O what joy if Christ would prepare more men with the gifts and zeal needed to enter foreign nations and teach the Reformed faith where only the Romish or Arminian Christ has been named.

O what joy if He would even give us men with the gifts and zeal needed to cross cultural, economic, linguistic, and religious boundaries to preach the pure gospel of salvation where Christ has not been named, on the frontier of missions, in the darkness of the heathen world.

If I walk by sight, perhaps saying that I’m a “realist,” I might say our denomination is too small to do much mission work in the world. I might say we have too few churches, too few members, too few ministers, and at the moment, too few seminary students. I might also tend to think that we have too many vacancies.

But remembering what God told Gideon, “The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands,” I believe God can do great things with small numbers. I believe God will do greater things in missions through our denomination by impressing on our hearts the truth that He is on a mission to establish His covenant not only with us and our children but also with all the elect who are afar off, and He calls us to be His instruments in accomplishing it.

To conclude these opening thoughts about the covenant, missions, and the antithesis with respect to ministers of the gospel, let us seek to remove from our thinking any separatist mentality that focuses too heavily on our own needs and longs to hoard our resources and manpower and to hunker down inside our covenant community, as it were, until Christ returns. Let us rather understand that we are not Old Testament Israel but the New Testament church, called to be spiritually, not physically, separate from the world, a city on a hill that must send bearers of the light of the gospel into the world until the beast rises out of the sea and puts an end to it.

In my next article, I hope to examine the covenant, missions, and the antithesis in respect to the life and ministry of a missionary in a foreign culture.

The children of God suffer. Some of them suffer more than others, but all of them suffer. They suffer as they pass through life in a fallen world. They suffer from trouble in their families and distress in their marriages. They suffer upheaval in the world and disruption in the church. They suffer persecution and injustice at the hands of men. They suffer beside quiet sickbeds or still coffins.

The glory of God’s Word is that it does not remain silent on the sidelines as the children of God suffer. The Word of God speaks to that suffering in ways no other word either can or may. Perhaps there is no greater example of this speech of God to the suffering saints than what we find in the book of Job. Scripture itself commends this book and its namesake character to the child of God who finds himself grappling with suffering in his own life. “Ye have heard of the patience of Job...” (James 5:11).

Yet the book of Job is challenging. A young child can grasp the basic storyline of Job’s prosperity, his suffering, and his ultimate correction and restoration in a thirty-minute catechism lesson. However, a beginner’s catechism lesson rarely delves too deeply into the three cycles of speeches between Job and his friends that make up the main part of the book. Even a seasoned Christian can quickly find himself lost in the many poetic turns of phrase and deep questions raised by the six speakers from Job 4-41.

The great value of Rev. Ron Hanko’s new commentary on Job is that it makes this large and challenging book of the Bible accessible. Job: God’s Sovereignty in Suffering is purposely inexhaustive when it comes to a word-for-word breakdown. “That would require too much space, would almost certainly be repetitious, and would obscure the main purpose of the book” (p. xi). A glance at the table of contents will help you keep your bearings by making the basic form and structure of the book visible. The commentary itself then works through each of these main sections, keeping the focus on the main points and how they develop and build on one another. The assumption of the author is clearly that you
will have your Bible open on your lap as you use this book as a guide into its main themes and applications.

What the book lacks in detail, however, it makes up in focus on the big picture. The great concern of Rev. Hanko is clearly that God would speak through His book of Job, and that God’s people would hear God’s Word about their suffering. Some of the things spoken by Job or his three friends may, in fact, be wrong in their content, emphasis, or application. But that does not take away from the inspiration of the book of Job as a whole. “More, it is God’s final word on the matter” (p. ix). Following the lead of the biblical text, the commentary therefore carries us along through the cycles of speeches to the great conclusion of the matter when the Lord Himself descends in the whirlwind. I have never before experienced the hair of my arms standing on end when reading a commentary on the Bible, but I have also never realized what a striking scene it must have been as Elihu was speaking his last words, even as clouds were gathering on the dark horizon and the winds picking up. “From the storm God speaks, and if the storm were not enough to silence every mouth, God holds before his servant Job his unspeakable and incomprehensible glory as creator and upholder of all things” (p. 125). Where Job has been looking for a meeting with God in order to demand an explanation for his suffering, “getting what he wished, Job finds he has nothing to say” (p. 125).

That focus on the big themes of the book enables the author to make many warm and instructive applications along the way. From instruction on how not to comfort a brother in the church (hint: not like Job’s three miserable friends), to highlighting the limits with which a believer may question God as he suffers, the commentary brings the main message of the book of Job to bear on the lives of God’s people. The great lesson that Job, his friends, and we need to learn is “that God is the great redeemer of his people, not in spite of their trials and afflictions, but in their trials and afflictions” (p. 128). Thus, the title of the book, which calls attention to the distinctive light the sovereignty of God brings upon the reality of Christian suffering.

Job: God’s Sovereignty in Suffering could be used profitably by any Christian who desires to work through the book of Job in his or her own personal devotions. As you keep the biblical text open on your lap, the commentary will keep you from losing sight of the big picture and the main applications. I also kept thinking to myself as I read the book, that it would serve as a helpful tool for a Bible study group. Maybe Bible study groups tend to stay away from Job, given its length and complexity. The commentary may help a study group work through the biblical text in a reasonable amount of time (keeping to the main sections, rather than individual chapters) while enabling fruitful discussion on the main questions raised and answered in the book of Job.

The children of God suffer. Of that, there can be no doubt. The question is not whether we will suffer. The question is, where will we turn for comfort and instruction in the midst of our sufferings? The answer to that question for the Christian can only be, to the Word of God; and in particular, to the Word of God in the book of Job. May the Lord use this new commentary to aid the children of God as they seek such comfort and instruction in the midst of all their sufferings.

Reports

Secretary’s report—annual RFPA meeting*

Every Friday our business manager Alex Kalsbeek sends out his update on the work accomplished for that week. At the top of that update he always includes the mission of the RFPA. That mission reads as follows: Our mission is to glorify God by making accessible to the broadest possible audience material that testifies to the truth of Scripture as understood and developed in the Reformed tradition. That mission is always in the forefront of the minds of the staff, and the board has kept that mission in front of us as well as we have worked for you this past year.

Speaking of the staff, this year saw a transition in the staff at the RFPA. After faithfully serving the RFPA for 18 years, Paula Roberts left to be a mother to triplets (Owen, Samuel, and Homer). We thank her for her years of service and wish her God’s blessing as she continues to serve God as a wife and mother. The RFPA hired Marco Barone in January and he was able to work with Paula for several months to learn the position. We look forward to continuing to work with him.

We will also be seeing transitions in the Standard Bearer this year. As was announced in the July issue of

* Held September 23, 2021 at Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI.