

The **STANDARD BEARER**

— A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE —

. . . God determined from before the foundations of the earth how large His church should be. God determined the size, the shape, the dimensions, and even the number of stones and the kinds of stones required for His glorious dwelling place. Every stone is hand picked.

See "The Holy Catholic Church"

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Editor-in-Chief: Prof. Homer C. Hoeksema

Department Editors: Rev. Wayne Bekkering, Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, Rev. Arie den Hartog, Prof. Robert D. Decker, Rev. David J. Engelsma, Rev. Richard Flikkema, Rev. Cornelius Hanko, Prof. Herman Hando, Rev. John A. Heys, Mr. Calvin Kalsbeek, Rev. Kenneth Koole, Rev. Jay Korterling, Rev. George C. Lubbers, Rev. Rodney Miersma, Rev. Marinus Schipper, Rev. James Slopsema, Rev. Gise J. Van Baren, Rev. Ronald Van Overloop, Rev. Herman Veldman.

Editorial Office: Prof. H.C. Hoeksema
4975 Ivanrest Ave. S.W.
Grandville, Michigan 49418

Church News Editor: Mr. Calvin Kalsbeek
1313 Wilson Ave. S.W.
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49504

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Business Office: The Standard Bearer
Mr. H. Vander Wal, Bus. Mgr. PH: (616) 243-2953
P.O. Box 6064
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506

New Zealand Business Office: The Standard Bearer
c/o Protestant Reformed Fellowship
B. Van Herk, 66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

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MEDITATION

The Holy Catholic Church

Rev. C. Hanko

Ques. 54. What believest thou of the "holy catholic church" of Christ?

Ans. That the Son of God from the beginning of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and forever shall remain, a living member thereof.

Heid. Catechism, Lord's Day 20

I believe a church.

I do not believe *in* a church. I do not rely upon the church for my salvation, since God is the God of my salvation in Jesus Christ. With the fathers of the past I believe *in* God, the Father Almighty, and *in* Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, and *in* the

Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, the Author and Finisher of my faith. Therefore I believe a church.

It is not man's church. It is not in that sense my church. It is *God's* church, and therefore also the church of Jesus Christ, which He gathers unto Himself. We marvel as we speak of it. For it be-

longs to those things, those wonders of grace, which eye cannot see, ear cannot hear, and which exceed our fondest imagination.

There is *one* church. This is not an external, visible unity. For part of the church is already in heaven, part is still scattered over the earth, and part is still to be born. All the ecumenical attempts of our day toward an outward unity, regardless of creed or practice, must fail and can only lead to the coming of the antichrist. For the unity of the church is the unity of divine election in Christ, manifested in a true faith, even as our fathers declare.

This is a *holy* church. In its visible manifestation it is still very imperfect, even unholy. Scandalous things are often spoken of thee, O church here on earth. True, the church becomes visible in the walk and confession of the believers. It is also visible in the institute as the congregation functions through its office bearers and as the church assembles under the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. But the preaching is still imperfect, the celebration of the Sacraments is still spotted with sin, and the fellowship among the members still leaves much to be desired. There is always a carnal element that meets along with the church, as chaff among the wheat. The believers are still sinful saints. Yet, in spite of all that, the church is sanctified in Christ, the flock of our Lord, a holy priesthood, God's precious possession. The individual believers are called saints and have the assurance that according to their new life in Christ they can sin no more.

This church is *catholic*, that is, universal. There is a "church" that lays a false claim to that name and tries to deprive us of it. Yet the true catholic church is recognized by the pure preaching of the Word, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the proper exercise of church discipline. As our fathers teach us to confess in this Lord's Day, "The Son of God gathers, defends and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church, chosen unto everlasting life, and agreeing in a true faith." Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses, Elijah, and David, Peter, James, and John, Paul, Augustine, and Calvin, and many more belong to that church. Yes, every believer in Christ, whether young or old, male or female, bond or free has a place in that church, even until the last elect is gathered in. God has His people among Jews and Gentiles, in Singapore as well as in Australia, in America as well as in Europe. It consists of an amazing variety of race and color, which together makes up the fulness of the Body of Christ.

"Glorious things of thee are spoken, O city of God" (Psalm 87:3). Scripture sometimes, as here,

compares the church to a city, the holy city, the city of the Great King, founded upon Zion's holy hill. In other passages the church is compared to the Bride of God, or even family, sons, and daughters of the Most High. Sometimes we are compared to a body consisting of many members, and are referred to as the Body governed by Christ, its Head. Then again our unity is expressed in the figure of the vine and its branches, or the olive tree.

A very common figure in Scripture is that of a temple, the House of God. Solomon's temple, as it stood in the land of Canaan and in the center of the Holy City, was an earthly picture and type of the church. We think of this costly, ornate building, its cedar beams, its golden splendor shining in the dazzling brightness of the sun, its altars and its sacrifices of atonement, its priests and its hallowed worship. But besides that, we think of the holy place, where the table of shewbread represented Christ, and the candlestick represented the church, while the altar of incense brought the prayers of the saints before the face of God, purified in Christ. Above all, our attention is called to the Most Holy Place, where God dwelled among His people in the lighted cloud and above the ark of the covenant. With Israel of old we say, "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord, God of Hosts. Even the sparrow builds its nest within Thy sacred walls." Nor can we forget that this House of God stood in the center of Jerusalem with its massive walls and iron gates, and its sentinel that kept watch by day and by night. We, too, confess, with a broader vision than the Psalmist had, "Walk about Zion, and go round about her; tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:12-14).

Chosen unto everlasting life.

Only God could plan a house magnificent. We confess "a church chosen unto everlasting life." The eternal Architect chose our Lord Jesus Christ to be the chief cornerstone, the firm foundation, and the unifying strength of His church. God gave to Christ a people, His flock, His precious possession. That is, God determined from before the foundations of the earth how large His church should be. God determined the size, the shape, the dimensions, and even the number of stones and the kinds of stones required for His glorious dwelling place. Every stone is hand picked. Every stone is unique, different from all the rest, in order that each stone may serve its own purpose in the building. An amazing variety of people make up the one church which God has chosen unto His glory in eternity.

We cannot fail to add that while the church is under construction throughout history there is a lot

of material that is used for the construction and for the scaffolding, which now detracts from the beauty of the building, but finally will be broken down and burned like straw and stubble. Election includes reprobation. The wicked perish in their sins, but only after they have served their purpose, in spite of themselves, toward the gathering of the saints and the coming of God's kingdom.

The Son of God gathers His church.

We know that David prepared an abundance of material for Solomon's temple. In this mass of material there was one huge, unsightly stone, that did not seem to fit anywhere in the plans of the building. For some time it was "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence" for the builders of the temple. Finally it dawned on them that this stone was appointed for the one place where it fit exactly, the chief cornerstone. We see the fulfillment in the Savior Himself, for,

The stone rejected and despised
Was made the cornerstone.
How wondrous are the ways of God
Unfathomed and unknown!

God purchased His church with His own blood in His dear Son Jesus Christ. God laid the foundation for the church by Christ's death, resurrection, and exaltation at His own right hand in the heavens.

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God: and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone; in Whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in Whom ye also are building for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22).

You who are fellow citizens of the saints, members of the family of God, are built into a holy temple in the Lord! There is one Masterbuilder, Jesus Christ, Who takes the stones out of the stone quarry of the human race as ugly, filthy stones and forms them into precious, shining jewels in the House of God. This construction work has been carried on since the dawn of history, even for many

centuries, both in the old and new dispensation, and yet the building, as it is being reared up in heaven, is not complete. Each stone is the personal concern of our Lord. "For we are His (God's) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). We can express it this way; we are being fitted for our own place in that temple of God. Maybe we occupy a prominent place in the forefront where all can see, maybe even a small place in some hidden corner, yet the privilege of serving in that building to the praise of our God is sufficient honor for each of us.

No hammer blow is heard, no sound of chisel or of axe, no noise of grinding as the building takes form and shape. The work is done, not by power, not by might, but by the Spirit of our God. It is the power of the still, small voice, that nevertheless is able to save or to destroy. For Christ builds His own church by His Word and Spirit. Some would call it the foolishness of preaching. We speak of the power of God within us unto our salvation.

Christ defends and preserves.

We are still a militant church being prepared for the church triumphant. The gates of hell gape wide over against us as they pour forth their evil spirits to destroy us. But we rest assured in the confidence that "a Mighty Fortress is our God." This does not mean that we sit idly by while the battle rages round about us. We are the watchmen on the walls of Zion. We are kept only by the power of God *through faith*. Therefore we are called to stand fully equipped with the whole armor of God, which is His Word. We know the pain of our present affliction. Yet we also know that we are being cut, ground down, shaped, and polished for our own unique place in the House of God. When that place is ready and we are ready for that place, Christ reaches down and fits us into our particular spot where we can serve best to the glory of Him Whose House is being built.

Amazing grace! I believe a church, which also means, "that I am and forever shall remain a living member thereof!" Amen.

Editor's Notes

ABOUT BOUND VOLUMES. Our Business Manager informs me that all copies of the bound volume of last year (Volume 57) have been distributed as of this date. This volume was very late, due to problems at the bindery. Moreover, our business

office received the bound volumes a few at a time. Mr. Vander Wal is a bit concerned that some of our regular subscribers to bound volumes may have been overlooked, due to the confusion. If you have not yet received your copy, please write to our

Business Office immediately. We also have a few surplus copies, available at \$12.00 each, plus postage.

ABOUT CHURCH NEWS. Effective immediately (or earlier), be sure to send church bulletins and other church news to our new Church News Editor, Mr. David Harbach, 4930 Ivanrest Ave. (Apt. B), Grandville, Michigan 49418. Mr. Harbach will be taking over our news department at the beginning of our new volume-year, October 1. Thanks to Mr. C. Kalsbeek, our retiring news editor! Other staff changes will be announced in our next issue.

INDEX. The annual index—thanks to Mr. Don Doezeema—appears in this, the final issue of Volume 58. For those interested in the proposed master-index to the entire *Standard Bearer*, I have no specific news at this moment. At last report, I was informed that the work is still proceeding and the index is still forthcoming. Patience! It's a monumental task!

FROM OUR MAILBAG. From time to time both our editorial office and our business office receive

some interesting mail about either our RFPA books or our *Standard Bearer*. Let me share a few excerpts from recent letters.

—From Rochester, Minnesota: "I am interested in learning what publications you have available. Do you publish a catalogue? Do you publish only books, or are there other things (e.g. pamphlets, magazines, etc.)? I have profited from Herman Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics* and now Gertrude Hoeksema's *Peaceable Fruit*. —Thus my interest in your publications."

—From Southampton, England: "Thank you for sending me such an interesting parcel of literature. I enclose \$3.00 in payment, together with your Invoice...."

—From Hong Kong: "I should be most pleased if I might purchase from you a copy of the book: Homer Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers*. I saw this mentioned in 'Christianity Today.' I am particularly interested in Reformed theology, especially the doctrines relating to the covenant of grace. Please would you let me know the cost of this book plus postage.... I should also be grateful if you would also enclose a catalogue of all your publications, which I suspect may include some of interest to me."

EDITORIAL

A Dreadful Sacrilege!

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

From time to time we have reported in these columns concerning the rapid deterioration and apostasy in doctrine and practice which is taking place in the church of our forefathers, the Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland (the GKN). And while these reports, in so far as they convey information concerning synodical decisions, certainly help us to gain an understanding of what is taking place across the sea, sometimes it is perhaps a bit difficult to gain an impression of their actual impact and of the real extent of the apostasy. After all, decisions usually deal with theory. But what about actions? Thus it is, for example, with the decision of the Dutch churches concerning admission of homosexuals. That is a *decision*, a stand. Is it practiced in the church? And if so, to what does it lead, and what is its impact on the life of an actually existing congregation?

Here is a concrete example.

In recent weeks several Dutch papers (*Reformatisch Dagblad*, *Waarheid + Eenheid*, *Einhovens Dagblad*, *Trouw*) as well as *RES News Exchange* have carried reports and comments about the baptism of twins of a Lesbian couple in the Gereformeerde Kerk at Rotterdam-Delfshaven. (If memory serves me correctly, this was the church of which the late Dr. Schilder was minister-emeritus prior to his being deposed by the Synod of the GKN in the 1940s.) Here, briefly, are the facts of this case:

1) More than two years ago twins were born to a woman living in a Lesbian "relationship" with another woman, both apparently members of the Rotterdam-Delfshaven church. The twins were conceived by artificial insemination.

2) The sacrament of baptism was applied for. Bear in mind that the Dutch churches have already officially admitted homosexuals to church membership,

and thus to the Lord's table. Principally, of course, this means that they also have the right to the sacrament of baptism. However, who expects the impossible, namely, that children be born to homosexuals? But this happened—or rather, it happened to *one* member of this Lesbian pair, through the additional corruption of artificial insemination. This precipitated this new problem of baptism. By the way, all the news dispatches speak of these twins as belonging to this Lesbian couple (*twee vriendinnen die in een lesbische relatie leven*). This is, of course, physiologically impossible. Whether it is recognized in Dutch civil law or in Dutch church law, I do not know. One of the Dutch papers, however, makes mention of the fact that in the same church of Rotterdam-Delfshaven some two years ago the local preachers led a church service in which a homophile couple were confirmed in their "relationship" of living together.

3) The consistory of Rotterdam-Delfshaven, however, did not dare proceed with this baptism immediately (the original application was more than two years ago). Their objection was not to artificial insemination. The consistory hesitated because this was something new and because they were unacquainted with the baptism of children out of homophile relationships. They therefore did not dare take a stand, knowing, too, that there was considerable unrest and objection from within the congregation. Hence, the consistory sought the advice of the Classis of Rotterdam. Meanwhile, the consistory asked the homophile "couple" involved for "understanding" with respect to the delay.

4) The classis did indeed delay—for almost two years. Strange to say, according to a spokesman for the classis, Mr. G. J. Smouter, what troubled the classis, however, was not the issue of homosexuality, but that of artificial insemination. Perhaps what really troubled the classis, however, was the problem of finding a way out of the situation and at the same time permitting the baptism. What was the way out? They came to the conclusion that this was a matter of personal responsibility before God, so that it was left to this "couple." And they reasoned that although they might wish that this had not happened, and although they might express disapproval about the conception of children through artificial insemination, nevertheless they must not allow the children to be the sacrificial victims of the problem. And thus the Classis of Rotterdam neatly thought to decide the case without deciding the issue.

5) With their hand strengthened by this approval of classis, the Consistory of Rotterdam-Delfshaven announced that they would proceed with the baptism on Sunday, August 22.

Needless to say, there have been many critical voices raised against this in the Netherlands. It has been discussed and criticized in a broadcast of the evangelical broadcasting association, *Evangelische Omroep*; and it has been criticized in more than one church paper. According to one report which I read, there were some 650 concerned members in the congregation of Rotterdam-Delfshaven. The decision was said to militate against the feelings of the "average church member," who wants a normal church-life and not "that progressive business." Yet a lady elder, a Mrs. Griffioen, was reported to have said that the consistory had not yet received any official protests, and that while there had been a request for an emergency congregational meeting, such a meeting could not be held until the end of August—after the date fixed for the baptism. Another spokesman was quoted as saying that this was simply a thing to which everyone would have to become accustomed.

But what a dreadful sacrilege!

Can you imagine our beautiful Baptism Form (if they still use it in the GKN) being read in such a situation? Can you imagine the solemn questions being asked of and answered by such a Lesbian couple? Can you imagine the language of the Prayer of Thanksgiving being uttered: "Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise Thee, that Thou hast forgiven us, and our children, all our sins, through the blood of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through Thy Holy Spirit as members of Thine only begotten Son, and adopted us to be Thy children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism, we beseech Thee, through the same Son of Thy love, that Thou wilt be pleased to govern these baptized children by Thy Holy Spirit, that they may be piously and religiously educated (in a Lesbian home which we, the church, approve, HCH), increase and grow up in the Lord Jesus Christ," etc.?

The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah! Compounded by the sin of adultery!

A horrible abomination sanctioned by the sacrament of holy baptism!

And whose is the greater condemnation? Not the Lesbian couple's, but that of the church which approves all this—in the name of being Reformed!

*Take time to
read and study the
Standard Bearer*

THE LORD GAVE THE WORD

The Protestant Reformed Churches and their Mission Calling

Prof. Robert D. Decker

Last spring, April 22 to be exact, the Protestant Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan sponsored a Mission Emphasis Day. Speakers at the Conference were: Rev. Steven Houck, Rev. Lau Chin Kwee of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore, Rev. John A. Heys, Rev. Ronald Van Overloop, and the undersigned. The day proved extremely profitable for the goodly number able to attend. For this reason we decided to publish the speeches in this column for the benefit of a larger audience. The undersigned gave the introductory speech in the morning on the subject: The Protestant Reformed Churches and Their Mission Calling.

That the Church of Christ has the calling to do mission work is plain from Scripture. The risen Christ said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:19, 20). Our Lord spoke these words to the apostles just prior to His ascending into glory. Because the apostles together with the prophets and with Christ as the Cornerstone are the foundation of the church this word applies to the church in every age (cf. Ephesians 2:20). This is also evident from the fact that Christ promised to be with the church unto the end of the world. The Book of Acts records the explosion of the church from Jerusalem throughout the Mediterranean world. This calling in missions is also plain from the fact that Jesus told us: "This gospel must be preached to all the world, for a witness to the nations." When this work is accomplished, "then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). Revelation 6 gives us the vision of the white horse and rider going through the earth conquering and to conquer.

All of this applies to our churches. We must be busy in this work in obedience to the command of the King of the church. We must and we can, by the grace of the Holy Spirit. By that grace we can preach the gospel boldly, optimistically, joyfully.

After all, we never need to be ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). God always causes the faithful preacher and church to triumph in every place.

In the past, the emphasis of Protestant Reformed missions was on Church Reformation and Extension. This is expressed in the Preamble to the Mission Constitution which in part reads: "We believe that this missionary activity includes the work of church extension, and church reformation, as well as the task of carrying out the Gospel to the unchurched and heathen. However, we are convinced that our present duty lies primarily in the field of church extension and church reformation." Obviously our churches believe they have a calling to preach the gospel to all creatures. Belonging to this calling is the work of church reformation. However, our churches believe their present duty lies primarily in church reformation and extension. Operating from that basis the work in the past was directed toward the Reformed community and especially toward the Christian Reformed Church. This was adopted by the Synod of 1940 and remains in force today. Under this preamble our mission work was done for the first forty years or so of our history.

That history is very interesting. In 1924 there were three churches cast out of the Christian Reformed Church. These were the Protestant Christian Reformed Churches of First Kalamazoo; Eastern Avenue, Grand Rapids; and Hope, Riverbend. 1931 marked the appointment of the first Mission Committee. By 1934 there were nineteen congregations, largely the fruit of the work of Revs. G.M. Ophoff and H. Hoeksema. Our first home missionary, Rev. Bernard Kok, labored from 1936 to 1941. Other missionaries were called and labored in the states and after the war in Canada. The work in Canada was among the post-war Dutch immigrants who had their roots in the Liberated Churches. By 1950 there were twenty-five churches with some six thousand members. After the split of 1953 Rev. G. Lubbers became home missionary laboring for

ten years in Colorado and the Dakotas and Houston, Texas. The churches of Loveland, Colorado; Forbes, North Dakota; and Isabel, South Dakota were organized under his preaching. Rev. R. Harbach succeeded Rev. Lubbers. Rev. Harbach worked in Houston and in British Columbia. Some families from the latter area joined the Lynden, Washington and Edmonton, Alberta churches as the result of Harbach's ministry. Houston was also organized under his preaching. Later, through the ministry of Rev. B. Woudenberg (pastor of Lynden at the time) the congregation of Edmonton, Alberta was organized.

The year 1962 marks a significant date in the history of Protestant Reformed missions. The Lord opened a door for us in Jamaica. A pastor in England heard the Reformed Witness Hour over Transworld Radio. He contacted Rev. C. Hanko and asked that we take over the work among some twenty congregations in Jamaica. This we have done by means of emissaries and correspondence. Rev. Lubbers served as missionary to Jamaica from 1970 to 1975. Why are 1962 and Jamaica so significant? For some forty years we were involved in Church Reformation and extension almost exclusively. Many accused us of "not believing in missions." When Martin Luther was accused of this he replied that he was too busy reforming the church to do mission work. That is our answer too. The churches needed to be established in the truth. When the churches had been founded, God gave us work in Jamaica and now in Singapore as well. But there's more. Jamaica is different, decidedly different. They are not white, but black. They are not Dutch, but Jamaican. They are not middle or upper middle class, but poor, extremely poor, especially by our standards. They are not well versed in the Reformed Creeds. They are babes in the faith. All these and more differences present their own problems. One has but to listen to those who have been there to know that. Prior to 1962 we labored among groups of people very much like us. These were steeped in the Dutch Reformed tradition and theology. Now we labor among peoples very different from us in a different land with a different culture, different customs and mores. But the need is the same: the life-giving gospel of the sovereign grace of God in Jesus Christ.

What is our present calling? Church Reformation, to be sure! The Protestant Reformed Churches have a tremendous calling and responsibility. God has preserved the Reformed truth in our churches. We have good, solid, expository preaching and catechism instruction. Discipline is exercised and the sacraments are administered. We have covenant, Christian schools and dedicated, capable teachers. Our churches are strong by the grace of

God! Thanks be to Him! But it is no time to be at ease in Zion. Ours is a time when the very foundations of Reformed orthodoxy are being shaken and broken down. Let that church which thinks it stands take heed lest it fall! Our calling is to preach and teach and witness to the truth of the blessed gospel of sovereign grace. We must have missionaries. We must make use of the radio and the printed page. We must continue what we are doing as churches individually and as a denomination in Birmingham and elsewhere.

This work is extremely difficult. There is widespread ignorance of the most simple truths and Bible doctrines and facts. This is because of the apostasy in the seminaries and the consequent failure of the pulpit to feed the people of God. Even J.H. Bavinck remarks about this in his book, *Introduction To The Science of Missions*, published some thirty years ago. Truly the lament of the prophet Hosea applies to our times: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." Our home missionaries live with this reality every day. Only a remnant receives the gospel of sovereign grace. The vast majority despise it and oppose it. Church Reformation remains our calling.

But we must go to the nations as well. We must go to Jamaica while the door is still open. There are many needs, many sick, many weaknesses, sins, many poor. These things ought not deter us. They are all the more reason why we must preach the gospel there. The poor we have always with us, Jesus said. He also told us: inasmuch as ye do it unto one of the least of these, My brothers, ye do it unto Me.

We must continue in Singapore. God has opened a large and effectual door for the gospel there. Rev. den Hartog, in a private letter, claims there is enough work for two more missionaries. We must go wherever else God may send us.

In this work we must never be discouraged. It is God's work! The elect are in the nations, and by the preaching of the Word the Son of God will gather them. The ungodly will be left without excuse. When the gospel shall have been preached to all the world for a witness to the nations, then the end shall come (Matthew 24:14). In no less a work God gives us the privilege to participate. We are more than conquerors. God calls us and He equips us to be His instruments and He gives the fruit. We need never be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes. With the Apostle Paul we confess: "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are

saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which cor-

rupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ" (II Corinthians 2:14-17).

THE DAY OF SHADOWS

Instructive Burial Arrangements

Rev. John A. Heys

It has been stated that there is nothing more certain in life than death. There is truth in this, and whether we be rich or poor, bond or free, male or female, Jew or Gentile the day of our death is certain for us. The only exception is that those living when Christ returns will be changed and at once enter into heavenly glory or hellish agony. We may not like to think of our coming death. We may try by surgery and medication to delay it. But it is an experience that we may be sure lies in the future for us.

However, it would be wrong to say that it is the most certain thing in life. The most certain thing in life is that God will fulfill His counsel; and therefore all His promises to His people will be fulfilled to the last letter of every word in them, and the wages He has decreed for the ungodly will be paid in full in the lake of fire. And therefore the believers may face this certain death with the firm conviction that death for them is gain and will bring them to the enjoyment of what God promised in a heavenly glory, while unbelievers have reason to live in fear and dread of that day when all the deceptive earthly joys come to an end and they receive their reward in a woe that will never end.

Because we know that death lies ahead we buy cemetery lots, make out wills, try to set our house in order, and even perhaps pick the text and the songs for our funeral service.

But although death is very certain, the time of that death is not so certain in the minds of all those that die. The physician at times may predict quite accurately how many days, hours, or minutes one has yet to live. But some die suddenly, unexpectedly, at times when their loved ones have no thoughts of the nearness of death at all. It takes them by surprise not only, but they are wholly unprepared for it. A cemetery lot must quickly be purchased. A will contemplated but not consummated cannot now be drawn up and filed with an attorney.

Then, too, there are those who expect to die and

continue to live, as well as those who are expected to die and baffle the physician and even get up off their "deathbed" to live active and productive lives. The time of our death is not for us fixed and certain, even though the fact that it is coming is so sure that there is no room to doubt it. Through almost six thousand years of history man has not been able to point to one person who escaped death and has continued on this earth beyond the age of Methuselah, who was not touched by death until he reached nine hundred and sixty-nine years.

Now Jacob was aware of all this. And Jacob was aware of it because he knew that his death was not far away, for he had not only reached the age of one hundred and forty-seven, but he could tell from his physical limitations and frailties that he was rapidly going down hill. And there were things that he not only wanted to do, but he knew that he must do before he closed his eyes in sleep. Therefore he called Joseph to him and made him swear that he would see to it that he would be buried in the land of Canaan. So we read in Genesis 47:29-31.

One thing Jacob wanted to make sure. He was living with his sons in Egypt, and he knew that his sons would remain there for many centuries. For his grandfather Abraham had been told by God that they would be strangers in a land that was not theirs, and would be afflicted four hundred years before they would come out again into Canaan. Genesis 15:13-15 reveals that to us. But even though they would continue in that land for many years, he wanted his body buried in a land that by promise was theirs. And he wanted that burial shortly after his death. Joseph later on commands that his bones be carried to Canaan when the Israelites would in God's time be delivered from that people that would afflict them. But Jacob says to Joseph, "Thou shalt carry me out of Egypt." And "thou" is singular, referring to Joseph, not to the Israelites when they come up out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses.

Did Jacob have a special reason for asking Joseph to do this and to swear an oath that he would do so? Was it that he trusted Joseph more than the other sons? Was it that he was confident that Joseph had the king's favour and could easily get permission to do this? Was it because Joseph was his favourite son? And did he have to demand an oath of Joseph? Had Joseph ever done anything to give his father the impression that he would go back on his word? All these questions arise when one reads these lines about Jacob demanding this oath of his son.

One truth stands out among all the answers that might be given to these questions, and that is that Jacob was very serious about this matter. Be it his favourite son, be it that this son had influence with the king of Egypt and could obtain permission to bury him shortly after his death and back in the land of Canaan, this was no whim or fancy of Jacob. It was not a wish of a senile father with childish preferences. You can rule all that out of the picture. Those words, "deal kindly and truly," are the same words that Abraham's servant used before Bethuel when he requested Rebekah's journey with him in order that she might become Isaac's wife, as recorded in Genesis 24:49. There it was not a case of sentimentality. By no means is it a case of fleshly emotionalism and sentimentality here.

It is true that Jacob states that he desires to lie with his fathers. It is also true that family plots are purchased and designated so that families can be buried together, and that bodies are flown from places on the other side of the globe to be buried where their relatives can visit the grave and place flowers upon it. But Jacob's desire is spiritual. It is not because he was born in Canaan. It is not even because his fathers were buried there. What benefit do the dead derive from such a burial? To the soul departed for heavenly glory, what does it matter where the body is temporarily hidden from the eyes of men and set aside until the resurrection day? Jacob is not looking at that piece of land called Canaan. Nor in the first place is he looking at his fathers buried there in that one small spot in Canaan. Turn to Hebrews 11:13-16 and let Scripture interpret Scripture. Then you are safe, and then you will learn to see matters as God wants you to see them.

Jacob had seen the promises of the new Jerusalem afar off, was persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that he was a pilgrim and stranger on the earth (also in that land where he wanted to be buried), because he desired a better country, that is a heavenly one. Jacob had his eye on the promise of God. He had his eye on Christ. O yes he did. For all God's promises center in and revolve around Christ. And although Jacob

could not know Him as we do, and could not see beauty in His cross the way we do, Jacob could with Job say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body; yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25, 26). And do not forget that Job lived before Jacob's day. There is nothing strange about it that the saints in those days knew that they had a Redeemer Who would raise their dead bodies. Rather than being strange, it is wonderful that they knew and believed all this. It is the result of a wonder of grace which God wrought in them to give them spiritual life, faith, and hope.

Jacob had in him the same spiritual life that God gave not only to his fathers, with whom he would be buried, but to Job and all the Old Testament saints. This life takes hold of God's promises and causes all those who have it to seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and to say with David (who likewise had that life), "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple" (Psalm 27:4). It works the confidence in those who have it to say also with David, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6).

And because Jacob had such hope and confidence in God's promises he is moved to want his body buried in the land of promise. He wants that which comes when the promises of God are all fulfilled. He wants his body to be there when God fulfills these promises. As an Old Testament saint he could not see the details of that fulfillment as clearly as we can, but he saw a fulfillment coming. And I might add that we today do not see the fulfillment either as it actually shall be. We still, though our vision is brightened and contains more detail, see as in a glass darkly. Revelation 21 and 22 are a beautiful testimony of what lies ahead. But it is all written in earthly language. We too still see the promises afar off, even though we are much closer to their fulfillment. We seek "an heavenly" country; but, not having been there, we cannot say anything more about it than what is presented to us in Holy Writ in earthly language. That language expresses its beauty in terms of earthly beauty. How much more wonderful it shall then be! The psalmist says in Psalm 103:11 that as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is God's mercy toward them that fear Him. We may also say that as high as the heaven is above the earth, so great is the glory and wonder of that which is promised us in earthly language.

And before we conclude — even though we had

more to write on this matter — let it be pointed out that there is another aspect of this request of Jacob that must not be overlooked. There is instruction here. And I do not mean merely that we can learn from this deed of Jacob. I mean that Jacob is here teaching his sons as a faithful covenant father. He is about to die, and he knows it. The day will soon come when he cannot instruct his sons any more. His mouth will be stopped. His body will no longer be seen. He will no longer be there to rebuke, exhort, and point his sons (who had their flesh and had given him many moments of anxiety as to their spirituality) to God's promises. Putting them to the task of burying him in the land of promise will focus their attention on that promise of God. They will not as easily forget it as they would have without this example which their father sets. And I might add that Joseph's request that his bones be carried along to Canaan by the Israelites served that same purpose, namely, to keep before them the hope of the promises of God. Jacob points his sons

to the promise. He directs their thoughts, even after he is dead, back to Canaan and to the promises of God connected with that land. He, as well as Abel, "being dead yet speaketh" (Hebrews 11:4).

Do we as parents do that? Do we so live that we point our children to what we are going to leave behind for them, or to what God has laid away for His people in the heavenly Canaan? At the moment, the Israelites had it good in Goshen. In fact, they never had it so good before this as pilgrims and strangers in Canaan. And our children never had it so good in all the affluence and luxuries — even in these times of gross inflation. We do well to strive, therefore, more diligently and faithfully to point them to the heavenly Canaan, and to live a life that sets such an example not only, but so that their memory of us after we have departed points them heavenward and not to the things below which moth and rust corrupt and thieves break through to steal.

THE STRENGTH OF YOUTH

Children, Obey Your Parents

Rev. Rodney Miersma

Children, whether they be little children which are held in one's arms or older children who have already come to years of discretion, occupy a very important place in life. Except for Adam and Eve, our first parents, everyone must first pass through the stages of childhood before becoming an adult. The children of today will be the leaders of tomorrow. Thus, all education today is centered about the child. To see this one only has to look at all the educational facilities and the money spent to maintain them and their numerous programs. If you children reading these words do not see this clearly, your parents certainly do when they see the annual tax bill and the amount allotted for education. This is in addition to the tuition that is paid for your Christian instruction.

Not only are you children of today the country's citizens of tomorrow, but from the viewpoint of the church you are the church of tomorrow — its future deacons, elders, ministers, and covenant parents of the next generation of believers.

Yes, you are important as children. The Bible also teaches this. Jesus said in Matthew 19:14, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come

unto Me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." This is also plain from the promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 17:7, "And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee *and thy seed after thee* in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, *and to thy seed after thee*." Thus, when the Spirit was poured upon the church on Pentecost, Peter could say, "for unto you is the promise *and to your children*, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

Now that you know that you are important, what is your inward feeling and attitude? Are you inclined to rise up in pride and put yourself "in the driver's seat," so to speak? Do you look down in disdain upon your parents, teachers, consistory, or government officials? Children, the apostle Paul has something special to say to you. In Ephesians 6:1-3 we read, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth."

What does this imply for you? First of all, it pre-

supposes that you as children are members of the church of Jesus Christ, and that too, as manifested in the congregation to which you belong. As Paul addressed the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus, the children also were included in that address. Thus, you too must learn to say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." You too have been redeemed by Christ's blood, are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which He before prepared that you should walk in them. As children you also must put off the old man of sin and put on the new man in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and delighting to live with Him.

Yes, you are in the Lord and must obey in the Lord your parents. This is not merely Paul saying this to you, nor is it merely I who am saying this to you, but "thus saith the Lord!" God Himself says to you, "Honour thy father and mother." He says, "My little children, I am the Lord thy God; obey your parents in the Lord." That is correct, you are told by the Lord Who made heaven and earth to obey your parents.

Obedience, what is it?

Obedience presupposes that your father and mother have authority over you. Authority is the right which one receives from God to rule and to expect obedience. Parents receive this from God, and are thus obligated to discipline and to punish if obedience is not forthcoming, since you are to honor your father and mother. To honor someone means that that person is important, worthy of respect. The opposite of honor is to count lightly or to think little of. I am sure that all of you are familiar with the cartoon that appears in most daily papers under the caption, *Dennis the Menace*. We laugh at his pranks and remarks, considering them cute. But little Dennis has never learned the lesson of Scripture, what it means to honor father and mother. Instead we find in him an example of one who is a mocker of God's holy laws, making a joke of that which God considers serious. This is a reflection of the mentality of the sinful and fallen world of mankind who do not know God as their Savior.

How does one show honor? By obedience! You cannot honor your father and mother if you do not obey your father and mother. So often you want to ask the question, "Why, why must I obey, why must I do what you tell me to do?" To this your parents must answer, "Because I am clothed with authority." Too often today children sit upon a little throne in the home from which they seek to rule over all those whom God has placed in authority over them. Whenever the parent tells the child

to do something, invariably the question "why?" will be heard. If this sounds familiar, if you always ask your parents, "why?" then you have not learned to honor your father and mother as God's representatives of authority. To honor your parents means that you fear God. It also means that you obey your parents as those who speak the will of God, your heavenly Father.

The apostle Paul, in his own way as inspired by the Holy Spirit, answers your question of "why?" He says, "for this is right." "Why must I obey my parents? Why must I do as I am told and do it when I am told?" Infallibly and authoritatively the answer of Scripture always is, "for this is right." For children who are in the Lord, as you are, this is the proper thing to do. A referee must call the game according to the rules of the game. He must be fair. He must call the game right, justly. For children to obey their parents is just, is fair, is according to the rules. God is just; Christ is just; and all of God's rules are just and right. Therefore, that which is just is that which befits the creature according to its nature and under God's ordinances.

Consequently, it is very fair on the part of parents to say to their children: "Listen to us; do as we tell you." It would not be just for God to ask you children to be teachers and to bear the responsibility of ruling. That would be unjust, requiring you to do what is beyond your ability and power. God has thought it well that children shall listen, shall hear, shall obey. That is where you will find your true beauty, for the adornment of the child is obedience.

To obey is not easy for you. In fact, it is contrary to your very nature. Thus, if obedience is your true beauty, then by nature you are ugly. You need to pray, pray to God for the grace to obey your parents. And grace you will receive, for God has put His law and His love in your hearts by His Holy Spirit. With this law and love you will walk in obedience. Assurance of salvation will be the fruit of such a walk in life, for a tree is known by its fruits.

But we are not finished yet. There is something unique about this commandment. It comes with a promise: "that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." At the time the law was given, this promise referred to the land of Canaan, which makes it easier to understand now. The land of Canaan was a picture of the heavenly Canaan. Those dwelling in Canaan do so as heirs, their possessions being pictures of the eternal inheritance in the heavens above. To live long on the earth is the portion of those whose inheritance is among all those who are sanctified to the Lord.

The earmark of a child of God is that he has learned the new obedience of faith and love in

Christ. It is not possible to be obedient to God while one is disobedient to one's parents. A disobedient child does not honor his father, does not obey, does not show the fruit of the Spirit in his walk and life and confession. In such the infallible fruits of election are not seen. A disobedient child goes his own way. That, dear children, is the way of death. Such a one will not live in the land, but will perish in his sins.

Do you wish to dwell forever in the land? Then obey your parents in the Lord, whether in the home, in the school, or in the church. This is well-pleasing unto the Lord. The Lord loves obedience, as can be seen from I Samuel 15:22: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifice, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

Thus, you too must learn that you are in need of daily conversion to God. When you are obedient

and confess your sins and ask the Lord and your parents to forgive you, then you are happy, blessed, and beautiful children in grace. Then, when your father and mother correct you, you will obey them and honor them as though God Himself were speaking to you. Then you, who as a child is obedient, will be the man who is obedient, the man in Christ forever.

Finally, remember this, that your first teachers are your father and mother as they instruct you beginning in the home. Here is laid the basic pattern for all obedience in every relationship of life. When you are not obedient to your teachers, and to the authorities on the street, and to the consistory, it is because you have not learned well the basic lesson of obedience and honor to your parents for God's sake. But when you obey God in every sphere of life you are walking in the kingdom of heaven on earth, as obedient subjects of the King. May the Lord so bless you!

GUEST ARTICLE

Liberty and Maturity (1)

Rev. Wayne Bekkering

Let us look at this truth from the point of view of Galatians 5:1. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

The apostle Paul was the minister of God to the Gentiles. Through Paul and his helpers God was bringing to the Gentiles the glorious gospel, the gospel of liberty.

Paul first proclaims unto them bondage. That is one emphasis of the message that he comes with. You are in bondage, he teaches them. There is a universal bondage that grips all mankind. The apostle deals with that in all of his letters to the churches. The apostle Paul in Romans 5:12 identifies the very source of that bondage through the sin of one man, Adam, in the beginning. That fall of Adam brought upon all men without exception a universal, a total, a horrible bondage: the bondage of sin.

Even though God had created man good and upright so that he had the ability and right to serve God, yet through man's own willful disobedience he lost that right. The image of God in which he was created was turned into the very opposite. Rather than to stand before God in righteousness

and holiness and true knowledge (which is the image of God) he now stands in enmity and unrighteousness and ignorance. He has been reshaped into the image of Satan in sin. His mind which was once filled with the righteousness of God is now filled with a horrible darkness. The freedom of righteousness which he once had, to go about in the creation as king under God, is now a horrible trembling in expectation of judgment, and justly so because God is angry with sin and the sinner. That Paul preached. He preached God. He preached God as the holy, just Judge of heaven and earth Who will not lightly pass over sin. He preached that man was in a horrible bondage; but thanks be to God, he also preached the way out. He preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified, Him risen for the salvation of sinners hopelessly bound in the bondage of sin.

There is only one way, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Jesus Christ. The way out of sin is by the sovereign, powerful grace of God, whereby He takes the heretofore dead sinner and with the miracle of regeneration He quickens him, makes him alive so that he is born again. Now that sinner has been relieved of that bondage of sin and corrup-

tion. He has been renewed again into the image of Him that created him. So that once again he has the beginning of the ability to serve God, and that is freedom. The right and the ability to serve our God in thanksgiving. That is the essence of the gospel which Paul preached to the Galatians. They received that gospel willingly. They rejoiced in the reception of that gospel; and not only that but they made application of that gospel in their lives. Paul says in Galatians 5:7, "Ye did run well, who did hinder you that you should not obey the truth?" Something happened! Something terrible happened.

Now, what happened was this. There were certain Jews who were listening to Paul's gospel and who were saying, yes, that is good news...but. They were saying, yes, what we hear Paul saying is the fulfillment of the Scriptures...but. But don't forget what Moses said. Don't forget all the traditions which we have been taught. Don't forget those laws and regulations, because they lead us to holiness, do they not? They were saying, You believe in Christ now? That is good. But now that you believe in Christ, come with us and we will increase your understanding of these things. Submit yourselves to circumcision first of all, and then we have a few other regulations that we consider to be very important. We want to add to what Paul says.

Paul had preached freedom from sin through faith in Christ Jesus alone. Justification by faith only, Paul taught, but they said, yes, justification by faith *and* by walking in the good law of Moses, God's law. But Paul said, No! Paul said that that is a reintroduction into bondage. Paul would have nothing of Christ-*and*, or Christ-*but*. Paul would have Christ *only* as our liberty. "For liberty Christ has freed us" is the literal idea of our verse. For liberty unto liberty has God freed us from bondage, and now in no wise allow yourselves to be "had in" to the bondage of the law. The literal idea of "entangled" is to be "had into." The idea of it is that which grabs hold of one and pulls one down. "Entangled" is a good word to express the idea.

They had been freed from that awful universal bondage of sin, but Paul warns that these men came to introduce a new yoke of bondage. The law with its regulations as it was required by these Judaizers.

There is a fine line that we have to understand with respect to the law. In certain places Paul says that the law is good and in other places he rejects the law categorically as though we have in the Scripture two opposing views of the law, which of course, is not the idea.

The idea is this. In the old dispensation the law was used by God as an external code that was

placed upon the people so that, as they worked under the law and tried to grapple with the perfection of that law, they always came to the conclusion that they could never fulfill it. Then in desperation and yet in faith they cried out, "Oh God be merciful to me the sinner." Then God caused them to hear the blessedness of the promise of the old dispensation. God said in effect, I know your difficulties. Take for yourselves a lamb and bring it to the priests. The priests will slay the lamb and will offer the lamb upon the altar, and when I see the blood of that lamb I will pass over you. I have heard your cry; I will no more remember your sins against you. That lamb was a picture of none other than the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament that law had a distinctively external character. Now that law continues. That same law. God's expression of perfect holiness and righteousness continues into the new dispensation. No longer, however, is it a crushing external burden which was a yoke of bondage.

Now by the work of God's grace and Holy Spirit the principles of God's law are written in our hearts — not upon the tables of stone, but upon the fleshly tables of our hearts. Those laws are infallibly inscribed in the blood of Jesus Christ so that God by His grace binds His laws upon our hearts and upon our minds. Now our whole perspective is different. If we be in Christ Jesus we are new creatures. Old things have passed away and behold all things are new. That is right. The law in its damning bondage is passed away for the redeemed sinner. The law now written in our heart is a guide to thanksgiving, obedience, and holiness to the Lord that saved us.

That is how we must understand the law in the new dispensation. We are not without the law. We are not against the law, but we are "in the law" through Jesus Christ.

What difference does that make, you may ask. It is still law, isn't it? Oh, a world of difference it makes. It is like the difference of a little child who does not want to do the dishes. The child begins to grumble and to weep and to stew. Finally the external law has to be applied, and the child finally submits. Unwillingly and grudgingly the child goes through the task. Finally the child finishes and says, "There, now I have fulfilled the requirements of the law." But what a grievous thing that is. How much better it is (and this is the goal, the ideal, of the New Testament child of God who has become free and mature in Christ Jesus) when the parents tell (the law) the child to do the dishes and the child responds willingly and obediently. Now what a difference that makes! A whole difference in attitude and in motivation. The whole situation in the

household is different when there is an inner willingness to walk in God's way. That is where we are in the New Testament by grace in Christ Jesus.

To present the way of holiness and obedience to the New Testament Christian as the way of regulations, of external codes — do this and don't do that — is to present a way that leads to bondage. Paul says, You have been freed, you have been delivered, you have been liberated. Now stand fast in that liberty and do not become entangled in the yoke of bondage. Don't do that to yourselves through immaturity. Don't allow these Judaizers to do that to you. Resist them steadfastly. "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free." Christ has liberated us unto liberty — not so that we should become free to be entangled again into regulation of anyone else except the Lord Christ.

The Judaizers of Paul's day were trying to entangle the Christians in a new yoke of bondage. That is why we see Paul contending so fiercely against those who would reintroduce the law as an external code.

Those attempts have continued throughout the ages. There are always those who would seek to add to or to take something away from the Word of God. Each of us has that inclination or tendency within us. We like to have everything all neat and orderly. Our children say, What can we do, and we like to say, You may do this, this, and this, but not this, that, or another thing. Then we know and the children know where the law is. That may work for immature children, but that is not the ideal nor the

goal for the child of God who is coming to the full stature of the new man in Christ. To want to have everything so carefully defined is really a basic immaturity. We have not yet begun to dare to walk in the freedom of the Spirit wherewith Christ has made us free. We like to have some external "guide bars" to help us because we feel so secure with them. But, lo and behold, those "guide bars" become for us a prison of bondage. We must be finished with external guide bars. We must strive to live out of the principle of freedom and thanksgiving of the new man in Christ.

Is that easy? Oh no, that is not easy. That is a very difficult calling, and that is why we revert so quickly and say, Just tell me what to do and I'll do it. Don't bother me with all the latitude that the Word of God allows. I am not a theologian, after all. I am not able to distinguish the way. But God says, I have given you the Spirit. I have enabled you by grace to know the way. You need not an instructor. You have an instructor in your hearts. Go to the Word. There is the guide for thankful, holy living. The Spirit of God within me, testifying with my spirit guides me and shows me the boundaries and also makes me willing to walk in them.

Then we do not have to become judges of one another. God judges us. I can do things that you cannot do. You can do things that I cannot do. But we trust that we are all servants of the living God, Who is able Himself to make us stand in freedom, in obedience, and in thanksgiving.

(to be continued)

IN HIS FEAR

The Church Prayer Meeting

Rev. Arie den Hartog

Church prayer meetings are not commonly held in our Protestant Reformed Churches, in fact they are not very common as far as we know in any of the Reformed Churches. They have long been a tradition in Presbyterian Churches as well as a number of other churches. There are those who claim that they were regularly held in the church from the time of the apostles. We have had the opportunity to experience such meetings during our labors as missionaries in the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. These prayer meetings were already an institution in what was then the G.L.T.S. when we came to Singapore. We found these

prayer meetings to be a great source of blessing both to the church as a whole and to ourselves personally. It is our purpose in this article to tell you something about these meetings. We want also to consider some of the biblical bases for holding such meetings. Finally, we want to relate some of what we can see to be the great blessings these meetings afford the church. It is our conviction that we as Protestant Reformed Churches can learn from these meetings and that we could well consider holding similar meetings in our own midst.

Let me begin by describing what is meant by a prayer meeting. A prayer meeting is a regular

weekly meeting of the church which is especially for the purpose of corporate prayer of the church. It is held in the recognition of the urgent need for the church always to continue in prayer unto the Lord. The meetings which we have experienced usually consist of the following. They are opened with prayer and singing. This is followed by an exhortation from the Word of God on the subject of prayer: the need and the urgency of prayer, the requirements of proper prayer, the proper subject of prayer, the biblical principles of prayer, and such like subjects. In the E.R.C.S. this exhortation is usually given by an elder of the church who also serves as the chairman of the prayer meeting. This is followed by the announcement of the current concerns and needs of the church for which the church is exhorted to pray. The church is especially exhorted to pray for the ministry of the gospel, for the worship services, and for the work of the special offices in the church. After this, opportunity is given to the members of the church to make prayer requests. This will include expressions of thanksgiving and praise to God for blessings received, requests for prayer for the grace of God to bear the burdens of life, to endure hardships and persecutions and trials, and to stand steadfast in the face of temptations and discouragements. If there are any sick in the church this is made known at the prayer meeting. If a member of the church has not been in church for some time this is made the subject of prayer. If there are newcomers to the worship services who have been attending the worship services for several weeks they are prayed for. Often, also, requests are made for prayer for a member of the church who in the providence of God has come in contact with a friend or colleague to whom they are speaking about the Lord. Often prayers are offered to God for our beloved Protestant Reformed Churches in the U.S.A. Sometimes also a member of the church will stand up to make a personal confession of faith or a short exhortation to encourage others in the church in a certain area of Christian living.

After the period of prayer requests the whole church enters into a time of prayer. In the E.R.C.S. this is done while everyone is on bended knee before the chairs. The chairman will open with prayer after which various members of the church will lead in prayer. There are also sometimes periods of silent prayer. Leading in prayer is done spontaneously and again usually by the leaders of the church.

Perhaps for many of us Protestant Reformed people this type of meeting would seem quite strange. Many of us have never experienced such a meeting. Lest you get the wrong impression let me assure you that these meetings are not character-

ized by the evils and excesses which we find in many modern-day church meetings. They are not characterized by a lot of disorderly shoutings of hallelujahs and amens and all sorts of emotional outbursts. Neither are these meetings the forums for all sorts of silly stories and all sorts of unbiblical prayer requests. The meetings are always subdued, reverent, and orderly. They always include biblical instruction on prayer. The church is constantly admonished against improper and unscriptural prayer and exhorted to pray reverently and sincerely. At these meetings the church as a whole earnestly and sincerely seeks to worship the Lord in prayer, to praise Him and to give Him thanks, and to make supplication of Him for His mercy and grace.

Is there biblical warrant for holding such meetings? We believe there is. In the first place, of course, the Word of God exhorts us everywhere on the great urgency of prayer. Paul calls the church to pray without ceasing. In Romans 12:12 the apostle exhorts the church to continue instant in prayer. In several places the apostle exhorts the church to pray for the ministry of the gospel (see Ephesians 6:19 and II Thessalonians 3:1 and 2). In Ephesians 6:18 the church is exhorted: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." In I Timothy 2:1 we read: "I exhort therefore that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men." James exhorts us: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). There are many elements in all of these passages of the Word of God that we could call attention to, but space prohibits. Surely the Word of God emphasizes the urgency of prayer. It emphasizes that we must pray continually and with perseverance. It emphasizes that we must pray for the church and for the ministry of the gospel. It emphasizes that we must pray for one another and for all men. Many more passages of Scripture could be enumerated.

Our Heidelberg Catechism teaches us that prayer is the chief part of thankfulness to God and that God gives His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desire continually ask them of Him and are thankful. These are tremendous statements. They are the clear teaching of the Word of God.

Indeed we ought always to be asking ourselves, are we being faithful in prayer? Are we continuing in prayer with all perseverance? When we pray do we pray earnestly and sincerely and not just generally, formally, and coldly? Do we pray constantly for the needs of the church of Jesus Christ

and for the ministry of the gospel? Do we pray earnestly and with fervent love for our fellow saints? How often would we avoid strife and bitterness and anger in the church if we spent more time praying for one another? Do we know the great needs and concerns of our fellow saints or do we care only about ourselves? When we pray do we pray only for our own needs or also for the needs of one another?

According to the Word of God there are various ways in which we ought to pray. We should pray privately in our inner closet. We ought to pray together with our families. We ought also to pray corporately as a church. One of the ways in which we do this is at our worship services, especially in the congregational prayer. Are there also other times when the church should be praying together as one body of Christ?

The Bible places great emphasis on corporate prayer in the church. The many exhortations to pray that are found in Paul's epistles are made to the church as a whole and certainly imply corporate prayer. We have a number of beautiful examples of the apostolic church in corporate prayer. We read of the apostolic church in Acts that "they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). Notice that prayer was something that the apostolic church continued in stedfastly and that they did this along with continuing in the apostles' doctrine. This was a time of great need in the church and there was therefore urgency for prayer. But is it not true that we today live in a time of great need for the church? We find another beautiful example of such corporate prayer of the church in Acts 12:5. "Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." This was a time of great crisis in the church when James had been killed and Peter had been put into prison. And what did the church do? They prayed together without ceasing.

One of the beautiful names which we find in the Word of God to describe the temple, and so also the church, is the name "House of Prayer." This indicates that one of the chief purposes of the church is to worship God in prayer. How often do we go up unto the house of the Lord with the definite purpose of worshiping the Lord in prayer? This indeed is the purpose of the prayer meeting.

The prayer meeting is a great blessing to the church. This is true of course because God is pleased to bless His church upon the prayer of His saints. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Prayer is not a futile exercise or mere outward religious ritual that is of no profit

or purpose. The Lord delights in His people when they worship Him in prayer. God is pleased to glorify His own name in the midst of His church when that church is gathered in His house for prayer. God hears and answers the prayers of His people when they pray for His church, for the ministry of the gospel, and for one another.

Through the prayer meeting the members of the church are exhorted continually to pray for the church. The specific needs and concerns of the church are set before the people of God to arouse their earnest concern for the church. The people of the church are made aware of what is going on in the various aspects of the life of the church and are exhorted to be concerned about all that is going on and to pray. Through the means of prayer God's people learn to humble themselves before God, to worship Him and give Him thanks, and to make earnest supplication of Him. In the prayer meetings the saints of God exhort and encourage one another in the difficulties of the Christian life. The Bible admonishes us to bear one another's burdens. Surely we do this especially when we pray one for another. Through corporate prayer the church is united together in the blessed bond of the love of God and one another in the communion of the saints. Through the prayer meeting the church learns of the real and specific needs of their fellow-saints and learns to be concerned for one another and sincerely pray for one another. Through the prayer meetings personal fellowship with one another is promoted and greatly blessed of God. What a great encouragement it is to hear the church as a whole praying for one's needs and concerns! The prayer meetings do much to encourage personal piety and godliness among the members.

The Lord in His grace has used our churches to teach the saints of God here many things. We can also learn from them. I believe that the prayer meetings in the E.R.C.S. ought to be an example unto us.

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TRANSLATED TREASURES

A Pamphlet Concerning The Reformation Of The Church

Dr. A. Kuyper

56. Concerning Reformation Through A Break With The Existing Church.

It is more important, if that is possible, that reformation by means of a break with the church has the conviction of sin and guilt as its point of departure, than in reformation through spiritual revival and gradual church renewal.

He who risks a break with the existing church without this consciousness of sin and guilt denounces faith in God's providential order.

For such a one it is as if the reformation of the church arises only because of the opposition and ambition of some so that God the Lord would indeed give to us a good church if only the stubbornness of a few did not stand in His way. And the chief desire of their heart is then that they, as the better ones, should try to make these evil people harmless, so that in this way they can bring into being a good church for the Lord. Three kinds of sins arise out of this one sin. First, there is no awareness of one's own corporate guilt. Secondly, there is an exaltation of one's self over others. And thirdly, there is the delusion that a good church is not a gift of God to us, but is a gift from us to the Lord.

If one confesses on the other hand, that a good church is an excellent and gracious gift of God which He freely grants us and which we receive without any merit on our part, then one sees at once that if the Lord withholds this good from us, this must lie in the sin of the church. In this way a bad church is always a chastisement and a judgment because of our unrighteousness. He who recognizes this judgment of God in the sad state of the church can no longer think that the piety of one's own people should be as a sacrifice for the evil of others. But on the contrary, he will confess that all guilt and sin is communal, and that exactly his own people, according as they know more truth and have received more abundant grace, have transgressed more abominably. Not the wild animals which mangle you, but the children of the house are the ones who violate that love which is most precious.

He who works for the reformation of the church in the name of the Lord neither can nor will do this in pride, much less with a contemptuous scorn for others. Rather, he will lack in himself the courage to lift his hand for such a task and he will anxiously ask himself if it be the Lord's will that his guilt before the Lord is to be punished more and more severely by this plague of desolation in the church. The true minister of repentance who is capable of this work will thus concede that he hopes for nothing else than an increase in the burden of his own sin. Nevertheless he conducts himself out of pure obedience and compels others to treat all things according to the Word of God.

God Himself is the only Author of reformation which takes place by means of a break with the existing church. This does not give us an excuse to neglect devotion to duty and a license for spiritual laziness. He who takes this position has the whole Word of God against him. This becomes in fact Antinomianism. But it is nevertheless true that reformation cannot proceed in a proper way unless the Holy Spirit performs the merciful work of arousing in hard hearts the conviction of sin, and of making one see a judgment of God in the decay of the church. This kind of conviction cannot be cultivated artificially. If the one person parrots the other that all church renewal must proceed from confession of guilt, this is useless and never brings anyone further than a mere empty show. Confession of guilt can arouse truth, reality, spiritual stamina, when the Holy Spirit Himself speaks as the Convector in the guilty heart. And having done this the same Holy Spirit then comforts, oh so tenderly, that same guilty heart.

There must still be added something else. Church reformation is not something which happens through the work of one person. When Luther began his work, he did take the lead; but his work would have disappeared in oblivion and death if a number of other persons, already matured and prepared, and only waiting for his signal, had not added their strength to his. So it is, if conviction of ecclesiastical guilt is aroused in only one heart, this is not enough. Such a conviction

must simultaneously arise in many and cause an awakening of the Spirit among the Lord's people. Only in this way does that warm fervor arise which melts everything, that scintillating life which awakens everything, that power which conquers all opposition. Then one sees how only God the Lord can be Author of such a reformation. One immediately realizes that a man can arouse an enthusiasm for his ideas in a small circle of friends, but to produce a similar spiritual movement in a broader circle, this no man can do; this is only of the Lord.

This is not to say that a person in whom that conviction is aroused must and may sit still until the

time in which he notices that that same conviction is in the hearts of others. This would hold in contempt and reject the demand of God. A man may imagine that this is true. He may even tell others that those who have insight into conviction of ecclesiastical guilt and see the sin of the church as sin against God nevertheless must passively wait until the Lord either performs an extraordinary sign by which the situation changes without our effort, or that all hearts are so aroused to church renewal that they become as a voice of the rushing of many waters. But he obviously does not understand even the first principle of obedience.

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*The Standard Bearer
makes a thoughtful gift
on any occasion.*

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Senior Mr. and Mrs. Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church expresses their sincere sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Dan Baldwin in the passing of his mother, MRS. RUTH BALDWIN.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth." (Psalm 121:1-2)

Rev. M. Joostens, Pres.
Mrs. R. Pastoor, Sec'y.

LEAGUE MEETING NOTICE

The Fall Meeting of the League of Eastern Men's and Ladies' Societies will be held, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, October 5, 1982, at 8:00 p.m. at Southeast Protestant Reformed Church. Members and friends are urged to attend.

Rev. Richard Flikkema will speak on "The Spiritual Strengths and Weaknesses of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and Possible Remedies."

Elsie Kuiper, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of the Priscilla Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan, extend heartfelt and sincere Christian sympathy to their member, Mrs. Gerrit Bol (Eleanore), in the passing to Glory of her father, MR. HENRY MEULENBERG. May God comfort her by His word and Spirit.

"When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." (Col. 3:4).

Mrs. Ralph Meyer, Pres.
Mrs. Ryven C. Ezinga, Sec'y.

Book Review

TREASURY OF QUOTATIONS ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS, F.B. Proctor; Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Mich.; 816 pp. (cloth), \$14.95. [Reviewed by Prof. H.C. Hoeksema]

This large volume is a reprint of a work originally published in 1887 under the title *Classified Gems Of Thought*. There is a vast amount of material in a book like this. This material ranges from brief sermons and sermon notes and outlines to brief paragraphs and statements on many different subjects. The quotations found in it are from a wide variety of evangelical writers. And according as the writers vary, so do the quotations. Some are Reformed and quite usable; some are definitely less than Reformed and even contrary to the Reformed faith. The value of the book is enhanced by a large General Index and by an Index of Texts.

For those who like to make use of quotations in their sermons or speeches, I can see some value in a book of this kind. This reviewer, however, makes very little use of this kind of material. It should be kept in mind, however, that the choice and the quality of the quotations found in a book of this kind are largely dependent on the author who collected them. In other words, the choice of a collection of quotations is a strictly subjective matter. However, there is such a wide variety and such a large choice in a book of this size that anyone who uses the book can make his own choice from Proctor's choice.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 19, 1982, the Lord willing, our parents, MR. AND MRS. JOHN WIGGER will celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary.

We, their children and grandchildren, are thankful to our Heavenly Father for giving us God-fearing parents who have brought us up in the fear of the Lord. We pray that God will bless them and keep them in the years to come.

"For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting and His truth endureth to all generations." (Psalm 100:5).

Bern and Kaye Wigger
Jennifer, Stephen, Rocky, Philip
Ben and Judy Wigger
Tim and Tom
Chuck and Barb Ensink
Scott, Brian, Sarah
Dave Wigger

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Class of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church expresses its deep sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Lubbers in the death of her brother, CALVIN DE ROO.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purposes." (Romans 8:28).

Bernard Bruining, Pres.
Faye Dykstra, Sec'y.

News From Our Churches

Candidates Tom Miersma and Jon Smith have received and *accepted* calls from our Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and Edgerton, Minnesota congregations, respectively. Before the news of candidate Miersma's answer to the call from Edmonton reached South Holland, Illinois their bulletin announced: "Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches has been postponed to Tuesday, September 21, so that one, or possibly two candidates may also be examined at this Classis." The result of all this could be a very unusual situation for the Protestant Reformed Churches in America: a time in which none of the parsonages of our churches are vacant. Though my memory of the statistics may be deficient, to my recollection at least, this is something new for our churches.

* * * * *

"We thank the Lord our Covenant God that soon He will allow us to open the doors of Christian education." By the time you read this column those words written by Rev. Joostens, pastor of First Church in Grand Rapids, to his congregation would sound better in the *past* rather than *future* tense of the verb. Nevertheless, it is fitting at this time that we consider the faithfulness of our Covenant God with respect to our schools. Nearly all of the grade-school children in our congregation have available to them instruction in our own parental schools. In addition, in the Grand Rapids, Michigan and Lynden, Washington areas a Protestant Reformed high school education is also available. Further, steps are being taken in other areas toward the establishment of parentally operated Protestant Reformed schools:

1) The Society for Protestant Reformed Education of Houston, Texas has been busy working on a constitution for a parental school.

2) Recent bulletin announcements from our Randolph, Wisconsin congregation reveal that the school society there continues to labor toward a school of their own.

3) A society and board for secondary education continues to labor in South Holland, Illinois.

4) Although the plans for the building of a Hope Satellite School in Hudsonville, Michigan have

been placed on hold, it seems only a matter of time before this project will be reactivated.

The life of our schools continues to be enhanced by the work of an organization called the Federation of Protestant Reformed School Societies. One of the purposes of this organization is to, "promote the development, understanding, and presentation of distinctive Christian education." In keeping with that purpose a summer mini-course with the general theme, *Teaching Our Children Scriptural Values*, was planned and held at the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church of Grandville, Michigan in August. Rev. Heys, pastor emeritus of our Holland, Michigan church, presented three lectures on the aforementioned theme: 1) "The Covenant Child, A Divinely Privileged Child"; 2) "The Christian School's Calling Because of this Privilege"; 3) "Cultivating Thankfulness in the Divinely Privileged Child." It would be impossible for me to review those lectures in this column, so I urge those who are interested to obtain the magazine in which these lectures will be printed, i.e., *Perspectives in Covenant Education*. Send to: Perspectives, Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute, c/o Covenant Christian High School, 1401 Ferndale Ave., S.W., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49504.

One final school-related item yet: A back-to-school thought from an August 31, 1980 Pella, Iowa bulletin: "Discipline in the school is only effective if it is reinforced at home. The old rule of, 'If you get a whooping at school, you'll get another one when you get home' is valid. If the parents are lax regarding discipline, then no amount of strict discipline at school will (humanly speaking) really change the child's life." From *The Bible Educator*, July, 1980.

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This is the last issue of volume 58 of the *Standard Bearer*, and it will be the last in which the letters CK will conclude it. Many thanks to those who have so faithfully sent bulletins and other church and school related materials my way. Please keep up the good work; but now send it to the address of my successor: Mr. David Harbach

4930 Ivanrest Ave. Apt. B
Grandville, Michigan 49418

CK