an hour you do not expect." "You know neither the day nor the hour in which the *Son of Man* is coming." When Paul speaks of the second coming in

1Thessalonians 5, he speaks of it in rather impersonal terms, “the *day of the Lord* so comes as a thief in the night.” When Peter speaks of the second coming in 2 Peter 3, he too speaks of it in rather impersonal terms, “the *day of the Lord* will come as a thief in the night.”

Each of these warnings is urgent, but how much more urgent is the warning of Revelation 3:1-6. Notice here Jesus speaks in the most personal of terms. He doesn’t say, “The Son of Man is coming.” He doesn’t say, “The day of the Lord is coming.” He says, “I will come upon you as a thief in the night!” Christ knows full well that the next great event in the history of redemption is His return to judge the living and the dead! Thus the urgency of the warning!

Perhaps you think the warning does not apply to you. After all, you believe and hold to the perseverance of the saints. You know on the basis of Romans 8 that nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. You are secure, and so the warning does not apply.

Let me assure you, the warning applies to each one of us! Consider verses 4-5.

You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

To those who overcome Christ promises garments of white. He promises that He will not blot their names out of the Book of Life.

The fact that those who overcome shall not be blotted out of the Book of Life, serves not to call into question the salvation of the elect, but to warn. As one commentator has put it: “The warning causes genuine believers, especially those wavering, to examine their lives, amend them accordingly, and gain subsequent assurance through a changed life. False believers, however, remain untroubled.” True Christians will be separated from false Christians: those whose “faith” was a sham will be revealed. Those who have not a true and living faith, who are false Christians, will not heed the warning; and in the end they will show themselves for what they are. But those whose faith is true and living, will heed the warning. True faith proves its genuineness by holding firmly to Christ, in whose garments they are clothed.

Do you understand? This warning says something of the nature of true faith. True faith is not merely an instrument by which we believe so that some day we can get to heaven. It is much more than that. True faith is the instrument by which we lay hold of Christ, and laying hold of Christ, we lay hold of heaven already now. True faith does not allow one to fall asleep, thereby becoming comfortable in the world. True faith longs for heaven. True faith longs for Christ. The means by which we stay awake, not defiling our garments, is this: we have a faith that lays hold of Christ, and laying hold of Christ, we lay hold of

heaven - the very heaven into which Christ Himself has gone before us - the very heaven in which He is now preparing a place for us.

True faith will prove itself to be so, by paying attention to the warning. True faith will prove itself to be so, by waking up and watching, prepared always for the return of Christ. Is such faith yours?!

He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Rev. Brian Vos is the pastor of the Trinity United Reformed Church in Caledonia, Michigan.



Press Release of the CanRC & URC Combined Church Order Committee

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema and Mr. Harry Van Gorp, representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), and Dr. Gijbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with Scripture reading and prayer.

The minutes of the November 4-6, 2003 meeting were reviewed and approved after some minor corrections were noted. An agenda and timetable for the next three days were circulated and adopted.

Recent synods of the respective federations dealt with the reports submitted by the committees. Synod Chatham 2004 of the CanRC expressed its thankfulness for the quality and thoroughness of the work that the Joint Church Order committee has been able to complete, thus far, and for the brotherly harmony that has been experienced. This Synod further encouraged the churches to forward their suggestions directly to the committee for its consideration. It reappointed the committee to continue with its earlier mandate and, in addition, to formulate a draft proposal

of regulations for General Synod. Synod Calgary 2004 of the URCNA adopted all of the committee's recommendations and encouraged the churches to interact directly with the committee regarding their work. It further authorized its church order committee to develop rules for General Synod.

Correspondence was received from one URCNA and two CanRC consistories with comments and reactions to some of the proposals formulated. This material was circulated and each respective committee will draft a report for later discussion.

A review of the articles thus far adopted resulted in a few modifications. It included a further discussion on the use of the term 'council' versus 'consistory with the deacons'. No final decision was made. It is agreed that the consistory is the ruling assembly in the church. Also the use of the words 'ordained' versus 'installed' received attention with a view to correctness and consistency.

Art. 8 C.O. Dort was placed back on the table as the result of a letter received from a church. The CanRC brothers will serve the committee with a proposal at the next meeting.

The matter of delegation to General Synod was again revisited. After an extensive debate and the consider-

ation that a broader assembly is deliberative in nature, it was decided that each second last classis before general synod shall choose 2 ministers and 2 elders as delegates to General Synod.

A report on 'gaps' that currently exist in the development of a Joint Church Order (JCO) was reviewed. The following articles were decided on:

It was agreed to leave out Art 15 C.O. Dort as the first part was considered no longer relevant in this age, and the second part is covered elsewhere in the JCO.

Article 18 in Dort deals with the office of Professor of Theology. As this is not a recognized office in the proposed church order, this article will be omitted.

Re: Art. 24 C.O. Dort. "The duties belonging to the office of deacon consists of exercising and supervising the works of Christian mercy in the congregation. They shall do this by acquainting themselves with congregational needs; exhorting members of the congregation to show mercy; gathering and managing the offerings of God's people in Christ's name, and distributing these offerings according to need; continuing in prayer; and encouraging and comforting with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ's mercy. Needs of those outside the congregation, especially of other believers, should also be considered.

The deacons shall ordinarily meet monthly to transact the business pertaining to their office, and they shall render a monthly account of their work to the Consistory. The

deacons may invite the minister to visit their meetings in order to acquaint him with their work and request his advice.”

The concern of Art. 40 Dort is also included in the above.

Re: Art. 28 Dort with respect to Civil Authorities was considered to be very relevant in today’s age. Rev. Sikkema was asked to present a proposed wording for this article at the next meeting.

Re: Art. 31 Dort dealing with the right to appeal was discussed at length for a proper understanding of this process. The Revs. Nederveen and Scheuers were asked to draft a proposal.

Re: Art. 37 and 38 about the assembly of the consistory, it was agreed

that “in each church there shall be a consistory composed of minister(s) of the Word and the elders, which shall ordinarily meet at least once a month. The consistory is the only assembly which exercises direct authority within the congregation, since the consistory receives its authority directly from Christ.” Whether the minister should preside over the meetings of the consistory is also the question of one of the letters received from the churches. The CanRC brothers will formulate a proposal for the next meeting on this issue.

Where a consistory is to be constituted for the first time, it shall be done only with the concurring advice of Classis.

The next meeting will take place

D.V. November 9-11, 2004 in the Grand Rapids area. Further meetings were tentatively planned for March 15-17, August 9-11 and November 15-17, 2005

The press release was read and approved for publication.

In his closing remarks Dr. Kloosterman stated his thankfulness to the Lord for the brotherly manner in which the committee again could proceed with its work. A considerable amount of work could be accomplished.

After Scripture reading and closing prayer by Rev. Sikkema, the meeting was adjourned.

For the Committee
Gerard J. Nordeman

United Reformed Churches Classis Southwest U.S. Report

For the first time in its existence, Classis Southwest U.S. was hosted in the city of Oceanside, California, as the Oceanside URC had the privilege and joy of hosting the sixteen organized churches for Classis’ 13th meeting from September 14-15, 2004. The meeting was chaired by the very able Rev. Russell St. John of the Grace URC in Kennewick, Washington. The collegial spirit in which business was transacted continued to be a hallmark of Classis.

The largest item on the agenda was the candidacy examination of Mr. Michael Brown a graduate of

Westminster Seminary California. Mr. Brown has been working under the oversight of the Escondido URC in their newest church plant, the Christ URC (Santee, CA). Mr. Brown showed a mastery of all areas of the examination.

The Classis continues to grow and to pastorally oversee the reception of new churches. The delegates answered an overture from the Grace URC of Kennewick, Washington in bringing the Evangelical Reformed Church of Tacoma, Washington into the Classis. The delegates answered by saying, “That Classis appoint the Grace

URC of Kennewick, WA to provide assistance to the Evangelical Reformed Church of Tacoma, WA in the process of the reception of this church and its minister into the federation, and that the consistory of Grace URC report their labors to each meeting of Classis.” The Classis also gave its concurring advice to the Ontario URC (Ontario, CA) for the organization of the High Desert URC (Victorville, CA).

The work of church planting continues to be vibrant within the Classis. Including the High Desert URC and Christ URC, mentioned above, there are currently five church plants within the Classis: The URC of the Magic Valley (Twin Falls, ID), Immanuel URC (Lemoore,



CA) and Redeemer URC (Sparks, NV).

We were blessed to hear the greetings of four ecumenical observers from the RPCNA, PCA, OPC, and RCUS. Greetings, as well, were brought by the Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, President of Westminster Seminary California and Mr. Jim Den Ouden, President of Providence Christian College.

The delegates gave their advice on various matters such as granting privilege of the floor to those not delegated, changing the date of Classis meetings, appeals of members, the procedure of examining candidates for the ministry, and the always difficult exercising of the third mark of the church. Classis also appointed members of CECCA and the URCNA Website Committee.

The next meeting of Classis will be hosted by the oldest church in Classis Southwest U.S., the Ontario URC (Ontario, CA) from January 18-19, 2005.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Daniel R. Hyde, Clerk

Record Number Attend RYS National Youth Conference

With gratitude to God, Reformed Youth Services was pleased to host a record number of more than 620 young people, sponsors, speakers and staff at Biola University in La Mirada, California July 26-30.

Almost forty member churches attended the weeklong event, which had as its theme "Stars in the Universe." Rev. Phil Grotenhuis, pastor of a newly formed church plant in Springfield, Missouri, and Rev. Jason Tuinstra, pastor of Community United Reformed Church in Schererville, Indiana were the main speakers, focusing on such topics as the antithesis and sexual purity.

"The speakers glorified God," remarked one sponsor. "Excellent messages. Our group said that the main speakers were the best they have had so far. They were easy to listen to and very applicable," said another adult leader. "Very good sermons," said one teen, "Very easy to understand but very in depth." "Awesome, man! I loved listening to him. The purity session was awesome," commented yet another young person, one of approximately 485 teens who attended.

Twelve churches sent twenty or more conventioners to the conference, which was the fourth annual RYS national convention. The 1st URC of Chino, California was the largest church represented, totaling 44 youth and adult sponsors.

Ten related workshops were also offered, of which participants attended five of their choosing. Topics covered included discernment, dating, servanthood, sanctification and entertainment. Two special guy-girl only workshops were led by Rev. Todd Joling of Faith URC in Beecher, IL and Mrs. Gwen Headley (wife of Rev. Alrick Headley of Zion URC in Ripon, CA), entitled "Be a Man!" and "A Virtuous Woman," respectively.

Some of the workshop comments received through student evaluations included the following: "He really knew what he was talking about and backed it up with Scripture," stated one teenager. "It made an impact because of his personal experience and passion for the subject. Very applicable," said another. "Very detailed, I like how he used a lot of Scripture passages," remarked a third youth.

Sponsors also commented on the workshops, which were held Tuesday and Wednesday of the conference. "It was a great workshop. It was very interesting to be made aware and warned of the evil forces and the evil in this world," said one leader. "Very good! Got the kid's attention. Challenging for the kids," said another. "Tough topic to talk to teens about and he used good biblical backing," stated a third counselor.

In addition to attending five main sessions and workshops, the teens also were required to attend morning devotional sessions authored by the main speakers, reinforcing what they heard the day before.

The usual recreational opportunities were enjoyed by many of the youth, featuring three on three basketball tournaments, coed volleyball and soccer, as well as indoor games. The adult leaders also enjoyed the fellowship of the annual sponsors dinner, at which they learned more about RYS programs such as STEP (Summer Teen Evangelism Project), Mini-STEP (young adults

mission opportunity in Toronto), LOGOS single young adult conferences and RYS regional retreats held in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Michigan, California and Washington.

Hearty thanks should be given to the hard-working volunteer committee, who meet all year long and sacrifice family time to ensure the convention runs smoothly. We also praise God for wonderful weather, traveling mercies and for protecting us from serious injuries. To Him be all the Glory!

Next year's convention will be held, Lord willing, July 25-29 at

Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri. Registration brochures will be mailed out to churches in December. For more information about RYS or the convention, please contact RYS Director Ed DeGraaf at (616) 667-0694 or rys@iserv.net.

Audiotapes of the 2004 main and convention speakers are available for \$35.00. A complete DVD set of the speakers and the concluding slide show are available for \$70.00, or \$10 per DVD. A limited amount of VHS tapes are available at \$50 per set. Please contact Ed DeGraaf for ordering information.

(Looking Out and About, cont.)

Leadership. The presenters were Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Professor of Ethics and New Testament at Mid America and Mr. James Van Drunen a former board member of the seminary who remains active in the life of the seminary. The seminar which was open to the public was attended not only by the board members and a number of students but also by church leaders from a wide area surrounding the seminary.

- The Fall Conference of the Seventh Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan was held September 24-26, 2004. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas was the speaker. Large audiences heard Dr. Ferguson develop the theme "From Grace to Glory."

- On Tuesday, September 14, 2004, Mr. Michael Brown sustained his candidacy examination at the meeting of Classis Southwest US of the URCNA in Oceanside, CA. A quorum of the Consistory was in attendance to witness his examination. The Consistory convened and adopted two motions. First, Consistory declared Mr. Brown a candidate for the office of minister of the Word in the URCNA. Second, Consistory ratified the Letter of Call extended to Mr. Brown. Rev. Michael Grant Brown was ordained to the office of minister of the Word on Sunday evening, September 19, 2004. Rev. Stephen Donovan of the Escondido URC officiated, Dr. W. Robert Godfrey preached "The Word is Near" from Romans 9:30 - 10:21, and Rev. Dr. Michael Horton gave exhortation to Rev. Brown and to the con-

gregation. Rev. Brown will serve the Escondido church as a church planter in Christ United Reformed Church in Santee, CA.

- Immanuel Fellowship Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan plans to dedicate its new sanctuary and educational facilities on Friday, November 5. Rev. Art Besteman will lead the service. A time of fellowship and refreshments is planned afterwards.

- Southern Ontario's Annual Reformation Rally will take place [D.V.] on October 29 at Redeemer College in Ancaster. Rev. Christo Heiberg of the Zion URC in Sheffield, Ontario is scheduled to be the speaker.



The Anointed Savior [III]

When speaking of Jesus as the Christ, not only do we confess that He is our chief Prophet and only High Priest, but as the Anointed One He is also our King who “governs over us by His Word and Spirit. The office of King was what the Israelites were expecting. They longed for the appearance of the Son of David; the King who make right what was wrong; the king who would defeat the tyrants; the king who would establish an everlasting kingdom in Jerusalem.

When Jesus said that the kingdom of God was about to be revealed, people started to wonder if Jesus was the long promised Messiah. They expected a king. You may recall that the mother of two of the disciples came to Jesus with the request that her sons sit on each side of Jesus when he became king and sat upon the throne. The travelers on the road to Emmaus said of Jesus, “We had hoped that He was the One who was going to redeem Israel.” What the wife of Zebedee and the resurrection day travelers did not understand was that the Messiah became the King by accepting the role of the Lamb.

The origin of the Kingdom of God is not in the flesh and blood of man but in the flesh and blood of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. As the Lamb, He poured out His blood for a complete remission of all our sin. The beginning of this kingdom, with all its power, rests in the divine and saving grace of

our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the all sufficient King.

Our Need for a King

Because of original sin and our totally depraved nature, there are many dangers within us. We have many evil desires and thoughts. In addition, Satan goes around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. The world, with all its glamour and glitter also attempts to lure us away from our God. We need a powerful, valiant, faithful King to fight for us against the temptations of the world, Satan, and from our own evil inclinations. We need someone who will defend us and preserve His church.

Such a defender is Jesus Christ, the anointed Savior. He is King because He was willing to be our Priest and make the necessary sacrifice for our sin. In Revelation 5, the whole mystery of the King-Priest is summed up in one beautiful picture. In that chapter, John weeps because there is no one worthy to open the scrolls John saw. That meant that the plan and purpose of history was to remain hidden, sealed in the hand of God.

An Elder approaches John and tells him that there is One who is worthy to open the scrolls. He is the hero who can execute the plans presented in the scroll; He is the One anointed to take hold of the helm of history. He will steer it to completion.

As John turns around, he is prepared to see the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the great and mighty One. Instead, he writes, “Then I saw the Lamb looking as if it had been slain.” The Lamb is the Lion who reveals to us the heart of God. Who is this Lamb who is also King? Who is the One who is able to defend you against the world, Satan and yourself? It is Christ, the Lord. He is the Messiah, the Christ, ordained by God to be our Prophet, Priest, and King.

Not only has He obtained salvation for us through His broken body and shed blood - the sacrifice made as our only High Priest - but Jesus has been anointed to defend and preserve us in that salvation. Jesus said in John 10: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, no one will snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”

In the past few months we have

Q

Why is He called ‘Christ’?

A

Because He is ordained of God the Father to be our eternal King.

seen Jesus of Nazareth as our prophet, priest, and king. As your chief Prophet, do you listen to Him as He speaks the Word of God's grace to you? Do you seek the pardon of your sin through the sacrifice made by our only High Priest? Have you taken your stand on the side of the eternal King? Remember: He alone is worthy of all praise because, as our King, He has won the victory for us.

Rev. Wybren H. Oord is the pastor of the Covenant United Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He also serves as Editor of *The Outlook*.

Sound Bites - 1989

January 1989

"The gospel of Christ challenges not only our morality but our intellect as well. Intellectual sin needs to be repented."

Science Held Hostage
Paul J. Murphy

"General revelation is not part of a lecture which God as the divine professor addresses us. Rather, general revelation has the main purpose of making fallen man feel uneasy before a greater power."

A Fresh Look at General Revelation
Theodore Plantinga

"I dare not judge how God responds to those who imply that He is 'tricky' or 'deceptive.' Those are the biblical descriptions of Satan, not God."

A Statement of Conviction
Jacob Terpstra

February 1989

"The gospel will not permit us to keep on supporting a church that increasingly contradicts everything that it commands us to preach and teach."

Considering Our Course
Peter De Jong

March 1989

"We don't really have a 'youth problem' in our churches. We have a *parental* problem more than anything else."

Children's Worship
Jelle Tuininga

April 1989

"Put yourself and your family in a church where the Word of God is

interpreted, explained, and applied. Don't confuse loyalty with responsibility or sentiment with faithfulness."

Spiritual Anorexia
Stephen M. Arrick

June 1989

"Contrary to their image, and with few exceptions, heretics are *nice* people."

* * * * *

"Not the gentility of his language, not the respectability of his position, not the whiteness of his teeth, not the tailoring of his suit, not the make-up of his personality, not the keenness of his intellect, but rather the content of his teaching, marks the heretic and marks the orthodox."

Heretics are Nice People
David A. Kloosterman

"A church married to the world finds itself a widow in short order."

The Church for the World
Jelle Tuininga

July/August 1989

"The urge to experiment with the pulpit and to loosen up the liturgy in the hope of making it more meaningful and lively is a fallacy. That Word properly preached doesn't need our help to be effective."

So What?
Fred Kooinga

(continued on page 32)



God's People, My Parish

John came to America to seek a better way of life for his family. His wife and five children remained in the Netherlands while John worked to make arrangements for their coming to the United States. John had worked as a skilled craftsman in Holland but the language barrier forced him to accept employment as a menial laborer with minimum wages here in the States. At the end of a year while John had worked to provide support for his family back home and to meet his own meager needs he found himself still short fifty dollars of the needed funds to transport his family to their new land.

Desperately lonely for his family he decided one night to approach the deacons of the church he had been attending to find out if they could provide some assistance so that he could be reunited with his family. The deacons listened attentively to his story and then informed him that since they were not a "leenbank" (loan office) they could not help him. John was completely downhearted as he left the meeting with the deacons. He stopped in front of a furniture store located along the main street of the Dutch community in which he was living and prayed, "Lord, I cannot go on like this, please help me."

John remembered that a friend was boarding with a family on one of the courts that ran off the main street along which he was walking. He decided to visit his friend. He turned onto the narrow street of modest houses and stopped at what he thought was his friend's residence.

An elderly lady responded to his knock. He realized he was at the wrong house. The lady at the door recognized by John's speech that he was from the same province in Holland from which she and her husband came. She invited John to come in. John was deeply distressed and soon found himself unburdening his heart to these kind folk who were showing him hospitality. At the close of the visit they invited John to meet them at an appointed time at the local bank because they wanted to help him.

John met the elderly couple at the neighborhood bank. The vice-president of the bank who was well acquainted with the affairs of nearly everyone in the Dutch community came out from behind his desk and told John that the man who was befriending him was a street sweeper whose income was severely limited and that he and his wife were withdrawing their life's savings to assist him. John informed the banker that every cent would be repaid as indeed it was in due time.

John sent for his family. However John had learned in the course of the contacts with his benefactors that they had no church home. John said to them, "You have done something for me, now I want to do something for you." and he went on to invite them to go to church with him. They agreed and the following Sunday the three of them made their way on foot to the church which John had been attending. The Spirit of God worked and the Word was applied and in due time the eld-

erly couple expressed their desire to confess their faith in Jesus Christ. This they did publicly in one of the neighborhood churches.

Each time that John told me this story - and I listened to it more than once - the tears flowed down his cheeks and I was reminded anew that our God is indeed sovereign and "all things come not by chance but by His fatherly hand."



Neil came to America as a young boy. He had been born into a Christian home, was reared in a Christian Church and had attended Christian Schools both in the Netherlands and in the States. As a teenager in America he made some bad friends and it wasn't long before he was living an immoral life. He became an alcoholic and forgot completely the training he had received from Christian parents. In time the church of which he was a member by baptism exercised discipline and erased his name from the membership rolls. Neil became bitter and vowed that he would never again enter a church. He declared that the church was made up of hypocrites. Some time later Neil married a woman who had been reared in the Roman Catholic Church.

Neil had an older brother, John. John and his wife had an only child, a son. This son was killed in a traffic accident when he was only thirteen. On the morning of the day of the funeral of Neil's nephew,

Neil and his wife had a heated argument. Neil's wife said that he should attend the funeral of his nephew. Neil reminded her that he had vowed that he would never again enter a church. Neil's wife retorted that that didn't matter, the funeral was for his nephew and he should go. Neil replied by asking why he should go when she had no plans to attend. Neil's wife replied that she had never been in a Protestant Church and didn't intend to enter one now. After a long morning of bickering they reached a compromise. Each would go if the other one did. And so Neil and his wife attended the funeral service.

The pastor who presided at the funeral of the teenager who had been killed chose as his text that day the opening words of Psalm 46, "God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in time of trouble." The Gospel is God's power unto salvation. The Word proclaimed at that funeral was used by God to bring Neil and his wife under conviction of sin and to faith in Jesus Christ. In the presence of death two sinners came to know the gift of life in Jesus Christ and to know it more abundantly.

How important it is for every pastor to proclaim the Gospel faithfully, also at funeral services lest the blood of lost sinners be on their hands.

Rev. Arthur Besteman is an emeritus pastor in the United Reformed Churches in North America. He is a member of the Bethany URC in Wyoming, Michigan.

Essay Contest Winners

First Prize - High School

Vanessa Rubingh - Age 16 - Grade 11

The Importance of Modesty

We've all heard the verse before: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (I Corinthians 10:31). Things that seem so mundane to us are very important to God. Modesty in dress and actions is important in the everyday life of Christian women and girls.

Modesty Is Important

Modesty is important. Why? Because the Bible commands it. A well-known verse on modesty is I Timothy 2:9-10: "In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works." In addition, I Peter 3:3-5 says, "Do not let your adornment be merely outward-arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands." These and other verses clearly show that modesty is important.

Modesty is directly related to the command to not commit adultery. As Jesus says in Matthew 5:28,

"But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Consider also I Thessalonians 4:3-5: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God."

Obviously, a woman cannot control a man's thoughts. "...if an attractive woman is 'lusted after', that is the man's problem. The Bible does not require pretty girls to wear paper bags over their heads to keep from stumbling all the brethren."¹ However, pretty girls can do their part to help prevent lustful thoughts. They can do this by dressing modestly. As it says in Mark 9:4, "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea." Far be it from us women, in our dress and actions, to be stumbling blocks for men!

Modesty Defined

Modesty is always important in everyday life. But what is modesty? How do I know if the clothes I wear are modest or not? To answer this question, let's break it down into several smaller questions. Who



commands modesty? As we have already seen, it is God. What is our standard of modesty? Where does this standard come from? Our standard of modesty must be based on the Bible.

The Bible does not give specific guidelines such as, “no tank-tops, no shorts shorter than mid-thigh, etc. etc.” This absence of particulars can result in disagreement among Christians. The Bible does give the earthly authority for modesty, however. In Numbers 30:5, it says concerning a daughter not yet married, “But if her father overrules her on the day that he hears, then none of her vows nor her agreements by which she bound herself shall stand; and the LORD will release her, because her father overruled her.” This passage goes on to say that if she is married her husband can overrule her.

This appears to be a rule that can be applied to modesty, as well. If Dad overrules it, it’s not to be worn. “But Dad,” the daughter will say. “Nancy is older and taller than me and she wears it!” Nonetheless, if Dad said it is not proper for his daughter to wear, then she must be content with that. So girls, when you find a dress or blouse or any article of clothing that you wonder about, go to Dad. He is your God-given authority. Ask him, “How does this affect you as a guy?” Let Dad go through your closet. After all, your father was a young man once, and knows from experience what kinds of clothes can cause temptation. Have him help you get rid of all articles he would not be willing to have you wear.

It sends a sad message when a brochure from a Christian family

camp. has to put modesty restrictions in the brochure because they have received complaints about the women’s swimming suits. This should not have been the case. This poses an additional problem: different families do have different ideas of modesty. One woman I know wore two-piece swimming suits when she was growing up, and thought nothing wrong of it. Her father never thought it was wrong either. In cases like these, it is best to err on the side of too modest rather than not modest enough.

As Christians, our question should not be, “How close can I get to sin?” Rather, it should be, “How can I best serve God?” Consider what the apostle Paul says in Romans 14:13: “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way.” Again in I Corinthians 8:9: “Beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.” Modesty is to be a mark of the Christian community.

Modesty is Obvious

Modesty is obvious. It is the one thing that anyone walking by you on the street can notice. Non-Christians and Christians can and will judge you by the way you dress. “One of the first evidences of a real lady is that she should be modest.”² “As the reader may have noticed from time to time, there is a

direct relationship between how a woman dresses, and whether or not men come around - and, of course, there is another connection to what kind of men come around . . . The principle is very simple; if girls dress immodestly they will attract the wrong kind of attention.”³

Modesty is important in actions as well as dress. Modesty in actions can sometimes be overlooked. Are you trying to get attention from the guys by how you dress? Then you will be quite likely to try to get attention from them by how you act as well. “There is no more beautiful adornment to womanly character than purity, and a girl does well to see that everything that concerns her dress and behavior when away from her home, on the street, or otherwise in the eyes of the public, is decent, clean, modest, and quiet.”⁴ “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” (Colossians 3:17). This applies to the dress and actions of all Christians.

It is not wrong to wear make-up or to look nice. Psalm 104:15 tells us: “[God causes] . . . wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man’s heart.” But remember, our adornment is not to be “merely outward . . . rather let it be the hidden person of the heart.” (I Peter 3:3-4). We should be focusing on the inner qualities which will not

As Christians, our question should not be, “How close can I get to sin?” Rather, it should be, “How can I best serve God?”

pass away, rather than the outward beauty which will fade. "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised." (Proverbs 31:30). Even when Paul speaks about your adornment not being merely outward, he is not saying that outward adornment is wrong. "Paul is not concerned with clothing and jewelry as such, but with the attitude of the one wearing them."⁵

We who call ourselves by Christ's name are to be different from the world. The world will be blatantly immodest. We are to be consistently modest in all of our dress and actions. Paul writes in Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of

God." Do not go solely by the style—that's not important. "For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (I Samuel 16:7). What is important is obeying God.

Yes, you might feel "out" sometimes. When everybody else is wearing immodest clothes and you aren't, you may be laughed at. You may feel uncomfortable and wish you didn't have to obey all of God's commands. You may be ridiculed for not following the latest style. But remember what Jesus says in Matthew 5:11, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake." Let us go forth as Christians and show the world by our speech, our actions, and yes, by our clothes, that we are

indeed people of God.

Endnotes

1. Doug Wilson. *Her Hand in Marriage: Biblical Courtship in the Modern World*. (Moscow) p. 48.
2. Karen Andreola. *Beautiful Girlhood*, Revised by M. Hale. (Oregon) p. 122.
3. Wilson, pp. 47-49.
4. Andreola, p. 132.
5. *Reformation Study Bible*, p. 1911.

Miss Vanessa Rubingh lives in Ellworth, Michigan. She is in 11th Grade at the Rubingh Home School and attends the Chain-of-Lakes OPC in Central Lake, Michigan.

First Prize - College

Susan E. Allgaier - Junior - Grove City College

Luther: Are His Arguments Still Valid For Us Today?

In order to fully understand how Luther presents and defends his arguments, one must first understand a little about Luther himself. Martin Luther was born in Saxony, Germany in 1483. He is described as an intelligent, studious boy with an overall cheery disposition. He continued his education at the University of Erfurt, enrolling in 1501. He was known there for his abilities in philosophical studies and debate.¹

Luther's History

There were times in the life of Luther when he would go through deep despair. These times became more frequent at college. There he became convicted of his sins and was discouraged over the state of his soul and his relationship with God. This despair and discouragement led Luther to go against the wishes of his father in pursuing a career in law in order to join a monastery to save his soul. He was accepted to the monastery of the

Erfurt Augustinians in 1505.

Although he thought this would help, it only served to deepen his despair. His theological studies only convinced Luther that he was right in being so discouraged, for the writings of the day, mainly those of Thomas Aquinas and Occam, taught a salvation by works. Luther knew that there was no way he could earn his salvation, no matter how hard he tried to do good works. He knew that "he deserved condemnation and hell" for the things he had done and would do.

The Vicar-General of the Order in Germany, Johann von Staupitz, gave Luther some very wise advice on Matthew 4:17: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He



told Luther that the repentance of which Christ spoke was a true repentance of the heart and not repentance of prescribed acts of penance. Von Staupitz also encouraged Luther to continue studying for his doctorate.

Graduating with his doctorate in 1512, Luther followed von Staupitz's advice and succeeded von Staupitz as the chair of theology at the University of Wittenberg three weeks later. During a series of lectures on the Psalms, "the light broke through the mists of doubt and despair caused by scholastic theology, ignorance, and personal soul-anguish".²

As well as being the chair of theology, Luther was also a minister at the Castle Church at Wittenberg. During this time the practice of selling indulgences began to permeate the church. In 1516, and Luther was began to preach publicly against the sale of indulgences. Luther began to study indulgences and what they meant to the church. He wrote his beliefs down, and on October 31, 1517, posted his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the Castle Church.

In 1519, Luther debated with Eck about the primacy of the pope. Eck had better debating skills and drove Luther to a point where he admitted to agreeing with John Hus and others whom the church had declared to be heretics. The only way Luther knew how to respond was with Scripture. Luther was put on trial, and on June 15, 1520, he was condemned for heresy.

Luther's Teaching

Now that we know a little bit about

Luther and his life, it will be easier to understand how and why he presented his arguments the way he did. Two questions that Luther's sermon, *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, answer came from the list of seven basic worldview questions in Sire's *Universe Next Door*. These questions are how we know the difference between what is right and wrong and what we are as human beings.

Luther classified people into two different categories. "Men can be classified as public or private individuals."³ Public individuals are those who have been placed in an office of authority. They are required to judge and punish evil men, vindicate and defend the oppressed, be servants of God, and act for the sake of others and not for themselves.

Private individuals are split into three categories. Luther does not give these different types of private individuals names, but he does describe the way they behave or act. The first type are those who seek vengeance and judgments from the representatives of God, the public individuals. The second type are those who do not desire vengeance, nor do they resist when evil attacks. They are the ones the Bible call the sons of God, the brothers of Christ, and heirs of future blessing. These are the type who do not avenge themselves. The third type are those who agree with the second type in theory but not in practice. They seek vengeance not for themselves, but for the betterment of the offender. They are the ones the Bible calls "zealots". Luther tells us that no one should ever seek to become this type of individual. He

says the only way to become this type of private individual is through maturity and experience.

This discussion leads us to ask the next question. How do humans know the difference between right and wrong? Luther does not address this question explicitly in his sermon, but we can definitely find the answer there. The two kinds of righteousness that Luther discusses are alien righteousness and proper righteousness.

According to Luther, alien righteousness is "righteousness of another, instilled from without". In other words, it is righteousness that has been imputed to us. Another way he described this type of righteousness is "[t]his is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith."⁴ Luther wanted to make clear that this righteousness is by no means from something we do, but rather only through faith or by grace alone. "Through faith in Christ, therefore Christ's righteousness becomes our own."⁵ Luther did not make these claims without anything to back it up. He used many Scripture references to make his claims.

The second type of righteousness that Luther discussed was proper righteousness. He defines this as the righteousness that proceeds from the alien righteousness. He said, "This righteousness is the product of the righteousness of the first type, actually its fruit and consequence."⁶ This righteousness flows from following the example of Christ. Luther quoted Galatians 5:13: "Through love be servants of one another." "When each person has forgotten himself and empties himself of God's gifts, he should

conduct himself as if his neighbor's weakness, sin, and foolishness were his very own."⁷

When Luther debated with Eck, he kept falling back on Scripture to defend his positions. It is no different with this sermon. Luther continually fell back on Scripture as his basis for truth. In this sermon, he used over fifty Scripture references. He used Scripture from the Old and New Testaments to verify his claims.

Luther's answers are applicable to us today, because we still need to hear that salvation is not by works but by the grace of God through Christ. Even if we do not agree with him, Luther's thoughts and views changed the course of church history. Though Luther did

not mean for them to be used in such a manner, his Ninety-Five Theses were taken up at the beginning of the Reformation. Luther intended the theses only for debate over the topic of indulgences, a subject very pertinent to the church at that time. Some of the students from the University of Wittenberg translated the Ninety-Five Theses and distributed them to the people. Within a few months, the Theses had spread across Europe, and people were using them as a cry for Reformation. Without Luther, the church would be a very different institution from the one that it is today.

Endnotes

1. Packer, J.I., O.R. Johnston. "Introduction." Luther, Martin. *The*

Bondage of the Will. (Grand Rapids, Mi: Fleming H. Revell) 1995. p.19

2. *Ibid*, p. 22.

3. Gambell, G., G. Harp, P. Kemeny, P. Schaefer, R. Stinger, E. Tilford. *The Western World*. (Boston, Pearson Publishing) 2002. p. 185.

4. *Ibid*, 9. 179.

5. *Ibid*. p. 180.

6. *Ibid*, p. 181.

7. *Ibid*, p. 183.

Miss Susan Allgaier is a Junior at Grove City College in Grove City, PA. She is a member of the Covenant OPC in that city.

First Prize - Adult

Mrs. Kristi Hummel - Edmonton, Alberta
God's Creativity

"...do all your work in love." I Corinthians 16:13b My husband often says he thinks God did some of his greatest handiwork on insects. I am beginning to agree with him. When I married a graduate student in entomology this summer, I underestimated, a bit, the degree of his passion for six-legged creatures. Afternoon excursions to hunt bugs in city parks and our refrigerator shelves stacked with glass jars containing stiff specimens has wisened me. And I'm beginning to catch a bit of insect fever myself—pointing out any stray beetles or butterflies I see as possible addi-

tions to his growing collection. Last Sunday, I even proudly stood by as he carefully flicked a metallic wood-boring beetle off the church wall into a plastic baggie before we could go in for the service.

God's creativity seems to have been endless when he created insects. So many details are hidden under our noses. I've learned that many of the "bees" we see on flowers and plants are really flies disguised as their stingy relations. And there are hundreds of kinds of beetles on the ground and on plants and trees in startling shades of

navy, red, orange, and black. Some beetles, a form of carabid, have long, narrow heads and long, spoon-like mouthparts that they use to get in snail shells and eat the sludgy mess. Others, like tiger beetles, stalk their prey on sandy soil and strike with blurring accuracy. From comical, minute weevils with their round, hard bodies and pointy snouts, to lacewings as delicate as their name implies—insects are marvels.

And these marvels are always busy. The Bible praises the industry of the ant in Proverbs. And it's true—insects are always working, harvesting, preparing. They work by instinct and necessity and it is easy to be amazed at their focus and strength. Insects are always doing exactly what



they were created to do. Their movements are never awkward or unsure. Insects come to life as either herbivores, carnivores, or parasites and develop as such with highly specific skills and focus. Assassin bugs, with their raptorial front legs and camouflage, are designed for one purpose. They can never be herbivores—only eat them! And a herbivore like an aphid isn't designed to stalk and kill or parasitize anything. Their lives are spent eating. How silly it would be for someone to try to train any insect or change it into something it is not. Insects are perfectly suited to be themselves and only that. The same goes for all created things. A butterfly can't be a wasp anymore than a cow can be a tree.

Everything was created to be what it is. Nothing more or less. God took no less care in designing His people. We're all created in His image, and more, with specific gifts and work to do. Insects seem blessed with natural instinct to know their work. Lately, I have been wishing God would bless me with a little more instinct. And I know I am not alone. Most of my friends are also in work limbo at jobs where they know they are not long-term; or they are contemplating returning to school because they are not sure what they are supposed to be doing with their lives.

And it is not just my peers. My parents both switched jobs within the last couple of years and many of their generation continue to bounce from occupation to occupation looking for the perfect career to define themselves.

This is a difficult subject because

we are so often defined by what we do. We introduce ourselves as bankers, musicians, or farmers. We enjoy talking about our occupations.

For Christians, the concept of work is more complicated because our work is also a calling to serve the Lord and others. Our daily work becomes not just who we define ourselves as, but a call to service in the Kingdom of God. Still, merging the idea of calling with work can be complicated. I heard it said once that calling is where "our passion meets God's need." That little saying has lodged in my heart ever since.

Without passion for our work we are not happy. Without need for our work we are not content. By combining passion and need we can, with God's help, change lives. We should work right at the heart of things. I believe this means following your heart, your talents, and finding out what you were made for. There is need in so many areas of the world. If politics gets your heart thumping serve there. If it is doing artwork then minister with your hands. If it is in the home do your best work there.

We can glorify God in everything we do. That is a truth of the Reformed faith that I love. God is in all spheres of life so we should be too. What a marvelous truth for us. And God's grace follows us wherever we go, but passion should also follow us to work that is not exciting or glamorous or our first choice of spending our time. Our passion should also root itself in God's passion and God is passionate about doing all things well. He loves to

say, "It is good" and He loves when we serve Him and others.

This means that I can glorify God just as much doing dishes as my husband can by studying leaf hoppers and scarab beetles. Our main work is giving glory by serving. I love the Westminster Confession's question and answer one "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." What a beautiful confession. Our work is never without purpose or passion if we remember this. What a comfort this is to us. God created His insects with strong instincts about their work. His children may not have the same instincts, but we do have assurance that God can use us wherever we are—whether it be behind the counter at a deli or in a law office. And we have something better than instinct—we have love we can share purposefully. Insects work for a purpose and praise their creator as silent witnesses while doing it. We need to do the same, but need not be silent. Praise the Lord.

Mrs. Kristi Hummel is a graduate of Dordt College and a housewife in Edmonton, Alberta.

Reformed Fellowship, Inc.
3363 Hickory Ridge Ct.
Grandville, MI 49418
(616) 532-8510

**Just in time for Christmas Shopping:
Buy a new gift subscription for a friend...**

Gift Subscription Form (new subscriptions only)

One year US \$21.00 Two years US \$41.00 Three years US \$60.00
(Canadian \$29.00 + 2.03 GST) (Canadian \$58.00 + 4.06 GST) (Canadian \$84.00 + 5.88 GST)

Name

Street

City

State

Zip

Denominational Affiliation

Reformed Fellowship, Inc.
3363 Hickory Ridge Ct.
Grandville, MI 49418

**and renew or start your own
for only \$15.00 [\$25.00 Can.] ...**

Subscription Form

One year US \$15.00 Two years US \$35.00 Three years US \$50.00
(Canadian \$25.00 + 2.03 GST) (Canadian \$50.00 + 4.06 GST) (Canadian \$75.00 + 5.88 GST)

Name

Street

City

State

Zip

Denominational Affiliation

Reformed Fellowship, Inc.
3363 Hickory Ridge Ct.
Grandville, MI 49418

(Sound bites, cont.)

October 1989

“When the line of demarcation between church and world is slowly wiped out, all the ‘evangelism’ in the world isn’t going to revive it.”

Outreach
Jelle Tuininga

December 1989

“We Christians have become so saturated with the self-love message, that we can hardly discern anymore between what comes from the pen of some psychologist and what the Bible says.”

“Project Charlie” in Our Schools
Valerie E. Heerema