

Clarion

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*Helping those who suffer
from depression . . .*

Numbers

10:1-10

By C. Van Dam



Reaping the Fruit of Gambling

State organized gambling has been with us since 1969 when it became legal and provincial finances can no longer be imagined without those easy dollars from state lotteries and gambling casinos. Although there were publicly expressed qualms originally, not much of that is heard nowadays. There appears to be little political resolve to hinder the procreative abilities of this golden goose of gambling income in any way. More casinos continue to be built and the hawking of lottery tickets continues as shamelessly as ever. The public seems most obliging to help fill cash strapped government coffers this way. So, why not continue?

Some fruits

There is however a very high price that will someday need to be paid for promoting gambling. A Nova Scotia expert has been quoted in the secular press to the effect that the tremendous growth of gambling combined with an increased reliance by governments on the revenue gambling generates sets the stage for a catastrophic calamity for the next generation. He sees the next generation entrapped "in an illusionary world of almost virtual reality wherein everything is a game and every game may be won or lost. The game and the play have a price. Are we willing to pay for it?"¹ Research has shown that it is especially youth that are becoming addicted to gambling. These youth are the first to grow up in a time of state-sponsored gambling which is socially acceptable. This means, for example, that their perspective on life is different from that of an earlier generation. The work ethic used to be generally accepted. In the 1960s nearly 60 % believed in it. Now only one of three believe that hard work pays off.² What will happen to this generation who are being taught to dream for an impossible lottery win and who are thus not being equipped for the real world? More and more experts are raising the alarm of the unpaid bills of gambling addiction that will be exacted from society in the future.

There are other related grim fruits of the lottery harvest that are now already being reaped. Lottery promotes coveting and desire for something that normally would not enter one's mind to wish for. The more seriously one takes the lottery, the more frustrating not winning becomes. Considering the chances of winning are typically somewhere in the range of 14 million to one, there are many people out there who are or could be generally dissatisfied with life. Many of these people will nevertheless continue to pump an untold number of dollars which they can ill afford into the dream they long for. Ultimately, the resulting shortage of money and even poverty leads to tremendous pressures and conflicts which can destroy entire families and lead to devastation of all involved. Investigations have shown that families will support rehabilitation for an addiction like al-

coholism. But when a family has been financially ruined, the response of those affected is very negative and there is little support for rehabilitation.

Gambling is sin

The grim fruits of gambling should come as no surprise for those whose guide for life is the Word of God. Gambling is sin for a number of reasons.

In the first place, God has taught us not to long for and gather possessions in this way. We are to use the gifts God has entrusted to us, our health, opportunities for education and work, and our material goods as faithful stewards (cf., e.g., 1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:12). Not squandering for a dream, but using our resources wisely and productively. In the parable of the ten talents, one servant receives one talent. In our context, a detail is noteworthy in the account of this story as such. Even though this servant did not recklessly squander or spend the one talent, but buried it in the ground for safekeeping, he was punished for at least not working with the money productively by depositing it with bankers for interest (Matt. 25:24-30).

Secondly, as Christians we know that not chance, but God, our heavenly Father, governs all things. Not even a hair can fall from our heads without the will of our heavenly Father. (Think of Lord's Day 1, 9, 10 and 13.) Now an unbeliever has no difficulty with playing lotteries for he believes chance governs all things. But how can a child of God play a lottery, or for that matter participate in a raffle with the fervent hope and wish that he win? A believer knows that God directs the lot (Prov. 16:33).³ For this reason, it is a grievous affront to God to try to use His directing of the lot to attempt to gain money or a prize at someone else's expense. Such behaviour easily becomes addictive and desire feeds desire in violation of the tenth commandment. This kind of lifestyle can only reap the fruit of eventual estrangement from God. One cannot attempt to use God's control of all things for selfish materialistic motives with impunity. There is a price, a penalty for not honouring God as GOD. The wages of sin is death. The essence of this punishment is estrangement from the God of life.

In closing

To oppose the gambling ethos of our day, we need to start at home, re-examine our own attitudes to this evil and renew our wholehearted commitment to a lifestyle that is in accordance with what God has revealed about Himself and His controlling also "chance." Such examination is necessary for it could be that before we know it we become influenced by the godless world of materialism around us and see nothing wrong with lotteries and raffles.

We also have an obligation to let those in authority over us know that it is immoral to promote gambling. Governments cannot absolve themselves of responsibility by factoring rehabilitation of compulsive gamblers into the cost of casinos. The end (getting easy money) does not justify the means (more gambling casinos).

¹*The Globe and Mail*, Sept. 19, 1995.

²*Christianity Today*, April 8, 1996, p. 12.

³God used the casting of lots to divide the inheritance of Canaan among the tribes (Josh. 18:10), to designate Israel's first king (1 Sam. 10:20-21, 24), and to arrange the priestly service in the temple (1 Chron. 24:5-19).

MEDITATION

By H.J.J. Feenstra

BE WISE WITH WISDOM!

Climax

Originally published as
Wees wijs met de wijsheid,
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Ermelo 1989
Translated by T.M.P. VanderVen

The first four verses of Proverbs 2 contain a telling climax, showing mounting tension and increasing intensity.

*My son, if you receive my words
and treasure up my commandments
with you . . .*

Wisdom announces, "Here I come; get to work and take hold of my words." That is line one. Line two speaks even more forcefully; the words become words of command. The hearer cannot and may not get away from these words, spoken with such authority. Not only should you accept these words which come to you as commandments, you must also take care of them. Do not stand there with your hands full, but find a safe storage place for them. *Treasure them up*, take them along as your spiritual luggage.

*. . . making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding . . .*

These words (= commandments) that you will accept and treasure are indeed worth it. They teach wisdom. You urgently need that instruction, and of course, you are willing to listen carefully. Notice the climax from the ears to the heart. Listening to these commandments of wisdom cannot mean: in the one ear and out the other. It means: listening with the heart, listening with your whole being because a man's heart devises his ways. And further, we

are commanded to *incline* our hearts. That means much more than to notice something remarkable. It means that you are beyond the stage of merely noticing things, you have become actively involved. Not only is your heart open to wisdom, but you desire it. As it were, you bend forward to listen even more eagerly because you do not want to miss anything.

Verse 3 continues to speak of that involvement:

*. . . yes, if you cry out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding . . .*

Inclining becomes *crying out*, calling for something. And calling changes into searching and digging. The gold thirst gets a hold of us. We have discovered something of such great value that it no longer leaves us unmoved. We want to get at it at all costs:

*. . . if you seek it like silver
and search for it as hidden treasures . . .*

That is the manner in which we must go after wisdom!

But now a practical question. Where are these words which come to us as commandments? Where do we need to search and dig at all cost? Well, they are contained in Proverbs, first of all in the introductory chapters. And after these preliminaries, the real work can begin, starting with chapter 10. That is the goal of our search; there is indeed much for us to put our teeth into, and that requires patience and persistence – reading and rereading, analyzing and mastering, reviewing and memorizing, working with this wisdom and applying it. Use a commentary;

compare various translations. Use a pencil to underline – surely a good thing to do in your study bible.

Many people have enriched their lives through the study of these proverbs, and have developed the art of living further. As a result, they were able to cope better with life. And do not forget the preventive effect of these proverbs. They can teach you how to prevent evil. Thus, in the end, wisdom gives most gain!

In this way, these verses in chapter 2 (1 - 4) relate to the whole of Proverbs. And yet there is more; these verses relate to all of Scripture. Our God is gracious and gives in abundance. Therefore we have a Bible rich in its variety: history, poetry, prophecy, archival documents, wisdom literature – various genres and styles. Therefore we confess about the Bible: *all that man must believe in order to be saved is sufficiently taught therein. The whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in it at length.*

God wants to give us so much; He wants to make us rich. Therefore we are commanded to dig for treasure by means of intensive Bible study, individually and together with others. Read a good book instead of watching TV. The apostle James teaches us that if any of us lacks wisdom, he must ask God. But such a prayer is not a magic trick; it is not a formula which will give the desired result immediately. Such a prayer will ask for a blessing over the use of the means which the Lord has given us in order to become wise.

From Scripture Proverbs 2:1 - 4
James 1:5 - 8

From the Confession Belgic Confession Article 7

The Church's Ministry To Those Who Suffer From Depression

By L.W. Bilkes

Depression: what is it?

One *Introduction to Psychology* defines depression as "a morbid sadness, dejection, or melancholy."¹ H. Norman Wright puts it in this way: "In simple terms, depression is merely a negative emotion due to self-defeating perceptions and appraisals. However, it may also be a sign of serious, even malignant disease."² A person can be depressed because of the 'blahs' or 'blues'." He can also be depressed because of "a neurotic or psychotic disorder." It can be a mild or moderate depression. It can also be a severe depression. "It can be harmless or life threatening."

What are some of the characteristics of depression?

- (i) It is "a feeling of overall gloom." When you feel depressed, you feel down, you "lose perspective," and you feel you are not able to carry on your life activities or are able to function only at 50% of 70% of your capacity."
- (ii) You experience changes in physical activities – eating, sleeping, sex." (a) Some lose their appetite for food, while others overeat. (b) Some "can't get to sleep at night" or "can't sleep through the night" or don't seem to sleep at all, while

- (c) "Sexual interest wanes."
- (iii) It is a feeling of overall hopelessness. If you then have a "fight" with your wife or with your husband, your marriage simply looks hopeless to you.
- (iv) It is a feeling of no more self-confidence. When in "normal" circumstances you "have a business problem," you might react to it "with some tension and frustration" but you would "promptly and appropriately" deal with it. However, when you are depressed and you have a business problem, you feel as if you are "a lousy businessman," and you "battle with problems of self-confidence instead of dealing with the issues in front of" you. "Your self-confidence is very low."
- (v) You withdraw from others because you fear you are not understood and are being rejected. You cancel activities that you used to enjoy. You fail "to return phone calls." You do not answer the telephone. You try to avoid seeing others and talking with others.
- (vi) "There is a desire to escape from problems and even from life itself, and you begin to think of "leav-

ing the home or running away." You have thoughts of committing suicide.

- (vii) You tend to be "over-sensitive to what others say and do" and to "misinterpret actions and comments in a negative way and become irritable" and cry "easily . . . because of these mistaken perceptions."
- (viii) You feel angry and bitter. Your feeling angry with yourself may be the result of feeling worthless. Your feeling angry at others may be the result of not knowing how to deal with the situation you are in. Often this anger is directed outward, sometimes inward.
- (ix) You feel guilty. The basis for feeling guilty "may be real or imagined." Often these feelings flow from assuming that you are in the wrong somehow," or that you are "responsible for making" the lives of "others miserable because of the depression."³
- (x) Clinical depression is defined as "a state of sadness that is severe enough to have observable physiological symptoms, such as insomnia, anorexia (loss of appetite), and fatigue."⁴

What's inside?

A survey of a couple of years ago showed that 85% of Canadians, coming from every age and income bracket, have played the lottery at some time. About 50% of Canadian adults buy lottery tickets on a regular basis, spending an average of \$8.50 per month. Buying lottery tickets is pure foolishness. Tom Watson in *Don't Bet On It!* says that you are 3 1/2 times more likely to be struck by lightning than to win a state or provincial lottery. Some odds! And yet, gambling is a growth industry in Canada. Editor Van Dam writes about this blight.

We are pleased to present an extensive article on how the church ought to minister to those who are depressed. May it encourage you, if you suffer depression. May it equip you if you are in a position to help a child of God who suffers depression. The author is the Rev. L. Bilkes, pastor of the Free Reformed Church in Abbotsford, BC. *Thank you, Rev. Bilkes, for sharing the fruit of your study with us!*

Mrs. Ravensbergen writes about sleeplessness and gives a good perspective on that problem.

You will also find a few letters of readers expressing various opinions. Please try to keep your letter short. That minimizes the chance of it being subjected to the editor's black marker.

GvP

- (xi) Manic depressive illness is defined as a "relatively infrequent disorder marked by severe mood swings from delusional, grandiose elation to severe depression with suicidal compulsions."⁵

Who suffers from depression?

The book, *Introduction to Psychology*, which was initially printed in 1982 indicates that 1 out of 20 Americans are "medically diagnosed as suffering from depression," that many more persons are "having symptoms of depression but not seeking treatment." This book was initially printed in 1982. The March 5, 1990 edition of *US. News and World Report* indicates that 1 in 12 Americans suffer from depression.⁶ H. Norman Wright wrote in 1989 that "medical practitioners" diagnose 7 out of 10 patients whom they see "for emotional problems" as having depression, that altogether there were 35 million depressed persons in the USA, and that "25 percent of the beds in public mental-health facilities, and 50 percent of the beds in private mental-health facilities have depression."⁷

H. Norman Wright goes as far as saying that at "some time in our lives depression affects each one of us." It affects "both sexes, people of all ages, the rich and the poor." It also affects ministers of the Gospel.⁸ Babies can suffer from depression and "people who are over one hundred years old." Some think that twice as many females suffer from depression as do males. I don't know if it is true. It seems to me that men "deal with their depression differently than do women." Women visit medical clinics more often than do men and thus are treated two or three times more often than men for depression. That as such does not indicate that women suffer from depression more than do men. It may well be that men less easily "admit weakness" and less easily "reveal inner feelings." After all, more men are alcoholics than are women, and "the rate for successful suicides is three times higher for men than for women."⁹ It occurs very often in the 40-59 age group, although it may occur in "any period of stress."¹⁰ It also occurs often in the Christian church.

Causes of depression

The writers of *Introduction to Psychology: Christian Perspectives and Applications* suggest that "pent-up anger . . . is the root of nearly all clinical depression."¹¹ Children, they say, "easily pick up a tendency to repress anger from a parent." Apparently many parents "discourage their chil-

dren from sharing angry feelings, even appropriately." So these children learn "to fear anger." They "grow to feel that being aware of their anger or expressing it will result in rejection or punishment." They therefore repress anger. What often happens then is that they displace their anger "on something or someone else."

Perhaps some of us know from experience what it is to grow up in a home "with chronically depressed parents." You perhaps have learned "similar attitudes." Your "pent-up anger eventually" affected your "nervous system" which adjusted to "the depressed lifestyle" and produced "harmful and far-reaching effects." Perhaps you too have used depression as "a powerful way" to manipulate others or "as a mechanism to vent" your anger on others or to get even with others. You perhaps found too that that sometimes relieves the anger, but you make life quite difficult and miserable on others.

Some use depression "to gain attention from others." Others use depression as "a conscience-pleaser," in that when a person is depressed, "the self is turned against self," and then when as a pastor I speak with such persons, they say to me, "I feel I am getting what I deserve."

Again others who suffer from depression mask their depression by way of "physical complaints such as headaches or bodily aches and pains that seem to have no basis in organic pathology." I am not suggesting that all headaches or bodily aches and pains are "face-saving mechanism to cover up emotional conflicts." But if there does not seem to be a basis in organic pathology, it may well be.

Also depression may be the result of "the stress of adjusting to change."¹² For instance, "a change of residence" can result in depression. When we move from Strathroy, Ontario, to Abbotsford, B.C., we suffer loss of friends.

Depression as related to spiritual problems

In pastoral experience we often encounter depression related to spiritual problems. Although there are more, allow me to highlight only three of them:

- (i) Depression can be the result of the wrong attitude to sin. The depression is then not merely the result of the fact that we have sinned but rather the result of the wrong way in which we react to it. The difficulty is that we do not confess our sin and do not flee to Christ for pardon and thus do not disown it or mortify it. Instead,



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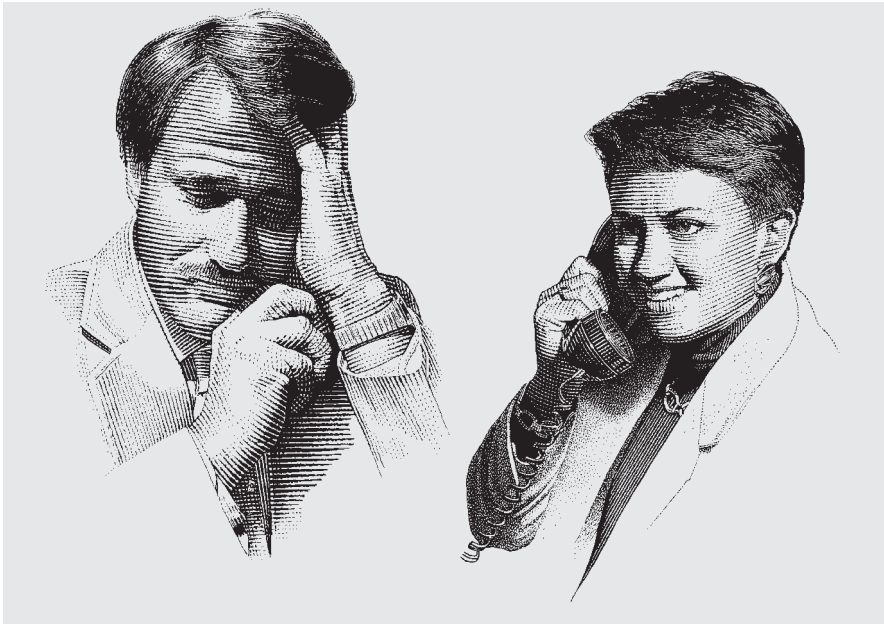
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we despair of our sin being forgiven. The result is that we react in a way similar to Cain before he murdered his brother Abel. You will remember that he “dropped” and hid his face. The K.J.V. translates: Cain “was very wroth, and his countenance (= face), fell” (Genesis 4:5). It is also possible to translate the word “wroth” as “depressed.” Then Genesis 4:5 and 6 reads: “And Cain was greatly depressed and crestfallen. . . . Why are you depressed and why are you crestfallen (= lit., why is your face fallen?)?”¹³ If for this depression we do go for therapy but this depression is not dealt with at its source, it is not dealt with properly, and we cannot become well.

- (ii) Depression can also be the result of vain regrets. If we have done things in life in which we hurt others and we are bitterly and deeply ashamed of them but we find we cannot undo them, we cannot repair them, then they can bring a futile, disabling gloom over us. The proper attitude is to ask God to forgive the mistakes of the past, to care lovingly for the victims of our folly and to give us grace in the present to run the race set before us while looking unto Jesus (cf. Hebrews 12:1,2).
- (iii) Depression can also result from having wrong expectations as to the way the Lord God deals with His people. You see, there are Christians who expect the pilgrimage through this life to be easy, and when adversities come their way, they begin to suspect that there is

something seriously wrong. They fail to realize that the Lord explicitly says that “the present time” is one of suffering (Romans 8:18), and that it is through much tribulation that men must enter into the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). They fail to realize that the Lord says that He chastens and disciplines every one of His children. Christians must expect to encounter many things that are not joyous but grievous, and must watch for the danger of becoming weary and despondent under His rebuke (Hebrews 12:5).

The Church’s responsibility

What responsibility does the Church have in connection with this problem? Larry Crabb¹⁴ correctly has been calling for the church to “reclaim its job of healing people who are struggling emotionally” instead of immediately sending them to professional counselor or referring them to a psychologist and a therapist. We need to realize again that “the Scriptures and Christianity . . . meaningfully address the core concerns of our lives.”¹⁵

Crabb makes a point we need to consider. I wish to mention the following aspects.

(1) The Church as health-giving community

The Church is to give support and encouragement to all who are liable to depression. The Apostle Paul writes that in bereavement we are to comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18). In the next chapter he writes that we are to “comfort the feeble-minded” and “sup-

port the weak” (vs. 14). The old are to comfort the young, and the young are to support the old. Pastors are to minister to the members of “their” congregation, but the members of the congregation are also to minister to their pastors. The New Testament pictures the Church as a health-giving community where burdens are shared, neuroses are dispelled, problems are resolved and every opportunity is given for the development of mature and well-integrated personalities.

(2) The Church as a spiritual atmosphere of hope

The Church must exercise the utmost care as to the spiritual atmosphere with which it surrounds its people. That is, in preaching and pastoral care ministers must not seek to spread gloom, by putting the emphasis exclusively on the law, on denunciation, on threats of doom and on searching questions as to the grounds of assurance, without any proper emphasis on comfort and light, hope and encouragement. We may not give the impression that it is wrong for a Christian to be happy. We may not give the impression that if you are happy there is probably something wrong with you and you are not a Christian at all.

How important this is! Take, for instance, assurance. Some teach and believe that you are not entitled to assurance unless you have experienced first intense inner conflict. Some who fear and love the Lord but who have not experienced that are depressed by its absence. So they put the focus not on faith in the promises of the Gospel but on conviction of sin and the intensity of the inward struggle. We must be keenly aware that in this way we are making a dramatic shift from the Reformation. The Reformers asked: “How can a man who is a sinner be right with God?” Some preachers ask: “How can I know that I have passed from death to life?” The Reformers based forgiveness and assurance on the promise of the Gospel. Some preachers base it on possession of “the marks of grace.” What they do in effect is making possession of the marks of grace the ground of justification instead of the promises of the Gospel. Calvin’s doctrine was that faith was faith in the promise of the Gospel, and that faith, whether small or great, in the promise of the Gospel contains assurance that God loves you. Some say that assurance is possible only by a voice from heaven that we are born again. In the absence of such a voice many fall victim to depression.

The message of the Church should be precisely one of hope and should create the atmosphere of joy and optimism. The nature of the Gospel and the special function of the Church is: "The Lord hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound" (Isaiah 61:1b).

David Kingdon emphasizes this: "Learn to live by faith. When we suffer from depression we often tend to forget the great truth of justification. We feel full of self-pity. And self-pity . . . arises from self-justification." He suggests that "when in our depression we pity ourselves we need to ask whether we have really learned to live by faith." He alerts to the reality that "the awareness of our ungodliness threatens so often to drive us into deep depression." He asks: "When this happens have we not forgotten that God justifies the ungodly? (Rom. 4:5). Satan does indeed charge us with ungodliness, and so does our conscience." But we must meet the charges brought against us and especially the charge that we are ungodly – as indeed we are – by pointing not to God's work in us but to His work for us. . . . We must accept our acceptance in the Beloved. We must ever look in faith to the substitutionary death, the justifying resurrection, the glorious ascension, and the prevailing the prevailing intercession of our Saviour (Rom. 8:34). This is the way of joy. It is to look to God's work for us, outside of us."¹⁶

The "directions and advices" that the late Dr. John Colquhoun¹⁷ gave to Christians afflicted with melancholy are also to the point:

- (a) Endeavour to understand well the covenant of grace.
- (b) Be firmly persuaded that the Incarnate Redeemer with his righteousness and fulness is in the Gospel offered to you as sinners of mankind.
- (c) Love not the good things of this world so as to place either your happiness or your confidence in them.
- (d) Be not solitary, but as little and as seldom as possible.
- (e) Recollect frequently that, although it is a sin to yield to temptation, yet it is not a sin to be tempted.
- (f) Consider how much it gratifies Satan, to see your indulging gloomy and desponding thought.
- (g) Meditate frequently on the promises and grace of the Gospel, but let each of your meditations be short and easy.
- (h) Be frequently employed in ejaculatory¹⁸ prayer, and let your stated prayers be shorter than ordinary.



- (i) Be not discouraged though in your holy exercises you have no lively feelings, nor elevating conceptions.
- (j) Be diligent, from principles of faith and love, in doing the work of your lawful calling.
- (k) Represent your case to some skillful, cheerful, and humble minister or private Christian, and follow diligently his directions.
- (l) If you have reason to apprehend that your malady (illness) is increasing, you ought to consult a skillful physician, and, in the hope that you shall in due time recover, to observe carefully his prescriptions.
- (m) Finally, Trust that the Lord Jesus, Whose infinite compassions fail not, will, as far as it shall be for His glory and your good, command deliverance for you.¹⁹

(3) Constructive Biblical guidance

As Church we must be able to give constructive biblical guidance and support to those smitten with depression. How?

- (a) The Church should be there to help. Pastors, elders, deacons, their wives and the other brothers and sisters should give themselves to help those who are in emotional stress. According to Larry Crabb, the "church needs to take the role of spiritual, godly men and women far more seriously."²⁰ We should not immediately refer them to a family physician or a counselor or psychiatrist. Mind you, in some cases this is altogether a must. There is clearly a need for professional counselors for those who suffer from depression and who cannot find the kind of help given in the church. For instance, in many cases of clinical depression, there is "effective medical treatment which may need to be prolonged."²¹ One of the pas-

toral skills in this field is to be able to distinguish between those brothers and sisters who require medical attention and those who do not. In case of tendency to self-destruction, such a referral and sometimes hospitalization is imperative. It is a great blessing that where depression is the result primarily of hereditary or environmental factors, much can be done by the use of the anti-depressant drugs and other therapy. But even when our depressed brothers and sisters are being treated by psychiatrists or counselled by psychologists, we as office-bearers should pastor to them and as brothers and sisters in the congregation surround with love, which at any rate gives a listening ear to and a praying heart for them.

Why do I suggest that when Christians are depressed, they should not right away resort to psychiatry? One reason is that much modern psychiatry is based on anti-biblical psychology. A non-Christian psychiatrist has no understanding of the spiritual problems which often underlie depression both in Christians and non-Christians. Another reason is that the Lord God has appointed in the church pastors, elders and deacons whose calling it is to deal with the emotional as well as with the other problems of His people. I realize that I as a pastor lack the technological resources of the psychiatrist. But my elders and deacons and I have other resources of our own: the Word of God, prayer, the comfort of the Holy Spirit, Christian experience, and the supportive resources of a Christian congregation.

- (b) We should help the brother or sister suffering from depression to work his or her way through the depression

in such a way that we honour the confidentiality of the depth of the depression. Grief is an intensely intimate, personal thing into which not just about everybody should be allowed to intrude. As far as possible, work your way through it with them keeping confidentiality and helping them fight their own emotional battles. If too many persons get involved in all the details, the brother or sister suffering from depression may lose all self-respect.

(c) We must remind the brother or sister suffering from depression that his or her condition is not unique. He may feel a sense of utter isolation and hopelessness and concludes that no Christian has ever had such an experience, and that he therefore is no Christian. This, however, is not what the Word of God teaches. It teaches that many saints in the past have plumbed the depths of depression: Elijah under the juniper tree, the Psalmist crying from the depths and Paul declaring that he was pressed down beyond measure and despaired even of life (1 Corinthians 1:8). They knew what it was to be in an abyss of gloom and even of bitterness against God. Their experiences are recorded in part to prevent us from feeling utterly hopeless.

(d) At a more complicated level I find that sometimes Christians become depressed because they nurture depression. What I as a pastor then try to do is challenge the depression itself. "Do you have a right to be depressed?" This is the approach we frequently find in Scripture. For example, the author of Psalm 42 asks his soul: "Why art thou cast down, o my soul?" Similarly, the Lord challenges Elijah (1 Kings 19:9), "What doest thou here?" The Lord Himself approaches even Cain in this way (Genesis 4:6): "Why are you wroth (= depressed) and why is your face fallen?" The thought that underlies these questions is that the depression to which they refer is thoroughly unreasonable and unjustified. Sometimes it is only a sinful reaction to the ordinary problems of life. More seriously it may be a strategy we adopt deliberately, retreating from the real life into a pseudo-illness to justify our own self-pity and attract the sympathy of others. Or it may be an act of regression, in which we try to escape into our childhood, to absolve ourselves from responsibility, escape the burden of decision-making and

exempt ourselves from the ordinary rigours of earning a living.

I don't mean to say that these are the motives behind all depressions but behind some, perhaps even quite a few. That's why we need to probe delicately but thoroughly. Otherwise too many lives are wasted and talents squandered through this misdirected self-indulgence.

However, when I challenge the depression itself and point such a brother or sister to the call of the Lord to always rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:4) and to be always contented (Tenth commandment and Philippians 4:11), I find some of them respond by saying that they cannot do that and conclude that therefore their Christianity is non-existent. To them I show from Scripture that eminent men of God like Job, Moses, David and Paul sometimes found it really hard to be reconciled to the will of the Lord God.

Moreover, I find that when brothers and sisters in their depression use religious language, it does not necessarily mean that their depression is spiritual. Clinical depression often fastens on to religion and feeds on it. It may well be that some one who is convinced that he or she has committed the unpardonable sin or is reprobate is not suffering from spiritual depression but from a clinical one which is fuelling itself with religious considerations. I tend to say that psychiatric referral is imperative in such an instance.

You see, clinical depressions are usually caused by a combination of factors. In some instances there is a biochemical problem. This is particularly true of manic depression, where the individual alternates between high and lows. Such depressions, however, reflect a complex interaction between internal and external factors. Some people have an inborn predisposition to depression and when they come under stress their psyche goes under. An already vulnerable personality becomes even more so in the event of illness.

(4) Dangers associated with depression

We must also be alert to certain dangers associated with depression. One of these is the strong temptation to resort to alcohol. However, if there is one time above all others when people should practise total abstinence, it is at this time. After all, alcohol is a depressant, reduces efficiency and carries the

risk of addiction. Similar dangers exist in connection with tranquillo-sedative drugs such as Librium and Valium which are easily prescribed. They also reduce efficiency and carry similar risks of addiction. Moreover, the anxiety and tension which they are intended to relieve are themselves emotional states forbidden to the Christian. An inherited predisposition to it implies that we shall be tempted to lapse into despairing gloom. It does not mean such lapses are inevitable, because with every temptation God provides a way of escape. By grace those who tend to become depressed can manage their temperaments so as to conform closely to God's ideal for our emotional lives.

(5) Be realistic

Finally, we must all learn to be realistic. To a large extent, depression is rooted in our aspirations to be successful or our dreams to become prominent. None of us is as successful as we like to be and none of us possesses all the gifts we think desirable. It can be very difficult indeed to live with ourselves. But live with ourselves we must, recognizing freely that we have only two talents (or maybe only one); that at many points we perform badly; and that many of our dreams must perish with ourselves. We must learn that God forgives failure; that no man is condemned for not being talented enough; and that it is better to do our duty badly than not to attempt it at all. We must learn to see ourselves through God's eyes. He knows the very worst about us; yet He loved us and gave Himself for us.

(6) Pastoral depression and recovery

What if pastors or counselors suffer from a melancholic temperament themselves? According to Brian Beardsworth, depression "is very common in ministers, many of whom are conscientious and introspective"²² and "has a profound effect on their general health, family relationships and the quality of their ministry."²³ David Kingdom spoke in March 1982 at a Leicester Ministers' Conference on "Ministerial Depression," and recommended the following pastoral counsels:

(i) If you suffer from a melancholic temperament learn to discipline it. When you feel yourself beginning to brood, center your thoughts upon Christ. Meditate on Him. See Him as He gives himself for others. Then you will be less absorbed in yourself and less inclined to pity yourself.

Seek to bring every thought into captivity to Christ. . . .

- (ii) Do not be afraid to complain to God when you are depressed. David complained when his soul “refused to be comforted” (Psalms 42:2). Only the last three lines of this psalm are a prayer – the rest is a complaint, although in the context of prayer. . . . David did not bottle up his anguish within himself. No, he complained, he cried, he unburdened himself to his God. . . .²⁴

Pastors must lay out the Christian calling to the brothers and sisters and help them towards fulfilling it. The calling in this instance is to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), to have hearts that make melody to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19) always and in all things and to be content whatever our circumstances (Philippians 4:11). It is something that we can learn. We can *come to be persuaded* that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord and *learn* to be content (Philippians 4:11). The Word of the Lord our God holds out not only the obligation to manage our temperaments but also the promise and the hope of significantly modifying them. But that cannot be left to the individual alone. The life of the whole church must be thoroughly biblical if it is to put melody in the hearts of the brothers and sisters, the young people and the children. The members of the Spirit-filled congregation will focus on the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:11) and accept responsibility for strengthening the weak and encouraging the feeble-minded. The Christian Church is the “primary context for healing.”²⁵

(7) Illustration a

I’m reminded of a marvellous illustration that the late Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones gave in a sermon on Luke 24:25-27 that I once heard on tape,²⁶ of how he, in the early 1930s, had counselled a teacher who was suffering from depression and had given up all his church work. He complained of headaches and gastric pains. Dr. Lloyd-Jones asked how long he had had this. He answered him that he had had this since 1915. During World War I he had volunteered for the navy. Eventually he was transferred to a submarine, which was sent to the Mediterranean. He told Dr. Lloyd-Jones: “One afternoon we were submerged in the sea and were engaged in an action. All of us were doing our duties. But suddenly there was a most terrible sound, and our submarine shook. Our submarine had been hit



Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

by a mine, and then we sank to the bottom of the Mediterranean. You know, he said, I’ve never been the same man. I’ve had this trouble ever since.”

Dr. Lloyd-Jones responded: “I understand, but please tell me the rest of your story.”

He answered: “There is nothing really more to say. I’m just telling you that that’s how I feel ever since that happened to me in the Mediterranean.”

Dr. Lloyd-Jones: “But I really would be interested to know the remainder of the story.”

He: “But I told you the whole story.”

Dr. Lloyd-Jones: “Now I really would like to know the whole story. Start at the beginning again.”

He did. Again he told “how he volunteered, joined the navy, was sent to the submarine, the submarine was sent to the Mediterranean. Everything went all right until the afternoon they were engaged in action, the sudden sound, the submarine shook, and there we went to the bottom of the Mediterranean, and . . . I feel like this ever since.”

Dr. Lloyd-Jones: “But do tell me the rest of the story.”

He said: “But I have no more to tell you.”

Dr. Lloyd-Jones: “Now, let’s go over it all again.” Dr. Lloyd-Jones took him over it step by step. They came to this dramatic afternoon, the sound, the shaking of the submarine. “Down we went to the bottom of the Mediterranean.”

Dr. Lloyd-Jones: “Go on!”

He said: “There’s nothing more to be said.”

Dr. Lloyd-Jones asked him: “Are you still at the bottom of the Mediterranean?”

Obviously, physically he wasn’t, but mentally, he was. He had remained at the bottom of the Mediterranean ever since.

Then Dr. Lloyd-Jones went on to explain to him: “All your troubles are due to the fact that in your own mind you are still at the bottom of the Mediterranean. Why didn’t you tell me that somehow you came up to the surface and that another man or another ship saw you, that you were treated there in a hospital and eventually brought back to Great Britain and put in a hospital?” Dr. Lloyd-Jones got all those facts out of him.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones said: “Why didn’t you tell me all that? You stopped at the bottom of the Mediterranean?”

The doctor explained: “It was because he had done that in his mind, that he had suffered terrible depression during all those years. As a result, however, of this explanation, that man became perfectly well immediately, resumed his duties and within a year became a candidate for ordination in the Anglican Church in Wales.”

(8) Illustration b

His mother died when he was six, and he was sent away to an uncongenial boarding school. As a young man he fell in love with his cousin Theodora, but the romance was broken off. Moreover, “his closest friend accidentally drowned.”²⁷ Afterward he went into a period of dejection from which he was suddenly released one day while contemplating the ocean at Southampton. His heart, he wrote, “became light and joyful in an instant.”

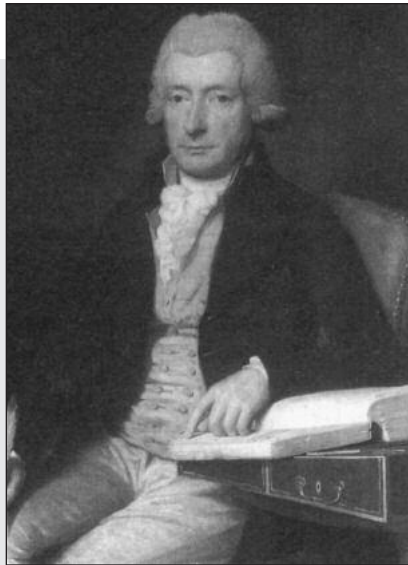
“His first suicide attempt came in his early thirties, days before he was to have publicly examined for a minor governmental post. Cowper attached a garter²⁸ to the ceiling, and hung himself. He woke up on the floor still alive, the garter having given way.” Later he wrote about this incident in his *Memoirs*: “Though I had failed in my design, yet I had all the guilt of that crime to answer for: a sense of God’s wrath, and a deep despair of escaping it, instantly succeeded.” He was convinced that he had committed “the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit,” and within a few weeks he suffered what today we would call a psychotic break. He described the onset of this first episode of insanity as “the most horrible dismay of soul . . . (and) a strange and horrible darkness fell upon me. . . . At every stroke my thoughts and expressions became more wild and incoherent; all that remained to me clear was the sense of sin, and the expectation of

punishment." His brother took him to an asylum run by a moderate evangelical clergyman, the Rev. Nathaniel Cotton, where for the next six months he "suffered terrible visions and voices but finally grew calmer under Dr. Cotton's mild ministrations." His brother visited him and assured him that he could be saved as well as anyone. This counsel had been offered to him before, but this time it found response in his heart. Cowper "made an almost instantaneous recovery." That night he had "sweet dreams" and in the morning he woke with delight. Nevertheless he stayed in the asylum for another year.²⁹

From here on "he lodged with . . . a family who shared his religious convictions, the Unwins. When some time later Mr. Unwin was killed in a fall from a horse, "Cowper remained in the household." They moved to the parish of the Rev. John Newton, and so began one of the most beautiful friendships anywhere recorded in Church history. Newton aged forty-two, and Cowper, then thirty-five, spent the next twelve years together. He became Rev. Newton's helper and took up the care of the poor, visited the sick and the dying, journeyed with Newton in the evenings to some preaching engagement and was always present at the meetings for prayer. Rev. Newton has written: "The Lord evidently sent him to Olney, where he has been a blessing to many, a great blessing to myself."

From time to time there were reminders of Cowper's earlier mental disorder when a depression would occasionally trouble his spirit, and Newton would exhort him "to resist, to the utmost, every dark and discouraging suggestion."³⁰ Newton's selection of a text was sometimes influenced by his friend's condition. Newton and his wife Mary often ungrudgingly gave themselves to all that concerned Cowper's welfare.

Five years later Cowper and Mrs. Unwin, who was seven years older than he, began making plans to marry. However, as "the wedding (date) drew closer," his "mental condition grew worse. He had been experiencing bouts of depression for a year," and then "he suffered his second attack of full-blown insanity. His hallucinations returned, and his friends described him as 'almost an infant.'" Then for the next thirteen months he stayed in "the vicarage" of "his friend, the Rev. John Newton, with whom he had been collaborating on a collection of hymns." Later Cowper wrote: "I did not . . . lose my sense but I lost the power to exercise them. . . . I believed that every one hated me . . .



William Cowper



John Newton

was convinced that my food was poisoned. . . ." (etc.) On top of it all, "he made several more suicide attempts. He claimed to have heard God commanding him to sacrifice his own life, just as Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac. When his friends prevented his attempts to kill himself, Cowper heard God's voice condemning him to eternal punishment for his failure. His psychotic delusions gradually abated, but his sense of exclusion from God's mercy never left him after that."³¹

"Amidst these terrible hallucinations, Cowper's nearest approach to sanity was when his distressed brain found rest upon his pillow and those who watched over him noted, 'Sometimes the Lord visits him in his sleep, so that his dreams are gracious and comfortable, and his heart drawn forth in prayer; but when awake his distress returns.'³² "There was no sudden recovery" as there had been in the asylum, and he "never entered a church again."

His friend, John Newton, whom we know as the author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*, "tried to reason Cowper out of his despair, but his efforts were fruitless." The last six years of his life he was "haunted by horrific dreams at night and sunk in speechless torpor³³ when awake. Though still cared for by friends, he died under the apprehension that he had offended the Almighty irremediably."³⁴

What shall we say? Ian Murray comments: "These suicide attempt . . . were not rational acts of an unbeliever, in final rebellion against God. They were the pathetic acts of a child of God, whose disturbed mind believed that in *his* case suicide was agreeable to God's will. That self-destruction is a sin from which particularly every Christian must flee is plain

from the Word of God and anything tending to lessen the terrible character is suicide is reprehensible. . . . Yet since, in Cowper's case, the citadel of his mind reeled in derangement and was seized by delusion, it may not be concluded that this judgment on his part and the corresponding attempts at suicide, from the intent of which God graciously preserved him, proved the unreality of his faith and of his security in Christ."³⁵

It's not a very encouraging story, although I do know that the articulation of his own doubts and weariness of spirit has spoken to and for countless other disheartened souls. I myself love many of his hymns. Take, for instance, his

*"There is a fountain filled with blood,
The dying thief rejoiced to see
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins,
That fountain in his day;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
And there have I, as vile as he,
Lose all their guilty stains."
Washed all my sins away."*

*"Dear dying Lamb! Thy precious blood
E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream
Shall never lose its power,
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Till all the ransomed church of God
Redeeming lover has been my theme,
Be saved, to sin no more."
And shall be till I die."*

*"But when this lisping, stammering tongue
Lies silent in the grave
Then, in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save."*

Who knows how many hearts have been eased by expressing their misery in Cowper's words? He groped toward "redeeming love" and away from "redeeming love" throughout his life, despairing in the darkness, but clinging to a fraying thread of hope. When he couldn't muster courage to enter a church during the latter part of his life, his hymns were there. They are still there, giving a tongue to the pain of the doubter, the weak, the sufferer, the morbid.

"It is worth observing," Ian Murray continues, "that Cowper's spiritual counsellors – of whom John Newton was chief – were not men who made feelings the index of a Christian's spiritual state. The invariable tendency of melancholy, when found in a Christian, leads him to account for his misery in terms of being deserted by God. Newton and his school knew full-well that our acceptance with God through Christ's blood is not to be treated as being synonymous with our consciousness of God's presence. If the two things are regarded as inseparable, then what an old Puritan rightly affirmed could never be true: "God sometimes puts His children to bed in the dark." Newton constantly laboured to stress the objectivity of the promises of God in Christ."³⁶

Why "is it that some of God's children are permitted to languish in such a condition when they are in the hand of the heavenly Father Who is both loving and omnipotent? All physical suffering" may already be very difficult for us to square with God's love and omnipotence, "but when the suffering of a Christian lies primarily in the mind, and is therefore of a nature which debars the sufferer from all consciousness of the consolations of the Gospel," we are faced with a very painful problem. Nevertheless, then "we are brought back to a fundamental spiritual fact: there are matters about which the Christian has to be prepared not to get light in this world for it clear that there are some dispensations about which God is reserving the explanation until eternity. There are mysteries which He calls us now to leave unsolved."

When Cowper at last left this vale of tears, Newton, seventy-five years old and looking forward to going home, wrote to tell a friend of the news, as follows:

My most dear and intimate friend, William Cowper, has obtained a release from all his distresses. I preached a funeral sermon for him on the 11th instant from Eccles. 2:2,3. Why was he who both by talents and disposition seemed qualified, if it were possible, to reform the

age in which he lived, harassed by distresses and despair, so that the bush which Moses saw all in flames was a fit emblem of his case? The Lord's thoughts and ways are so much above ours, that it becomes us rather to lie in the dust of adoration and silence than to inquire presumptuously into the grounds of his proceedings. It may reconcile us to lighter troubles, when we see what the Lord's most favoured and honoured servants are appointed to endure. But we are sure that he is rich enough, and that eternity is long enough to make them abundant amends for whatever His infinite wisdom may see meet to call them to, for promoting His glory in the end; for this bush, though so long in the flames, was not consumed, because the Lord was there. The last twelve hours of his life he lay still, and took no notice, but so long as he could speak, there was no proof that his derangement was either removed or abated. He was, however, free from his great terrors. There was no sigh either of joy or sorrow when near his departure. What a glorious surprise must it be to find himself released from all his chains in a moment, and in the presence of the Lord whom he loved, and whom he served!³⁷

Rev. Bilkes is pastor of Emmanuel Free Reformed Church in Abbotsford, B.C.

¹Meier, Paul D., Frank B. Minirth and Frank B. Wichern, , p. 398.

²A Curriculum Resource on Depression, Stress Burnout & Crisis: The Causes & Solutions, p. 7.

³Ibid., pp. 7,8.

⁴Meier, Paul D., Frank B. Minirth and Frank B. Wichern, , Loc. cit.

⁵Ibid., p. 402.

⁶Op. cit., p. 49.

⁷A Curriculum Resource on Depression, Stress Burnout & Crisis: The Causes & Solutions, p. 6.

⁸Cf. Kingdom, David, "Ministerial Depression," *The Banner of Truth*, December 1982, pp. 18-29.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Meier, Paul D., Frank B. Minirth and Frank B. Wichern, *Op. cit.*, p.257.

¹¹With a reference to Ephesians 4:26, "be angry and sin not: let the sun not go down upon your wrath," they add that those "who can maturely rid themselves of anger at bedtime seldom get clinically depressed," *Ibid.*, p. 261.

¹²Ibid.

¹³See also verse 6: "And the Lord said to Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?" Cf. Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, R.K. Harrison, ed., pp. 218, 219, 224.

¹⁴Founder and director of the Institute of Biblical Counseling in Morrison, Colorado,

U.S.A., and a professor at Colorado Christian University, author of books such as *Men and Women, Understanding People, Inside Out, Finding God, God of my Father, and The Silence of Adam*.

¹⁵In an interview with Kevin Dale Miller, "Putting an End to Christian Psychology," in *Christianity Today*, August 14, 1995, p. 16.

¹⁶"Ministerial Depression," *The Banner of Truth*, December 1982, p. 29.

¹⁷in his *Treatise on Spiritual Comfort*, 1814.

¹⁸An ejaculation is an abrupt, exclamatory utterance.

¹⁹I read this chapter, under the title "Directions to Christians Afflicted With Melancholy," in *The Banner of Truth*, October 1971, pp. 33-38. See also "The Nature and Signs of Melancholy in a True Christian," *The Banner of Truth*, September 1971, pp. 33-40.

²⁰In an interview with Kevin Dale Miller, "Putting an End to Christian Psychology," in *Christianity Today*, August 14, 1995, p. 16.

²¹Brian Beardsworth, a doctor practising in Hinckley, Leicestershire, England, "The pastor and His health," *The Banner of Truth*, August-September 1993, pp. 38-39. Remarkably, he has had to spend much time encouraging ministers of the Gospel suffering from depression "to take and persist with such treatment."

²²According to him, even doctors tend to under-diagnose depression in ministers "because the symptoms frequently suggest a physical condition: tiredness, early morning waking, lack of energy, etc.," in "The pastor and his health," *The Banner of Truth*, August-September 1993, p. 38.

²³"The pastor and his health," *The Banner of Truth*, August-September 1993, p. 38. He refers to Spurgeon who "described it as a 'cloud' which came over him." In this state of depression "it used to take him all day to do what at other times he could do in half an hour."

²⁴*The Banner of Truth*, December 1982, pp. 26-27.

²⁵Larry Crabb, in an interview with Kevin Dale Miller, "Putting an End to Christian Psychology," in *Christianity Today*, August 14, 1995, p. 16.

²⁶The illustration that follows I transcribed from the tape.

²⁷Murray, Ian, *The Banner of Truth*, September 1971, p. 14.

²⁸The word *garter* is derived from the word *garet* = bend of the knee. A garter is a fastening in the form of a band round the leg, to keep up the stocking.

²⁹Owens, Virginia Stems, "William Cowper, Crazy Christian," *Perspective*, April 1993, pp. 10, 11.

³⁰Murray, Ian, *The Banner of Truth*, September 1971, p. 19.

³¹Owens, Virginia Stems, "William Cowper, Crazy Christian," *Perspective*, April 1993, p. 11.

³²Murray, Ian, *The Banner of Truth*, September 1971, p. 21.

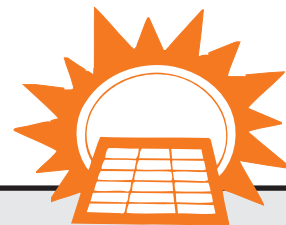
³³= apathy

³⁴Owens, Virginia Stems, "William Cowper, Crazy Christian," *Perspective*, April 1993, p. 11

³⁵Murray, Ian, *The Banner of Truth*, September 1971, p. 29.

³⁶Murray, Ian, *The Banner of Truth*, September 1971, p. 30.

³⁷Murray, Ian, *The Banner of Truth*, September 1971, pp. 31-32.



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

"I think of God, and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints. Thou dost hold my eyelids from closing; I am so troubled that I cannot speak."

Psalm 77:3,4

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Lord made the heaven and the earth. He established a pattern of day and of night. The light of the day gives us the opportunity to keep ourselves busy with our activities; the darkness of the night helps us to go to sleep and rest. People have been following that pattern ever since the day of Creation. So when everything goes well, we do our work and, when we go to bed at night we ask the Lord for His protection and for a restful sleep. The next morning we thank the Lord for the rest we received and we go on with our work again. When we get our sleep every night we can do much work in the daytime. That is how the Lord intended it to be.

But it does not always go like that! There are nights when the sleep does not want to come, when we are sleepless part or most of the night. The cause of that sleeplessness may be logical to us: we had a difficult day, or the next day we will have some hard assignments awaiting us, or other exciting things are coming up: a wedding, a holiday, a celebration. It is also possible that we are worried about something or someone. And even though we brought those anxieties in prayer to the Lord, they come back to us in the darkness of the night and hinder us in our attempts to go to sleep. When we are ill we cannot sleep either. Fever or pain may keep us awake or give us hallucinations.

When there is a cause for sleeplessness the problem will be gone as soon as the difficulties are out of the way. The problem is only acute. There are also people who suffer from chronic sleeplessness, or insomnia. They have nothing to worry or to be excited about, they are not sick, there is nothing that should keep them awake and yet . . . they do not receive the restful sleep that is much needed to function properly in the daytime. The nights are spent tossing and laying awake. They try everything they can to fall asleep, but nothing seems to help. They pray for God's protection in the night and they ask Him to give them sleep. Even that does not help. Does God not hear their prayers?

Like everything else in our lives, also sleep comes from the Lord. While we are sleeping, the Lord keeps watch over us and He is with us. But what if we are awake? We do not receive the sleep we need, so we are not much use the next day at work and everything is messed up. Where is the Lord then? Did He not hear our prayer for sleep, and so are we now left all to ourselves?

Fortunately, we all know that the Lord does not work like that. He is with us in everything and always. Even when we do not receive what we have been asking, He is still there. He knows our anxiety during the night, He also knows our difficulties the following day. He will help us. We receive "sleep" out of His caring hands, but also the sleeplessness comes from our loving Father. He is

there while we are lying awake, He also will be there the following day. When we trust in Him, He will enable us to do our work even in difficult circumstances.

One of the tried remedies for insomnia is to concentrate on one particular things that you really like. So why not concentrate on the Lord? Think of all the things He did for us. Or on all the beautiful things He has promised us. On the future that He has in store for us. On His everlasting Kingdom that will come, and for which we are allowed to keep praying. When those thoughts fill our whole heart and our whole mind it is not even so very bad to lay awake. And . . . it may also help us to fall asleep!

(This piece was "ignited" by Chapter XX of "In the Shadow of Death" by Abraham Kuyper)

*I remember God with weeping,
Thou dost keep my eyes from sleeping.
With a spirit faint and weak,
So distressed I cannot speak,
Days and years of old I ponder,
In the dark of night I wonder,
And my spirit finds no rest:
"Where is God, who once us blessed?"*

*And I say, "This grief besets me,
That the God Most High forgets me
And His right hand now has changed,
That I am from Him estranged."
LORD, I will recall Thy wonders;
On Thy deeds of old I ponder,
On Thy works I meditate,
Musing on Thy deeds so great.*

Psalm 77:2,4

Birthdays in July:

4: James Buikema
c/o N. VanderHeiden,
7162 Canboro Road,
RR 1, Dunnville, ON N1A 2W1

20: Charlie Beintema
29 Wilson Avenue,
Chatham, ON N7L 1K8

28: Jim Wanders
538 Wedgewood Drive,
Burlington, ON L7L 4J2

29: Tom Vander Zwaag
"ANCHOR HOME," 361 30 Road,
RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

I wish you all a very happy birthday, and until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Hwy. 20, RR 1, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address.
They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length.

Dear Editor,

I note that the Hiliter (page 179 of *Clarion*, April 19, 1996; Vol 45, No.8) provided for your readers one side of the picture relating to the resignation of some of the editorial staff of *Una Sancta*. It seems to me right to inform your readers that the very next page of the *Una Sancta* quoted by Hiliter printed a letter from the "*Una Sancta* Foundation", the body (consisting of one representative from each congregation in the bond of churches) who appoints (and hence releases) editors. This letter seeks to demonstrate that *Una Sancta* is *not* "preoccupied with the doctrine of the church and interchurch relations." Rather, the Foundation believes that, in a time of "pluriformity and interdenominationalism," "the present direction which *Una Sancta* adopted in the mid-nineteen fifties and has maintained ever since" should be continued.

I trust this added information will assist your North American readers to get a better picture of where their Australian sister churches are headed.

Sincerely,
Rev C. Bouwman,
Kelmscott, Western Australia.

Dear Editor,

In the April 19th, 1996 issue of *Clarion*, Rev. van Spronsen in his column "The Hi-Liter" tells readers of "a major editorial upheaval" in the Australian journal *Una Sancta* due to the resignation from the editorial board of three of its editors. The Hi-Liter goes on to quote from the letter of resignation as published in *Una Sancta* which makes allegations against the editorial board of *Una Sancta*:

The main reason for our combined resignation is an imbalance in editorial direction. There is a preoccupation with the doctrine of the church and interchurch relations. These subjects are approached from one perspective which we find extreme (anti-ICRC and opposition against relations with presbyterian churches). Articles from the other side are left aside, not allowed or heavily attacked. This is done in

spite of and against recent synodical decisions on these matters.

Una Sancta is the pre-eminent church magazine read in the Free Reformed Churches since the 1950s. The above accusations are very serious and the editors' action in resigning has caused surprise and sorrow within the churches. That only one side of this resignation be highlighted without mentioning the quite adequate refutation which accompanied the letter of resignation is promoting the kind of "imbalance" alluded to by the resigned editors and allows your journal to be used in an unwarranted attack on its Australian sister publication.

I understand that the column The Hi-Liter gives only brief snippets, and a full account of the matter is not appropriate for this column. Would it not have been better editorial policy and more brotherly to the editorial board of *Una Sancta* to have left the matter at just reporting the resignations, or else to have more fully reported the matter in another part of *Clarion*?

To redress the "imbalance" I quote from the letter (published on the same pages of the *Una Sancta* that Rev. van Spronsen quoted from) as sent by the *Una Sancta* Foundation to the three resigning editors in refutation of their allegations:

1. Regarding "the preoccupation" with the doctrine of the church and interchurch relations the foundation replies: "In recent years, our churches have become increasingly involved with interchurch relations. One only has to count the pages of Synod Acts to learn that a significant part of our resources is being devoted to such matters. Reading the same pages reveals that right from the beginning of that involvement, a deep division has developed among church members, deputies and consistories, and at synods. This division which centres on the doctrine of the church, is being fuelled by efforts of some to recognize Presbyterian Churches as true churches without first addressing the concerns that have been identified during the years of mutual contact. In the light of the importance and in-

terest this debate is taking in our church life, the claim cannot be justified that *Una Sancta* devotes a disproportionate amount of attention to these matters."

2. In addressing the statement by the resigning editors that in the discussion Synod decisions are criticized, the Foundation cannot see anything wrong with this, so long as the criticism is of an upbuilding nature. In this context it draws attention to the ongoing public discussion of Synod decisions in our sister churches, in particular the Netherlands.
3. In respect of the statement that "articles from the other perspective are left aside, not allowed, or heavily attacked" the foundation writes: "as to the first (left aside) the Editor In Chief (EIC) denies doing this. As to the second (not allowed), we are aware that there has been some dispute between one editor and the EIC about some articles, which the EIC and other editors considered to be contrary to the Confession." The Foundation which is the final arbiter in these matters has not been asked to evaluate.

In a separate note from the Editor In Chief, he denies that in his tenure he had disallowed any articles submitted by editors, except for one recent letter to the editor. Two articles which he asked an editor to reconsider were withdrawn by the author.

It is regrettable that the three editors took the step they did. However *Una Sancta* intends to continue "on the old path of Scriptural and Confessional leadership" and continue to be published D.V. each fortnight for the members of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. It is our prayer that also the three resigned editors will again see their task in support of "the family journal for the edification of the Scriptural way of life."

From a *Una Sancta* reader,
J.L. van Burgel
Armadale
Western Australia.

Dear Editor,

The Editorial by Dr. J. DeJong in Volume 45, No. 6 of January 26/96 aroused our renewed interest in the early history of our churches. His article was focused on remarks made by Rev. B. Woudenberg, and his accusation regarding the implied interference of Prof. B. Holwerda during early 1950.

We can testify to the fact that the infamous "Declaration of Principles" indeed caused a lot of grief to many people. Even before the proposal was brought to Synod 1950 of the Protestant Reformed Church, we were advised not to hand in our attestation but just request membership since "Changes would come about." We heeded that advice and received several visits from Rev. H. Veldman. The end result was a distinct difference of opinion regarding the covenant. Our yet unborn child, could it be considered a covenant child once born? We believed it to be and Rev. Veldman did not. Rev. Veldman told us that as long as we would not be "instructed in the Protestant Reformed truth" and believed as we did, our child once born, would never be baptized in his church.

This was the reason we attended the meeting and institution of the church

in Georgetown on August 13th, 1950. We took part in the institution and became members that day, we might add that we are still very thankful that the Lord guided us and opened ways for us.

With Christian Greetings,
George and Margaret Lodder

Dear Editor,

I would like to respond to G. Ph. van Popta's article "Contradictory Acts."

The decision of Synod 1977 has never sat well with me. It was wrong to call the OPC the true church according to Art. 27-32 of the Belgic Confession and not be one on pulpit exchange or full sister church relationship, etc. We were too hasty, and I agree with Rev. VanOene when he says, "No, The Canadian Reformed Church are not prepared to say, etc. "and confusion reigned ever since. I believe that until all the differences are ironed out such as fencing of the Lord's Supper Table, Church government from top to bottom instead of the local church having the highest authority etc. no true unity can be found.

I do differ when Rev. VanOene is not advocating rescinding the Synod decision of 1977. This is where the

whole problem lies. I believe Synod 1977 made an error. It has been appealed in earnest for nearly 20 years. The Synods should have adhered to these Scriptural arguments and rescinded the 1977 decision. Then we would not have had the Denver problem either. How can we even suggest to Denver to stay in the OPC when we ourselves are not prepared to have full relationship with them even though we call it the true church. Talking about contradiction to its highest point. I sometimes get the feeling that we are living in the same times as before the Reformation of 1944. Synods just refuse to listen to appeals that just don't go away. Let us not become trapped in wrong decisions but clear obstacles in a Scriptural manner. Then only can we receive the Blessing looked for with other churches to become one with us.

Yours in Christ, 
G. van Iperen

CORRECTION

to Rev. K. Jonker's letter to the editor, Vol. 45, No. 10 – the end of the second last sentence should read Acts 1977 not 1997. Our apologies for this error.

NEWS RELEASE

250th Anniversary Committee Synod of the Reformed Church in the U.S.

By Rev. Robert Grossmann

The Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States will hold its 250th annual session at Eureka, South Dakota on May 20-23, 1996. The Reformed Church in the U.S. (RCUS) was a German immigrant Protestant denomination whose first churches were organized by the Rev. John Philip Boehm in eastern Pennsylvania in 1725, and whose first synodical assembly was held at Philadelphia on September 29-31, 1747. By this time the original three congregations had grown in number so that the first synod was attended by four ministers and twenty-eight elders. Among the four ministers was Rev. Michael Schlatter, a Swiss, who had been sent by the Classis

Amsterdam in Holland to organize a broader assembly among the German Reformed in North America. At this time the Palatinate home of the German Reformed was under Roman Catholic domination and could not provide the needed support and government.

The present-day Reformed Church in the U.S. is a remnant of the much larger denomination which grew increasingly liberal during the nineteenth century and finally became swallowed up in the modern ecumenical movement of the twentieth century. In 1934 the Eureka Classis, only one of the fifty-eight classes of the RCUS, refused to join with the rest of the denomination in


merging with the Evangelical Synod of North America. This Eureka Classis continued the name and theology of the historic Reformed faith while the rest of the denomination became a part of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, which itself merged with Congregational churches in 1957 to form the United Church of Christ. The Eureka Classis slowly gathered and founded other Reformed congregations around the United States, and in 1986 once again formed a synod made up of four classes containing some forty churches.

The 1996 Synod meeting will feature special thanksgiving worship services, the publishing of a 250th

anniversary book, and greeting to and from other Reformed denominations from around the world with which the RCUS is in correspondence and fellow labor. The anniversary book, entitled *You Shall Be My People*, features chapters on the history, theology and influences of the RCUS. Edited by Rev. Robert Grossmann and Rev. Norman Hoeflinger, the book's eight writers have served a total of over 200 years in the ministry of the denomination. A hard-back book of 240 pages, it will be available at the Synod meeting at a price of \$13.85, or can be mail-ordered.

The RCUS conducts home mission works across the United States and foreign mission work in Zaire, the latter in cooperation with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated). It holds fraternal relations with this Dutch church, as well as with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Confessing Church of Zaire. It is a member denomination of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council and the International Council of Reformed Churches. It holds the Heidel-

berg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort as its creeds, and emphasizes a strict or "conservative" understanding of the teaching of the Bible.

The Christian community is invited to join this historic celebration. Those wishing to attend the historic 250th session of the RCUS Synod are invited to contact the host pastor, Rev. Herman Van Stedum, P.O. Box 287, Eureka, SD 57437 (605-284-2396) for scheduling and lodging arrangements. The anniversary worship service will be held on Wednesday evening, May 22. 

BOOK REVIEW

By C. Bosch



The Final Authority

William Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History* (The Banner of Truth Trust, PO Box 621, Carlisle Penn., 17013, USA; 1995), 244 pages; hard-cover; \$41.00 Can.

In recent years there has been a concerted effort amongst some to find common ground between Protestants and Roman Catholics.¹ Not a few have questioned the legitimacy of this movement seeing the fundamental doctrinal differences which exist between the two.²

In his book, William Webster, a Christian business man in Battle Ground, Washington and founder of Christian Resources Inc. makes a significant contribution to the debate.

Rome has always claimed that in formulating and maintaining her doctrines she has the weight of both Scripture and history (or tradition) on her side. In an unemotional but patient manner Webster succeeds in showing that Rome's position is untenable.

In Webster's wide ranging analysis he puts to the test Rome's teaching concerning: the authority of Scripture and the rule of tradition, Mary and the adoration of the saints, the sacramental system and the fundamental issue of faith and justification.

The author convincingly demonstrates that in all these areas and others

Rome deviates from the clear teaching of Scripture. He also devotes a large part of each chapter to an examination of the writings of the early "church fathers" as well as the decisions of some of Rome's own councils. In each instance Webster must conclude that these in no way can be used to defend Rome's claim to a "changeless creed." On the contrary, Webster clearly demonstrates that Rome has abandoned the truth the "fathers" once confessed. Some of its doctrines are of recent vintage and have little or no foundation in history at all.

Far from being tentative in his conclusions Webster is straightforward, mincing no words. Some examples:

Unless we also would deny Scripture, we must affirm that the Roman Catholic Church in its teaching on tradition is no longer truly catholic, but is Roman. (p. 33)

The veneration of Mary, promoted by Roman Catholicism is pure idolatry, for God alone is worthy of such devotion. (p. 88)

To shift the basis of justification from the imputed righteousness of Christ to a human righteousness is to pervert the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (p. 143)


This book is not a complicated theological treatise. While it will certainly

appeal to students of history we may all benefit from it. It provides real assistance in understanding of, and speaking to, our Roman Catholic neighbours.

Webster has included thirteen appendices containing historical statements such as, *The Writing of the Fathers on the Meaning of the "Rock" and Keys of Matthew and The Teaching of the Council of Trent on justification.*

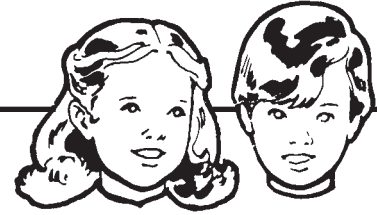
It is clear that Webster considers Rome to be guilty of violating the rule of *Sola Scriptura*. Rather than looking for common ground between truth and error Webster would call Rome to repentance. For the final authority is not history and tradition or the church, but the infallible Word of God. Only God's truth can set men free. We can only concur with Webster's refreshing appeal: "Turn from error and embrace the truth. Come to Christ in true Biblical faith and be saved."

¹I think of *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (ECT) a 1994 statement, signed by many evangelicals which declared that, "Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers in Christ and have a common faith, a common witness and a common ecclesiastical vision."

²A recent critical assessment of the ECT statement is *Protestants and Catholics Do They Now Agree?* By John Ankenberg and John Weldon. Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon 97402 USA; 1995. 

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

How are you all doing? Are you looking forward to summer? I sure am! Here are some puzzles to keep you busy!

Quiz Time!

SACRIFICES

Sacrifices are often spoken about in the Old Testament. God commanded that sacrifices be offered on certain occasions. Match the person with the sacrifice.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Abel, Genesis 4:3-4 | a. Offer bodies as living sacrifices to God. |
| 2. Noah, Genesis 8:20 | b. Offered sacrifices in the Temple. |
| 3. Abraham, Genesis 22:1-19 | c. Offered sacrifice before anointing David as king. |
| 4. Aaron, Exodus 29:38 | d. Offered His life as a sacrifice. |
| 5. Solomon, 1 Kings 12:13; 62 | e. Offered the first of his flock. |
| 6. David, 2 Samuel 6:12-13 | f. Offered sacrifices daily as God instructed. |
| 7. Jesus, Hebrews 9:23-28 | g. Offered sacrifice before leaving his father-in-law. |
| 8. Christians, Romans 12:1 | h. Offered sacrifice for safety of his family after the flood. |
| 9. Jacob, Genesis 31:49-55 | i. Went to offer his son for a sacrifice. |
| 10. Samuel, 1 Samuel 16:2-5 | j. Offered sacrifice for safe return of the ark of covenant. |

SCHOOL WORD SEARCH

by Busy Beaver Sarah Schulenberg

E K S P E L L I N G F S O E
 X G I C W A E C N E I C S R
 L M A T H E J O M P K I P A
 R E A D Y O G R A M M A R S
 P E N C I L O H H L R N S E
 I V A Z D N A L B Q U C Q R
 F R E N C H M C G R P E N T

Word list

School	Grammar	Math	Read
Spelling	Pencil	Science	Eraser
French	Pen		

ANIMAL WORD SEARCH

by Busy Beaver Diane Nobel

E F F A R I G B B C	Word list
M F P I G O T I E O	fish cows
U I P E S H A R K U	whale birds
W H A L E H C D O G	turtle deer
R O R T D O I S L A	giraffe owl
A R X R O D G W K R	dog pig
T S U U N E O O T R	cat yak
K E W T K F M C I I	mouse donkey
M O U S E T L R E A	rat cougar
H W L C Y A K D E P	shark emu
T L B E A R E E D D	bear horse

MURDERERS

by Busy Beaver Deanna Wierenga

- Who was a murderer from the beginning?
_____ John 8:44
- Who was the 1st murderer?
_____ Genesis 4:8
- Which well-known O.T. man killed an Egyptian?
_____ Exodus 2:11,12
- Who killed the Israelite boy babies?
_____ Exodus 1:15,16
- Who killed Jesus?
_____ Mark 10:33,34
- Who helped to kill Stephen and how?
_____ Acts 7:54-8:1a
- Who was Herod forced to kill?
_____ Matthew 14:8-11
- Who killed James the brother of John?
_____ Acts 12:1,2
- Which commandment tell us we must not kill?

JUNE BIRTHDAYS

We wish all these Busy Beavers a very happy birthday!

Tanya Meints	1	Jennifer VanderVelde	18
Rebecca Kruisselbrink	6	Jocelyn Schoon	22
Gregory Spriensma	7	Deborah Voorhorst	24
Felicia Oosterhoff	8	Twyla Vanleeuwen	25
Lee-Anne Vanderwoerd	9	Reuel Feenstra	27
Eric Vandergriendt	12	Bonita Feenstra	27
Mary Ellen Van Doornik	14	Renee Kruisselbrink	29
Jason VanderHorst	16	Jocelin Van Doornik	29
Jennifer Post	16	Lori Oosterhoff	30
Melanie Spanninga	17		

EARLY CANADIAN EXPLORERS AND SETTLER

by Busy Beaver *Miranda Barendregt*

A F W I N N I P E G T R E B L I G Y E R H P M U H
 Y G J M I R A N D A S T C P R N A D A M R T Z U I
 Z M Y S L D T E R P O Y H I I S A T Y T A I G H L
 X M E Z J L O R E L L E R K Q U V D Z W C U I E D
 S A S Z E B E R N A R D I E B I L L I E E R L A Z
 A R L Z S B A Y W X F V S Z B S O B W N S C B T M
 M T E Z S M A N I T O B T A H E O K O N E O Z H L
 U I K Z S I E U R D E M O N T S K T Y T U U S E A
 E N Y O M E L E R R E I P Z Q W S A Z Y Q R T R C
 L F R O Z T I M O T H Y H M I K E A H T C E I T T
 D R N O I S H E R E N E E N A J E A N T A L O N N
 E O E B Y D A Y N A B N R B Z J E Z B O J U D U O
 C B H A B I T A N T S A C A D I A N S B W R E O M
 H I A B A S A U L A H J O J B B C D E A O S B C L
 A S D A L A A S L A E E L E I F E R I C S S O N A
 M H A B I C D P R H N N U S J A M E S N S U I X C
 P E M Y D E M O I J R T M U N O P Q R H T B S S T
 L R D F A A B K L M Y I B Y R O N Z E O U M W P N
 A G O G H E C Z F F H N U S T I U S E J V U J P O
 I R L C D C O U R E U R S D E B O I S P P L A I M
 N A L E Z A U X A R D A I G E C A Z Y I S O C H E
 E N A L L N N J N D S K S I L L A W N R O C Q P D
 I P R L L T T E C I O K J H F D B O M H U J U M S
 D A D A A H F A I N N I P E T E R N E P N O E A I
 A G O S G O R N S A B R E N D A O T S P P R S I U
 Z R M A R N O Z D N Q D Y R S T T E U A V D C L Q
 F A A L A Y N E R D W N R X Y E V S Z M M A A L R
 E N A E L B T X A M B E D C N O E D E A K U R I A
 J D F D E I E T K A G H N A G H R I J I Y N T W M
 T M K T U L N L E G M N E I U O E P Q L L R I L N
 Z A S R M L A T U E V J R W H X N Y Z L E A E G A
 X B C E A D C E F L G E E F L O W S E M A J R H I
 Y I J B S K O L M L M N V O P Q R S T I U V W X K
 T Y Z O A B U C D A E C A N A D I E N W F G H I I
 W T K R I M Z N O N P Q L O U I S H E B E R T R V

Words to Find

Leif Erickson	Martin Frobisher	Huguenots	Count Frontenac
Viking	Jacques Cartier	Adam Dollard	Pierre Le Moyne
Ferdinand	Sieur de Monts	Canadien	Robert de la Salle
Amerigo Vespucci	Samuel de Champlain	Coueurs de bois	William Phipps
John Cabot	Samuel Argall	Jean Talon	Cornwallis
Christopher Columbus	Henry Hudson	Acadians	James Wolfe
Francis Drake	Louis Hebert	Habitants	La Verendrye
Humphrey Gilbert	Jesuits	Henry Kelsey	Marquis de Montcalm

That's all for this time!
 Love to you all,
 Aunt Betty 