

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

*A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine*

**... we should be
very cautious and wary
about relinquishing
any control over
or supervision
of our schools
to the federal
or state government
arguably earning
that prerogative
by virtue of direct
or indirect financial aid.**

See "Church and State" — page 228

*Vol. 68, No. 10
February 15, 1992*

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In This Issue ...

Dr. J. Gresham Machen, a contemporary of John Dewey, once wrote that "the most important Christian educational institution is not the pulpit or the school, important as these institutions are; but it is the Christian family. And that institution has to a large extent ceased to do its work."

If that was an accurate assessment of the state of affairs in the '30s, how much more so today. For good reason, therefore, James Lanting, in "Church and State," declares that the promotion of the voucher system, as another attempt to improve the quality of public education, is actually the treating of a symptom, not of the disease.

Mr. Lanting begins by noting that, after billions of dollars have been pumped into the public school system, to treat a variety of symptoms, the schools are on the verge of bankruptcy — both financial and educational. After four generations of public education in America, and after two generations of Dewey's humanism, the products of America's public schools are either functionally illiterate, or, at best, not able to "compete successfully in today's global, information-based economy."

One cannot help but wonder whether the "bankruptcy" of public education in America, compared, say, to the no less humanistic education in Japan, is the result of the special judgment of God on a nation whose schools began as institutions which taught men to think Christianly, and have now become institutions which purposefully teach men to think secularly — that is, without reference to God and His Word. Today, many of those schools aren't even safe.

Whatever the case, the truth of the matter is that the current revival of the tuition voucher idea does not at all reflect a growing appreciation for Christian private education. Mr. Lanting explains how it constitutes instead an attempt to save the public schools.

Christianity's insistence that it is the *only* way of truth is anathema in American society. The offense of Christian education is precisely the same. Hence the antipathy of the world toward the Christian school. All of which gives point to Mr. Lanting's word of caution concerning potential windfalls from tuition vouchers, at the conclusion of his article on "Choice: Tuition Vouchers, Christian Schools, and the 1st Amendment."

D.D.

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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema

Never Condemned Before God

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:18

We are all sinners. Daily we sin against God in thought, word, and deed.

And God is not pleased with our sins. Our sins anger God.

On account of our sins we all deserve to be condemned by God to the deepest hell.

The truth is that many have already been condemned for their sins. Some await their eternal sentence of misery as they continue to struggle through life; others have already departed this life and have begun to serve their sentence.

What a blessed thing to know that whoever believes on the only begotten Son of God shall never be condemned.

This is the instruction of Jesus to Nicodemus, who sought out Jesus in the dead of night. Jesus speaks to Nicodemus of God's great love for the world. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to the death of the cross, that whosoever would believe on him would not perish but have everlasting life (vs. 16).

Jesus continues to emphasize to Nicodemus that His primary purpose is to save the world. The Jews be-

lieved that the promised Savior would come to condemn the nations and thus bring salvation to the Jews. Jesus corrects this mistaken notion. God sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved (vs. 17).

And now, in the words of Jesus which we consider for this meditation (vs. 18), Jesus emphasizes the place and importance of faith in salvation. Jesus makes clear that not all are saved. Many are and will be condemned by God. However, those that believe on the name of the Son of God shall never be condemned!

These words of Jesus place us in God's courtroom.

God is the Judge before whom we appear daily. God is like no other judge before whom we will ever appear. For God is all-knowing. He knows all that we have ever done. Every deed, every word, every thought, every motive is known to him. There is nothing about us that God does not know. Besides that, God does not judge us according to human law, but according to His divine law as revealed in Scripture.

Now comes the sobering truth.

Should we in the judgment of God be guilty of so much as one transgression of His divine law, He will condemn us to an eternity of misery in hell.

*"If we say that we
have no sin,
we deceive ourselves
and the truth is not in us"
(I John 1:8).*

And we all have sinned. We have sinned not just occasionally but often. Daily we sin in thought, word, and deed. Let us resist the temptation of pride to deny or minimize this fact. Remember the inspired words of the apostle John, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8).

So it is that we all stand to be condemned by God to an eternity of suffering under His wrath.

And many are condemned!

Jesus indicates that this is the case with all those who do not believe. He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Notice that the unbeliever is condemned already!

*... whoever believes
on the name of
the only begotten Son of God
is not condemned.*

Condemnation does not wait for the unbeliever until some future date. His condemnation is not reserved, for example, for the final judgment. The purpose of the final judgment in the day of Christ is simply to make the judgments of God public, so that all questions of God's fairness are forever put to rest.

Rather, condemnation is a daily reality for the unbeliever. Every day of his life the unbeliever lives in the realization that he is condemned before God on account of his sin. And even in this life he begins to experi-

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

ence the sentence of God's wrath upon him in the form of temporal sorrows.

However, Jesus also indicates that whoever believes on the name of the only begotten Son of God is not condemned. This is true even though he sins against God every day of his life and appears in the courtroom of God with all his sins. In spite of these facts, he is not condemned. He is not condemned now in this life. He will not be condemned in the day of final judgment. Even though he deserves to be condemned as much as anyone else, there is no condemnation for him.

What a great blessing that is!

What is it to believe on the name of the only begotten Son of God?

The only begotten Son of God is Jesus. He is the second person of the Trinity, the only and eternally begotten Son of the Father. Through the virgin birth He has also come into our flesh.

Jesus speaks specifically of the name of the only begotten Son of God.

*To believe on the name
of the only begotten Son
is to place
your complete trust
in that name.*

In the Bible the name of someone refers to that person as he reveals

himself. Consequently, the name of the only begotten Son is Jesus as He has revealed Himself to us, and revealed Himself to us specifically as the only begotten of the Father.

Jesus revealed Himself to be the Son of God through the many mighty miracles He performed. No one ever performed miracles as did Jesus.

Jesus revealed Himself to be the Son of God through His teachings. The people marveled that Jesus spoke with authority and not as their own leaders, the Scribes and Pharisees.

But most of all Jesus revealed Himself to be the Son of God through His great works of salvation — His atoning death on the cross, His resurrection into glory, His sitting at the right hand of God, His coming again in judgment.

To believe on the name of the only begotten Son is to place your complete trust in that name. It means that you do not rely upon yourself. You do not rely on others. You rely only upon Jesus Christ and His mighty works that show Him to be God's Son.

In the context of our sins, to believe on the name of the Son of God means that you do not come to God on the basis of your own supposed goodness, worth, or works to escape the condemnation you deserve. Rather you come to God acknowledging your own unworthiness and inability. And you seek to escape the condemnation of your sins on the

basis of the perfect work of Jesus Christ alone.

Whoever so believes on the name of the only begotten Son of God is not condemned — not now, not in the final day of judgment, not ever.

The reason for this is quite simple.

The only way we can escape the condemnation of God is through the full payment of sin. If your sins are not paid for, you are condemned by God. If somehow there is payment for your sins, you escape the condemnation of your misdeeds.

And what will pay for our sin?

The price of sin is not paid with silver or gold. Neither is the price of sin paid through human tears or good intentions for the future.

The only thing that pays the price of sin is the atoning death of God's Son on the cross. For at the cross Jesus took our place and bore the full weight of God's wrath against our sin.

This perfect payment of the cross God accounts as ours through faith alone. As we cling to the blood of Christ in faith, God reckons the payment of the cross as payment of our sins so that there is no condemnation.

May God lead us to believe on the name of His only begotten Son!

Pray that God may lead us in faith daily to the precious blood of the cross to find payment for our sin!

That we may escape the condemnation of our sins and find the eternal joys of God's friendship! □

Augustine, on Rebuke

Far rather would I be censured by any one whatsoever, than be praised by either the erring or the flatterer. For the lover of truth need fear no one's censure. For he that censures, must needs be either enemy or friend. And if an enemy reviles, he must be borne with: but a friend, if he errs, must be taught; if he teaches, listened to. But if one who errs praises you, he confirms your error; if one who flatters, he seduces you into error. "Let the righteous," therefore, "smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me; but the oil of the sinner shall not anoint my head."

— *On the Trinity*, II, I, Preface

Church Unity, Reformed Synods, and Independency

Editorial

(2)

In a letter published in the previous issue of this magazine, a correspondent in Liverpool, England asked for clarification of an earlier editorial on "The Binding Decisions of a Reformed Synod" (cf. the *Standard Bearer*, June 1, 1991). Aware of the attack on synods (or general assemblies) in Reformed circles in our day, he was really asking for a further defense of churches banding together in synodical union.

Reformed and Presbyterian churches have always grounded synodical union in the unity of the church of Christ. The spiritual unity of the body of Christ must come to visible, institutional manifestation. This is not exhausted in the local congregation, even as the local congregation does not exhaust the reality of the church. Congregations that share the Spirit of Christ, as evidenced and expressed by oneness in the truth of the Word of God, unite in the assemblies known as classis (or presbytery) and synod (or general assembly). By this synodical union, the congregations show the oneness of the church before the world to the greater glory of Christ their Head. They themselves enjoy and benefit from this unity in fellowship and mutual help. They cooperate in the Lord's work, doing together what they could not do alone, or doing better what no one church could do as well on its own. In unity there is strength.

When the Reformed churches of The Netherlands meeting at Wesel in 1568 advised the forming of the classis,

their purpose was the unity of the church:

...for the establishing and preserving of consensus in doctrine, ceremonies, and church discipline, and for common actions and mutual consultation in matters of importance regarding common interests.

Likewise, the purpose of the original organization of the Dutch Reformed churches in a synod at Emden in 1571 was "in order to institute the unity of the churches in outward form."

The biblical basis for denominational union in a synod, therefore, is not only one passage in the New Testament, namely, Acts 15. The importance of this one passage for the denominational connection, however,

*By this synodical union,
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must not be minimized. Every Reformed and Presbyterian defense of the broader, or major, assemblies appeals to this passage. This is the passage adduced by the Westminster Confession of Faith in support of its statement that "for the better government, and further edification of the church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called Synods

or Councils" (31.1). The Christian Reformed authorities on Reformed church order, Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma, faithfully transmit the Dutch Reformed tradition when, in support of authoritative synods, they appeal first of all to the Jerusalem assembly of Acts 15.

Is the exercise of ecclesiastical authority as provided for in Article 36 (of the church order of Dordt—DJE) based on Biblical example? Yes. We read in Acts 15 This meeting at Jerusalem ... clearly partakes of the character of major assemblies. It may be regarded as a forerunner of what became well-organized and regular later on (*The Church Order Commentary*, Zondervan, 1954, p. 161).

It will not do for the Rev. Eric Alexander, writing in the *Evangelical Times* of England (January 1992), to dismiss this appeal to Acts 15 in support of synods on the ground that there is "only one passage of Scripture" that mentions synods or councils. The Holy Spirit does not have to repeat a truth a dozen times in order for it to be binding doctrine in the church. It is enough that He clearly teach something once.

In Acts 15, the Holy Spirit teaches that a doctrinal dispute in a local congregation was referred to a broader assembly for judgment. This broader assembly did not consist only of the apostles. But it consisted of the apostles and elders (vss. 2,4,6,22,23). Nor was the authority of this assembly only that of the apostles. The decision taken was authoritative, and

its authority was that of the Holy Spirit working through the apostles and elders. Verse 4 of Acts 16 speaks of "the decrees ... that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem." In addition, the decision of the Jerusalem assembly was binding upon all the churches (cf. Acts 15:28,29; 16:4). This was an assembly broader than the consistory (or session) of the local church that ordained decrees for all the churches to keep. This was also a broader assembly that was recognized and accepted by all the churches as Acts 16:5 implies. For it was an assembly that expressed the unity of the churches.

Acts 15 is only one very clear and concrete aspect of the biblical ground for the denominational union. The biblical basis for the denominational bond is the massive testimony in Scripture to the unity of Christ's church. The denomination is implied in Jesus' prayer for the unity of His church in John 17:20ff.; for the inward, spiritual unity of believers must be manifested and expressed outwardly and institutionally as the Lord indicates when He says, "that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them...." Denominational union is demanded by the apostolic concern that all the churches teach the same doctrines, practice the same order, and cooperate in the proper work of the churches (cf. I Cor. 7:17; 11:16; 14:33; Rom. 15:25-33).

It is not the case, therefore, that membership in a denomination is purely a voluntary matter for a congregation. It is true that the congregation freely joins herself to the denomination of like-minded churches. But it is also true that she does this by virtue of the Spirit's working within her to obey His command to seek the unity of the church. Membership in a denomination is a duty and a necessity for the local church, as membership in a local church is a duty and necessity for the individual believer.

Refusal by a congregation is visited by God with judgments. These are the "perils of independency." The independent congregation is tyrannized

by a lordly pastor. Or, congregation and minister fall into the hands of dictatorial elders. If the church escapes these disasters, she is liable to be torn apart by internal strife, since there is no remedy for local troubles in appeal to broader assemblies. The independent church deprives herself of the safety of the multitude of counsellors (cf. Prov. 11:14). Often, when the dominant minister retires or dies, the church is at a loss where to find a good, well-trained pastor. It is common that the independent church is so dependent upon a particular, gifted preacher that the church virtually passes away with him. There is, besides, the danger that the church turns in upon herself, concentrating all her attention and energies upon herself, as though the kingdom of Christ were no broader than this one congregation.

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of counsellors.*

But is there not the equally great, or even greater, danger of the hierarchy and apostasy of synod? And does this not spell the ruin of all the churches in the denomination? Our English correspondent raises this question, not so much because of his own fear of synod (for he confesses that he is "strongly persuaded that only connectionalism leading to synod is Scriptural") as because of the anti-synodical sentiment that is afoot today.

There are curious misconceptions about the Reformed synod in our day. One is that synod is inherently an evil or the threat of evil. On the contrary, the rule is that the synod is a good thing. Such was the Jerusalem synod. The effect of the Jerusalem assembly upon the churches was beneficial: "And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 16:5). Such were the ecumenical synods that con-

fessed the truths of the Trinity and of the Person and natures of Christ against pernicious heresies. Such was the Synod of Dordt. I myself have seen broader assemblies rescue beleaguered pastors; "save" sorely troubled congregations; deliver wronged and oppressed saints; uphold faithful consistories that were attacked by mistaken or wicked members of the congregation; and restore, or maintain, peace in the denomination by wise, biblical judgments on issues of controversy.

To be sure, synod is subject to the evil of hierarchy. But this is the abuse of the synod, not its necessary quality. The consistory of the local church is also liable to become hierarchical, as is the individual pastor or elder. But no Reformed man for this reason repudiates consistories or pastors or elders.

Another curious notion that gains currency is that synods become apostate overnight apart from the apostasy of the churches in the denomination. Thus, suddenly, the "good" congregations are confronted by the "evil" synod that has materialized out of nowhere. This is pure myth. Synods that set aside the authority of Scripture and the Reformed confessions, adopt false doctrines, and approve unrighteous behavior only show that the churches of these denominations have been falling away from Christ for a long time. After all, where do the ministers and elders that make up the erring synods come from? From the local congregations. And all the congregations share responsibility for the falling away of the denomination from the truth. At the very least, they tolerated the departure.

*No synod of the PRC
is going to become apostate,...
apart from a long history
of gradually increasing
unfaithfulness
on the part of
the congregations themselves.*

The truth of this is illustrated in the issue that now threatens to split the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), the ordination of women as ministers and elders. Conservatives excoriate the synod of 1990 as an evil synod for approving the ordination of women to the offices of minister and elder. But already 35 years ago the CRC approved women voting at the congregational meeting. This is rule in the church by women and a concession to the spirit of feminism in the world. In 1978 the CRC approved the ordination of women to the office of deacon. This too is rule in the church by women. The decision to ordain women as ministers and elders is the inevitable end of a long process. All the congregations have been well aware of this process and were involved in it. All are responsible for it.

This leads to the interesting question with which our correspondent in England closes: "Just suppose that the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches became corrupt and handed down a decision contrary to the Word of God. I assume that you are going to tell me that local presbyteries and

local churches need not, indeed must not, accept such decisions. That turns your local churches into independents, does it not?"

No synod of the PRC is going to become apostate, so that it decrees unrighteous decrees, apart from a long history of gradually increasing unfaithfulness on the part of the congregations themselves. Against this, every congregation, every pastor, every consistory member, and every church member is called by Christ to fight daily, in every lawful way. God grant that we are doing this!

If a synod of the PRC should make a decision that corrupts the gospel or transgresses the law, there are certain actions that the faithful congregation may not take. She may not form a "little church within the church" with other faithful congregations. Then she stays in the now apostate denomination, but tries to live her own separate life within the organization of the denomination. This makes a mockery of the denominational bond, that is, of the unity of Christ's church. Nor may she publicly agitate against the decision, stirring up opposition against it wher-

ever she can. This is forbidden by Article 31 of the church order of the PRC, the venerable church order of Dordt. It is revolution in the sphere of the church.

Certainly the faithful people of God will never accept decisions that contradict the Holy Scriptures and that approve wickedness, even though these decisions are adopted by synod. Their sole recourse is to protest the evil decision to synod. And if synod on behalf of the denomination upholds the evil decision, the faithful congregations must sever their connection with the PRC.

This does not turn them into independents. For as soon as possible, they will either establish a new denomination on the basis of the Word of God and the Reformed confessions or they will unite with an existing denomination of faithful Reformed churches.

They must.

They cannot do otherwise.

For it is Reformed to seek the unity of the church. □

— DJE

Letters

● Aussie Appreciation

In response to your editorial, "Promoting the Reformed Faith in Australia" (*Standard Bearer*, January 15, 1992), I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation and thanks. Moreover, I am sure that our church in Australia rejoices with me and adds her collective voice of thankfulness.

The spirit in which the editorial was written and the thoughts that were expressed in it are characteristic of the love and concern we have received since arriving in America last September. The care and hospitality we have received have been remark-

able. Having to establish a home, virtually from scratch, was made so much easier with the help and support of newly found friends. Encouraging words, genuine interest, and the formation of friendships have made settling into a new country far less traumatic for us.

Our spiritual home, while we are here, is Hope Protestant Reformed Church. Here we have been made to feel very welcome, so that we can truly call it "our home."

Studies at the Seminary have been demanding, but such a great blessing. The truths of the Word, which we all hold to be so precious,

are taught there powerfully, uncompromisingly, and vibrantly. Already, I firmly believe, it has been worthwhile coming over to your country, though we have really only just begun our studies!

For all of these things, and many more which are not possible to list in this letter, I wish to thank the PRC and her members. These are practical consequences of the fellowship of the saints which my wife, my children, and I will never forget, and which we will always cherish and hold dear. □

David Higgs,
Wyoming, MI

All Around Us

Prof. Robert Decker

● "HOLY ROLLERS": Bigger, Richer Than Ever

I am indebted to Kenneth Vink, Corporate Systems Supervisor at Spartan Stores, Inc. and an elder in our Grandville, MI Church, for the source of this article. Mr. Vink sent me a copy of an in-depth study of the Assemblies of God denomination which appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*.

Eluding the hellfire and smoke surrounding his pulpit, the Rev. Tommy Barnett waves good-bye. With a hearty 'Hallelujah,' he soars straight toward heaven and out of sight.

The abrupt flight of this Pentecostal Peter Pan in a gray suit brings gasps from many of the 6,500 faithful at Phoenix First Assembly. Joining in the extravaganza are a \$500,000 special-effects system, 200-member choir and 25-piece orchestra. It's a finale fit for the mecca where one of Mr. Barnett's assistant pastors studies how to make such miracles happen: Bally's casino in Las Vegas.

Indeed, Assemblies of God churches (AG) are flying higher than ever these days. Just four years ago they were mired in the sex scandals of their most famous ministers, the now defrocked Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggert. On the one hand, the AG, the so-called "holy rollers" of Christendom, were humiliated. But on the other hand the scandals gave them wide exposure. "Overnight, we went from relative obscurity to the world asking how our pastors got so out of control," says Juleen Turnage, the AG's secretary of information.

The AG, whose beliefs include faith healing and glossolalia (speaking or praying in unknown tongues, as evidences of being "baptized with the Holy Spirit"), is emerging with bigger ambitions than its television preachers ever had. The AG have opened over 400 churches nationwide since 1987. Their total membership exceeds four million. The AG has set a goal of adding 5,000 churches in the decade of the 1990s. They already have some 1,600 missionaries working in 121 countries. They operate 18 colleges with a total enrollment of 10,000. In these schools alcohol use is grounds for dismissal and dancing and movies are not allowed.

Many new AG churches are "supersanctuaries" that seat up to 10,000, with stages instead of altars, giant overhead TV screens making pastors larger than life, and laser-lights effecting New Age tableaux. Church stores offer all kinds of paraphernalia: fortune cookies with Scripture inside, miniature \$100 bills praising Jesus on the back, and T-shirts advising "Kick Satan's Butt."

The AG's problem of putting religion in perspective with their prosperity is evident at Phoenix First Assembly. The church building is a grand circular edifice located on 72 acres. The sandstone entrance near the fountain and waterfall has the elegant look of the neighborhood's golf resorts. The building cost \$9 million. Pastor Tommy Barnett claims his is the fastest growing church in the nation. It has an average weekly attendance of 9,600. Similarly, Carpenter's Home Church, the 10,000 seat AG church in Lakeland, FL, cost \$12 million. Calvary Temple in Naperville, IL is growing so fast that it's planning to build a 3,500 seat sanctuary that will cost \$15 million.

AG members claim to have become millionaires after praying for

this. Prayer brings them high paying jobs at good companies, new cars, and healing from all kinds of sickness.

While some of these excesses are denounced by officials at the AG headquarters in Springfield, MO, the headquarters itself is big business. Their printing presses, e.g., turn out 25 tons of books and pamphlets per day! Their video production center produces hours of sermons which are aired by most of the nation's 200 religious TV stations.

Reading all this, we are reminded of Scripture's warning against the false teachers in the church who "...through covetousness with feigned words make merchandise of you ..." (II Pet. 2:3).

The Wall Street Journal

● New Law on Religion Passed in Singapore

The government of Singapore has forbidden anyone to escalate inter-religious tension. It also forbids anyone to incite others to defy, challenge, or oppose government policies, or promote subversion in the name of religion. Violations carry a fine of \$10,000 and up to two years in prison.

Churches in Singapore have given the new law mixed reviews. The National Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese have objected to the broad and ambiguous wording of the law. Singapore Baptists have approved the law. The latter suggest that only Muslim extremists and very zealous Christian groups might stir up dissension. Just how the new law will be implemented is not clear.

What effects might this law have on our sister churches, the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore? Perhaps one of the brothers from these churches can tell us. Does the law

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mean, e.g., that should the ERCS evangelize among Buddhists she would be guilty of "escalating inter-religious tension"? Already in recent months, door-to-door and street evangelism have been criticized. Rapid growth of churches in the past months has raised apprehensions among some Singaporeans. If Christians are seen as too aggressive, the government may decide they are "escalating tension."

Pulse

REC News Exchange

● Charismatic Reformed?

Early last year the directors of the recently formed Association of Reformed and Charismatic Churches met in Florida to approve their Statement of Faith. Joseph R. McAuliffe of Tampa, a staff writer for R. J. Rushdoony's *Chalcedon Report*, said "the purpose of the Association is to provide Christian leaders who are committed to the principal tenets of Reformation theology and to present manifestations of the Holy Spirit a setting for fellowship, accountability, and mutual edification." McAuliffe also reports that "the Association is in a very embryonic stage and our goal for this year is to complete our Statement of Faith and write our Constitution. We hope to hold our first conference in April 1992 and invite all interested parties who share our vision for

the authority of God's Word, the power of God's Spirit, church planting, missions, and cultural transformation."

From this it appears that the Reconstructionists, or at least some of them, are going charismatic. Reformed and charismatic is a contradiction in terms. No confessionally Reformed church or person (in the sense of the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards) can possibly be charismatic. The Reformed Truth repudiates not only charismatic excesses, but also its basic teachings.

Christian Observer

● M.A.R.S. Decides to Relocate

At its Board Meeting on January 22-23, the Trustees of Mid-America Reformed Seminary adopted a significant resolution concerning the future of the school. The Board decided to relocate the seminary to the Chicagoland area, in order better to fulfill its goal to serve a broad range of Reformed and Presbyterian churches in an increasingly urban world.

This decision was taken with grateful acknowledgment of the support of local constituents, but with the conviction that such a move is compelled by the seminary's vision for broader service. "It is clearly a decision taken in faith," said one board

member.

A committee has been appointed to work out details relative to the decision, such as site, timetable of the move, and financing.

Said Board President Richard Blauw of Southern California, "We thank everyone in this region for their faithful support in the past and we trust God that we will continue to enjoy that support during the time of transition and after the actual move."

Mid-America Reformed Seminary is a school serving existing and emerging Presbyterian and Reformed churches through the training of pastors. Its Board contains representatives of many such churches and from all across North America. The Seminary is financially supported by the free-will gifts of Reformed believers in many states and nations.

● A Thought Worth Pondering

Here is a statement which all of us who own TV sets ought to ponder. The quote is taken from an article which appeared in a recent issue of the *Banner of Truth*, edited by Maurice Roberts. Here it is:

The television . . . is certainly a great time-waster and will give little help to anyone who has his sights on getting to the Celestial City. □

In His Fear Rev. Arie denHartog

It is of greatest importance that we understand the way that the Lord deals with us when He chastens us. If

Rev. denHartog is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

Our Father's Chastisement

we do not understand this there is a great danger that the evil one will lead us to discouragement and despair. Particularly at times in our life when we are experiencing great difficulty and trials, he will tempt us to deny the truth of God's Word and to forsake the Lord. It has even happened in the lives of God's people

that failure to understand God's way of chastisement has led them far from the Lord for a time in their lives, and caused them to become bitter with the Lord's ways until God in His great mercy brought them back. I have seen this as a pastor.

It is of great interest and spiritual profit for all of us to examine

what the Bible has to say on this subject. Even a cursory study of the Scriptures will indicate how often the subject of divine chastisement is dealt with. Both the Old and the New Testaments speak of it repeatedly. The most extensive treatment of this subject is found in Hebrews chapter 12. God has preserved in the Scriptures great examples of His saints who endured the Lord's chastening hand in their lives, and of the great spiritual benefit and blessing they received from the Lord.

This is in a sense a very solemn and serious subject. Few in our superficial age, when it is imagined that the Christian life is to be only ease and luxury and joy and pleasure, ever contemplate the teaching of the Lord about chastisement. Some will dismiss the whole subject as too serious and unnecessary to consider at length. But we dare to say that this subject is going to become very important to every child of God at some time in his life. We want to spend some time writing on this subject in the next couple of articles in this rubric of the *Standard Bearer*.

*... if we are
without chastisement,
then we are not
sons of God at all
but bastards*

The Bible clearly teaches that every child of God will at times in his life be chastened of the Lord. In fact the Word of God states very strongly that if we are without chastisement, then we are not sons of God at all but bastards (Heb. 12:8). Every true child of God needs at times to be chastened. When we rightly understand the chastening of the Lord in our lives, then we are truly the children of God.

Let us begin by saying something about the meaning of the word "chastisement." Literally this word means to deal with as children. The Greek word used here comes from the same root as the word used in the

Greek for children. It is a word that is used to describe the whole of the training, instruction, and upbringing of a child. It includes the admonition, correction, and discipline of children. The word used here can be applied to all that is done for a child to bring him to maturity.

Implied in the word as it is used in the Scriptures therefore is the great truth that we are the children of God. Not all in the world are children of God. It is the unique and high privilege of God's people to be called the children of God. By nature we are the children of wrath. We are children of God through the action of God's great love and grace in His Son Jesus Christ. We are children of God by the wonder of adoption through the blood of Jesus Christ. God made us spiritually His children through the work of regeneration in our hearts. The Lord molds and forms us as His children through the process of sanctification. When God chastens us He deals with us as His dear children. Chastisement is an important aspect of God's work of sanctification. All those who truly believe are the children of God. God gives His children the faith to believe in Him. He tries the faith of His children often through chastisement. When Job understood this in his life he had the hope that he would come forth from the chastening process as gold tried by fire to the praise and glory of God.

When the word chastisement is used in Scripture it usually refers especially to the difficulties and trials through which the Lord leads us during our life on earth. It describes the dealing of the Lord with us during fiery trials and stormy troubles. He may chasten us by suddenly taking away from us something very dear and precious. He may chasten us by sending us a prolonged grievous illness. God chastened Job. In one day He took away all his riches and all his children. God may sometimes chasten us by taking one of our dear children from our bosoms. Maybe He chastens us by taking out of this life a dear, godly husband or wife with whom we have lived for many years

in the covenant of marriage and leaves us alone in the world. The Lord may sometimes chasten us with a sickness that we have to live with for a long time and that is so awful that no doctor on earth can cure us. He may chasten us so severely that we finally die from such a disease. The Lord may chasten us by sending trouble and disappointment in our life. Maybe He will lead us in the way of failing in our attempt to attain to some great goal that we had set for ourselves. Sometimes the Lord chastens us by financial hardship and loss, so that we have really to struggle to make ends meet, and maybe even have to go hungry sometimes.

*God loves us
with the tender love
of a Father
and is compassionate
to us in all of our afflictions
and trials.*

For many of us, that might be hard to imagine, but there are always saints of God on the earth somewhere who are chastened in such a manner. The Lord sometimes chastens His saints through the persecution and hatred of the world. The Hebrew Christians whom the inspired writer of the epistle to the Hebrews addressed were experiencing such chastisement. The Lord can sometimes use even the devil to trouble us, and by that same affliction He chastises us. The classic example of that is of course the whole story of Job. The Lord dealt also with David in such a manner in connection with the numbering of Israel. And we are told that Paul's thorn in the flesh was a "messenger of Satan to buffet him." Chastisement can sometimes be so severe that we groan in agony. The chastisement of the Lord can even last the whole of our life on earth. In many cases the Lord chastises elderly saints more severely than He does youthful ones. He sometimes sends one affliction after the other and gives sorrow

upon sorrow. Sometimes the Lord chastens by withdrawing the consciousness of His favor and lovingkindness so that the Christian gropes in darkness and despair and cries out to God. Sometimes in our Christian life we are afflicted by doubts and fears that are part of God's chastisement.

It is impossible to understand God's way of chastisement unless we know and believe the greatest truth of all the Bible, the truth of God's absolute sovereignty. God rules over heaven and earth in His goodness and wisdom. He rules not only over the mighty events of history but also over all the circumstances of our personal life. He blesses us with health and strength, with the vigor and beauty of youth, and also rules over the days of our decline and all the infirmities that come along with this. He often uses the circumstances of our life, which are all completely under His control, to chasten us.

Chastisement is an act of God's love for His children. When He chastens His children He never does so out of cruelty or vindictiveness on account of their sins. God loves us with the tender love of a Father and is compassionate to us in all of our afflictions and trials. He knows what is necessary for our salvation. He does not afflict us without a cause or because He delights in seeing His beloved children suffering. He always seeks the end of our salvation for the glory of His own name. He deals with us only in perfect love and wisdom.

There is a constant refrain found throughout Scripture. In at least five books of the Bible the same phrase appears: "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." It is very important that we fully understand and believe this. For if we do not understand this we will inevitably become discouraged under the chastening hand of the Lord, and in times of severe chastisement become bitter against the Lord. If we do not fully understand this, we will imagine that God is cruel and harsh with us. We will imagine that we do not deserve

what He sends us in life and will begin to murmur and complain against Him. This all comes from a wrong understanding of the chastening of the Lord. The Lord chastens only in His great and tender love and affection. His love for us in Christ Jesus is absolutely sovereign and unchangeable. It will never fail. Nothing in this life or in the life to come can ever separate us from the love of God. We must steadfastly believe this by faith in order to endure the chastening of the Lord.

*Through chastisement
He prepares us for that place
which is reserved
in heaven for us.*

There is a very great difference between the punishment and the chastisement of the Lord. The Lord in holy wrath punishes the wicked. The Bible says that He is angry with the wicked every day. He curses them in all their doings. When He sends them affliction it is in His wrath and displeasure against their sins. Even when the Lord sends prosperity to the wicked He sets them upon slippery places to cast them down to destruction (Ps. 73). God punishes the wicked in order finally to destroy them in hell. Our Lord Jesus Christ, however, has borne away all the punishment of the sins of His people through His death on the cross. God will not punish us a second time for our sins. We must never imagine that when the Lord is chastening us He is actually punishing us for our sins. If we do that, we deny the cross of Christ. Truly there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. God does not chasten us to punish us for our sins.

The Lord may chasten us in connection with certain specific sins in our life, as we shall consider later, but He will not punish us for those sins. The difference is very important to understand. God chastens His children who are first of all made right-

eous at the cross of Jesus Christ. God chastens His children in love and always for their good and salvation. If we understand this rightly we will not carelessly go to the Lord in prayer and insist that He always remove every trial and hardship from the pathway of our life. Rather we will pray that the Lord will give us grace that we might be able to endure His chastening hand and that every chastisement He sends us will be for our good and salvation. (But who prays such a prayer today?) The Lord has prepared a particular place in glory for each of His saints in Christ Jesus. Through chastisement He prepares us for that place which is reserved in heaven for us.

There are two more things we want to consider in our next article. We want to examine carefully God's purpose in chastisement. And finally we want to say something about how we as the children of God must endure the chastisement of the Lord. □

REMEMBER:
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Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

Choice: Tuition Vouchers, Christian Schools, and the 1st Amendment

It's time parents were free to choose the schools that their children attend. This approach will create the competitive climate that stimulates excellence in our private and parochial schools as well.

President Bush, April, 1991

The Bush Administration is sparing no expense to embrace a far-reaching definition of choice — including aid to parochial schools, if that will pass the hurdle of the 1st Amendment. Education Secretary Lamar Alexander has called government support of parochial school students “as American as apple pie.” Alexander hopes eventually to erode the ironclad distinction between public and private education.

Time, Sept. 16, 1991

Collapse of Public Education

For almost a decade now, the collapse of our nation's public school system seemed inevitable. Each fall, attempting to stem the tide of sharply rising deficits, teachers strikes, student violence, and high school illiteracy, federal and state governments continued frantically to pour billions of dollars into the “black hole” of public education. The results have been a grim disappointment. The nation's public school systems are now on the verge of financial and educational bankruptcy.

In the past decade several intensive studies of the public schools (e.g., *A Nation at Risk*) have conclusively demonstrated that the system is woefully inadequate, perhaps even a complete failure, in educating its children.

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Although the state public school system has often been criticized in the past for its shortcomings, the fundamental concept of “state” education has escaped widespread scrutiny. More recently, however, the very notion of a “state” school system is under attack — why should the government own and operate our nation's schools?

This past April the Bush Administration launched an unprecedented assault against the “monopoly” of public schools. And what President Bush and his Education Secretary Alexander are now suggesting could eventually be a total dismemberment of the public educational system as we know it today. Armed with a recent study from the Brookings Institution (*Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* by John Chubb and Terry Moe), the Bush Administration is proposing a new “remedy” for the ills of the public school system. And this radical option has been cleverly given a politically correct label: “parental choice.”

The Radical Alternative — Parental Choice

The proponents of Choice are suggesting that “free-market” principles of competition should be introduced into the educational arena to challenge the stagnant and unproductive monopoly public schools have too long enjoyed. To do this, Choice adherents propose that government should in some way subsidize the tuition of *all* students, who would then have the choice as to which school they would attend. These tuition “vouchers” (as they were first called by the free market economist Milton Friedman in the 1950s), would presumably be used by students to enroll *anywhere*, including all private and parochial schools.

The contention is that such universal “choice” of schools would force public schools to be competitive or face extinction when students abandon an inferior state school for a superior learning alternative elsewhere.

Although proposals for tuition vouchers have been around for sev-

eral decades now (see, e.g., *Society, State & Schools* by McCarthy, et. al.), the concept has gained political viability recently when minorities began advocating Choice as an escape from inner-city schools. A pilot school \$2,500 voucher program involving eight private, non-sectarian schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (ironically conceived by Polly Williams, a black-separatist state representative from Milwaukee) has gained nationwide attention and approval. Although an innovative \$2,500 tuition tax credit was recently defeated in an Oregon referendum, Choice in one form or another is rapidly becoming a real political possibility in many states and perhaps nationally, if Congress adopts Bush's "America 2000" educational program.

Constitutional and Other Problems

Choice is not without its detractors, however. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the National Education Association (NEA), and Americans United for Separation of Church and State bitterly oppose the plan, arguing that the demise of the traditional public school system will cause a plethora of other problems, including renewed segregation, exclusion of difficult and handicapped children, and unprecedented chaos during any transition period.

Another formidable hurdle for a "free market" in education is the 1st Amendment prohibition of governmental "establishment of religion." The Supreme Court has historically struck down any direct governmental aid to "sectarian" schools as violative of the anti-establishment clause which mandates that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion...."

But the Bush Administration and some constitutional scholars are now arguing that such tuition vouchers will vault the "wall of separation" between church and state because such vouchers or tax credits would merely constitute permissible "indirect" aid to sectarian schools and primarily serve the legitimate secular purpose of education.

*Governmental sponsorship
and financial aid
have invariably
been accompanied by
the twin monster head
of governmental control.*

Vouchers and Christian Schools

Although the Christian school movement may initially experience some euphoria over such a promising financial windfall of tuition grants or tax credits, it would seem prudent to be very cautious and realistic about these radical developments in the past few months. Governmental sponsorship and financial aid have invariably been accompanied by the twin monster head of governmental control. It seems inevitable that if and when Congress and the states adopt these proposed tuition voucher or tax credit schemes, there will be the usual accompanying conditions and restrictions upon the use and acceptance of such governmental aid. Indeed, it is not unlikely that the schools receiving such aid will be forced to comply with current governmental regulations regarding specific curriculum content, affirmative action and minority quotas, sexual discrimination,

corporal punishment, teacher certification, and other such criteria as a prerequisite for acceptance of government funds.

Moreover, it would appear that the proponents of Choice are superficially ignoring the fundamental problem with state schools. The cause of the meltdown in public education is not the lack of parental choice of schools, but rather the destruction of the traditional family structure. Malnourished and psychologically troubled children from dysfunctional homes with a single, working parent or no parents at all are ill-equipped to learn and mature in any school. Choice may be treating only the symptom and not the disease.

But our parental, Christian day-school movement should nonetheless closely follow with great interest this current debate about Choice in education. And although the outcome may be some form of welcome financial relief for Christian school parents (who, because of local real estate taxes, are now unfairly paying "twice" for education), we should be very cautious and wary about relinquishing any control over or supervision of our schools to the federal or state government arguably earning that prerogative by virtue of direct or indirect financial aid. □

The Shepherd

*Although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find my sheep.
But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord
passed through
Ere He found the sheep that was lost.*

— Anonymous

Go Ye Into All The World

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

Approaching the Unbeliever

What do we say to those who give no evidence of being saved?

There is no pat answer. It is not as simple as reciting four spiritual laws.

There are certain truths which must be presented, although there is not just one way to present them. Of course, every unbeliever needs to know the Savior. The knowledge of Christ is the essential truth they must be taught. However, in order to know and enjoy the only comfort of belonging to the Savior, which enables one to live and die happily, it is necessary that they be first taught how great their sins and miseries are (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1). The first Scriptural truth which must be presented (in one way or another) is the truth of the unrighteousness and depravity of man.

The Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to declare the truth of man's great need for a Savior, in the first two chapters of his epistle to the church in Rome. The apostle addressed himself to those who were unrighteous in three different situations. In this article we will consider the inspired writer's approach to these three kinds of unbelievers.

Paul seeks to show the saints in Rome that what the unrighteous in all three situations have in common is the wrath of God, whether it is imme-

diately evident or will be evident in the day when "God shall judge the secrets of men" and will "render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:16, 6). The wrath of God is upon them because of their sins and miseries. They are unrighteous.

* * * * *

The first group of unrighteous are described by Paul in 1:18-32. They are without the Bible and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. They have "prospered" in their sin, committing the worst kinds of sins. And, to make it worse, they take great pleasure in their gross sins.

In this first group of unbelievers are those in the "backward" countries of the world. The gospel never reached their country or village. They died in their sins, never having seen a Bible or having heard of Jesus, the Savior.

*This knowledge
that God exists
is always accompanied
by the knowledge that
God must be glorified.*

Also in this first group of unrighteous are those in "civilized" countries who have given themselves over to the worst kinds of sins: homosexuality and "filled with all unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:26-31). These supposedly civilized people not only willingly commit every kind of sin, but take pleasure in those who commit such sins with them. What makes this delight in sin so terrible is

the fact that they know "the judgment of God that they which commit such things are worthy of death" (Rom. 1:32). They know no shame.

Although these unbelievers may not have a Bible and may not know of Jesus the Savior, they are not without the knowledge of God. God makes sure that all men, even those in countries where the gospel has not yet been preached, know that He is. God Himself showed it to them (Rom. 1:19). These unbelievers know of God from the realm of creation, but that knowledge is also manifest "in them" (vs. 19). The deity and power of God are "clearly seen, being understood" (vs. 21). This knowledge that God exists is always accompanied by the knowledge that God must be glorified. However, these unrighteous sinners, increasing their guilt, hold down the truth (vs. 18), and change the truth of God into a lie (vs. 25).

The missionary and evangelism committee which want to speak to this kind of sinner must be aware of what the Bible says of them. That which is to be told them is something which they are constantly denying to themselves. Their problem is not that they do not know God, but rather that they refuse to glorify and to thank God.

The missionary and witnessing Christian are going to point out that the sinner stands in danger of the judgment of God. They should show that God's wrath is already "revealed...against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (vs. 18).

How is this wrath of God manifested? What does this wrath of God do?

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In His wrath God delivers men unto sin. The natural law of consequence operates on sin, so that sin intensifies as, in the wrath of God, it is punished with more sin. The path of unbelief is sin, then wrath, then more sin, then more wrath, still more sin, and still more wrath, etc. The result is that man reaps for himself a correspondingly greater toll of divine vengeance.

The power that pulls man down is the unchangeable operation of the wrath of God. Romans 1 teaches clearly that sin's seemingly unchecked growth is, in reality, God's judicial abandonment of man unto sin. God's wrath corresponds to the organic growth of sin. God brings man as low as possible, in order that man might see the consequences of his sin. Man falls below the beast, making a calf his god. And man does things sexually that an animal would never do.

The Reformed missionary and the Reformed believer are not left silent in the face of gross sin. Nor does such gross sin mean that all evangelistic effort on our part is futile. While the wrath of God is revealed from heaven upon such societies corporately, there may be individuals within who are the elect of God. Do not forget that God sent Jonah to Nineveh. God can have His own even in societies which are characterized by the manifestation of the wrath of God in this present time.

Wickedness is great but not greater than the power of God's grace to rescue. The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation! It is the power that lifts individuals up and out of harm's way.

* * * * *

The unrighteous sinners in the second case are those who appear to be free from the wrath of God in this life (Rom. 2:1-16). This is what they believe to be true. In fact, they look upon the unrighteous sinners in the first case and see a marked difference between themselves and those who are obviously the objects of divine wrath already in this lifetime.

The Holy Spirit, through Paul, speaks immediately against the pride

of these sinners and shows that they are just as inexcusable because they did the same things (2:1). It could be that this group of unbelievers do not violate the commands as obviously and as seriously, but they do violate them. Maybe they did not kill, but they hated. Maybe they did not commit any acts of homosexuality, but they did wrongly desire in their hearts. And "the judgment of God is against them which commit such things" (2:2).

*... the presence of the
many good things
which God is pleased
to give mankind carries
a responsibility
for the recipients,
namely to repent.*

The hypocritical attitude of these equally inexcusable sinners arose because of possibly two erroneous conceptions. First, they might have conceived that they would escape the judgment of God (2:3). Or, secondly, they might conclude that they are the objects of God's goodness because they do not see themselves under the wrath of God. They identify the apparent absence of God's wrathful judgments as God's goodness. They concluded that they were better and that they did not have to fear God's wrath at all.

Paul is used by God to alert these unrighteous sinners to several truths.

First, the presence of the many good things which God is pleased to give mankind carries a responsibility for the recipients, namely to repent (2:4). Just as these good things demand of them that they glorify and thank God (1:20), so they call the recipients to be converted.

Secondly, the apparent absence of God's wrath does not add up to God's love. God's goodness is not equivalent to His love and grace.

Thirdly, their refusal to repent and to thank God is to be viewed properly as a "despising" of God's

goodness. They treat the many good things which God gives them as worthless. The ignoring of the responsibility which comes with the good things that God gives them is a despising of God's goodness.

Fourthly, although God's wrath may not be openly manifest upon them (as it is with the gross sinners described in chapter 1), such does not mean that they have escaped God's wrath altogether.

Fifthly, their refusal to repent and their despising of God's goodness results in their actively treasuring up unto themselves wrath in the day of wrath (2:5). All the while they thought they were free from God's wrath, in reality they were treasuring up wrath against the judgment day. Not God, but man himself, is actually the one who is piling up divine wrath for himself.

The Reformed missionary and the Reformed believer have the calling to warn those who appear to be living quietly with the bounties of God's goodness. They must be warned that if these good things do not lead them to a life of conversion, they are despising God's good gifts and treasuring up for themselves divine wrath. Therefore, while it may appear that they are not the objects of God's wrath, God in His forbearance is waiting to manifest His wrath in "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (2:5).

In addition, our not being ashamed of the Gospel of Christ means that we have an answer. We witness of the righteousness of God in Christ, which is revealed in the gospel. This we must do unashamedly, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.

* * * * *

The third group of unrighteous sinners to whom Paul gives warning are those Jews who thought that they were certainly going to escape the wrath of God because they were children of Abraham, because they were "called a Jew" (2:17). They felt protected from God's wrath by their religion, by their circumcision, by their having been catechized in the law, by

their ability to judge and reject all worldly philosophies, by their being teachers of babes and guides of the blind.

*Away with all our religion
and piety as the basis
of righteousness.*

To these unbelievers Paul comes with the instruction that in the judgment day they will not be able to use their religion as the ticket which gains them entrance into heaven. Their religion, circumcision, and instruction in the law are privileges; they are not the basis of personal righteousness before God. In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men no one will be able to use as a defense his religion or his doctrine or his denomination. If he cannot claim entrance

into the kingdom of heaven on the basis of casting out devils in Jesus' name (Matt. 7:21-23), then certainly his instruction in and knowledge of the law and his participation in the sacraments will also not gain for himself entrance into the kingdom.

Away with all our religion and piety as the basis of righteousness. Not one can or may use religion in order to stand before the living, holy God.

A real Jew and real circumcision are not outward, but inward. The only basis for anyone to stand before God with boldness in the judgment day is a circumcised heart — such a heart which lays hold *only* on the righteousness graciously earned by Jesus Christ and freely bestowed by the Holy Spirit.

There is nothing left in man (in us) of which to boast. We are nothing but poor, miserable sinners. I am nothing and my religion and piety are

nothing. My righteousnesses are filthy rags.

If this be understood and acknowledged, then we have room, and the right place, for the gospel.

Then, in the day when God will judge the secrets of all men, we will claim emptiness (not our righteousness). Then we will plead God's righteousness given in Christ.

Then God will speak: Your sins are forgiven. Then the impossible will happen: the unrighteous will be declared by God to be righteous.

* * * * *

The knowledge of this righteousness, which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, is what makes us unashamed of the gospel of Christ when we face any of these three kinds of unbelief. This is the message of the Reformed believer, evangelism committee, and missionary. □

Malachi

Lesson 6

The Coming of the Messenger of the Covenant

(Malachi 3:1-6)

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Carl Haak

In these verses of Malachi's prophecy the prophet speaks words of consolation and joy to true believers and words of severe judgment

Rev. Haak is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Lynden, Washington.

and warning to those who walk in wickedness. We have noted that the days in which Malachi prophesied were times of trouble for God's people who had returned from the Babylonian captivity. It was a time of apostasy, cold indifference, and treachery. Even on the part of God's true people there was despondency and secret despair. "Where is the God of judgment?"

they ask in chapter 2:17. A class of rich had arisen whose wealth was gained from their oppression of the poor. For the true believer it was a dark day, a day in which wickedness seemed triumphant.

In answer comes the mighty promise of God's sure judgment on the wicked and His salvation of the righteous. "Behold ... the messenger

of the covenant will suddenly come to his temple!" Unto the wicked He shall appear as a fire to consume and to execute swift judgment against all who practice wickedness and fear not God. For those who seek and delight in Him, He comes to purify them and present them before God in righteousness. And this is certain, for it is the word of the Lord, the one who changes not. Therefore the sons of Jacob, the elect of God, would be preserved even in the darkest of times.

Malachi very plainly speaks of the coming of Jesus Christ. This passage is, in part, very similar to Isaiah 40:3. Isaiah's prophecy must have been well known to the Old Testament believers. Malachi refers then to the promise of John the Baptist, the forerunner (see John 1:23, Matt. 3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 1:76, Luke 3:4-6, Matt. 11:10).

Concerning the coming of the promised Savior, the hope and salvation of all the church, Malachi has much to teach us.

1. It will be preceded by "my messenger," whose work would be to prepare the way before Him.

2. The promised Messiah is the "messenger of the covenant" who is the delight as well as the object of faith of all God's people.

3. The promised Christ is God, equal to and the same as God, one being with Jehovah. Note verse 1: "I will send my messenger ... and the Lord whom ye seek ... saith the Lord of hosts."

4. The coming of Christ in both His birth and return in judgment is viewed as one coming. Clearly Malachi speaks of His advent as well as His second coming in judgment.

5. This coming serves a dual purpose. He appears as a flame of fire to take vengeance on the wicked (vs. 5). And He comes to purify by fire the sons of Levi that they may offer to God sacrifices of righteousness (vs. 3).

Finally, our passage teaches us the certain preservation of the true children of God (vs. 6). The perseverance of the saints is guaranteed, not by their unchangeable love to God,

but by His unchangeable love to them, and by His eternal purpose and promise in Christ Jesus.

Memory Work

(Malachi 3:1-3, 6)

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.

But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap.

And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Questions for Study

1. Verse one is a beautiful prophecy of the coming and identity of Jesus Christ. We will want to examine it carefully to see its power and beauty.

a. Show from the New Testament Scriptures that the messenger who is to prepare the way for Christ is John the Baptist.

1) What does it mean that John was "to prepare the way before me"? (Is there any correlation to today as we await the final return of Christ?)

2) How did John prepare the way for Christ? Why was this necessary?

b. The identity of the promised Messiah.

1) Show from verse one that Jesus Christ is God. Compare this with Romans 9:5, I Timothy 3:16.

2) Look up Jeremiah 31:31, Hebrew 12:24, and Hebrews 9:15 and then explain what is meant by the fact that Christ is the messenger of the covenant. What is the relationship between Christ and the covenant?

c. What do the following verses teach concerning the identity of the "temple"?

Ephesians 2:20-22

Zechariah 6:12-15

II Corinthians 6:16

II Thessalonians 2:4

Jeremiah 7:4

Revelation 3:12

d. What does it mean that Christ shall "suddenly come to his temple"?

2. The purpose of Christ's coming: judgment and salvation.

a. What is the significance of the fact that Malachi sees the advent of Christ in Bethlehem and His final return as basically one coming?

b. From the following passages tell what the coming of Christ is to the wicked and unbeliever.

II Thessalonians 1:7-10, with Hebrews 12:24

Revelation 6:13-17

Luke 2:34

c. Christ comes to "purify" and "purge" the sins of Levi. Explain how the purifying of silver by fire is an example of Christ's work in believers (see I Pet. 1:7, Prov. 17:3).

1) Who are meant by "the sons of Levi"?

2) Compare verse 4 with I Peter 2:9 and Ephesians 5:26, 27. Then explain what verse 4 is saying.

d. Make a list of the sins mentioned in verse 5, finding other scriptures which mention the same evil and what the sin actually is.

e. How are all these sins summed under "and fear not me"?

3. The preservation of saints is founded on the very being of God.

a. Explain what the following passages say about God's immutability (unchangeableness)

Psalm 102:26, 27 (quoted in Hebrews 1:11, 12)

James 1:17

Numbers 23:19

II Timothy 2:13

b. What then is God's immutability?

c. Why is this the reason for the preservation of saints?

d. Why does this produce comfort and carefulness in the saints, and not carelessness?

4. Can you write from memory that familiar and beautiful passage, Malachi 3:1-3, 6? □

A Word Fitly Spoken

Rev. Dale Kuiper

Zeal

It is striking that both the Hebrew and the Greek words from which our KJV derives the words zeal, zealous, and zealot are words which have the basic meaning of heat. The Hebrew root means to boil with heat, to be hot. Metaphorically the word indicates excitement of mind, ardor, fervor of spirit, zeal in embracing, pursuing, or defending anything. The Greek word means to become very red, to be excited so that the face is red. Thus, this word also means to be zealous towards a person or thing, to burn with zeal. It should be noted that both these words can also mean jealousy or envy, and both words can have a negative or sinful implication; a bad, misplaced zeal in some contexts.

Men can be flushed in the face and burn with zeal in respect to that which is impure and sinful. The Jews had a zeal of God but not according to knowledge, so that they went about establishing their own righteousness (Rom. 10:2, 3). With great zeal Paul persecuted the church of God (Phil. 3:6). The false teachers among the Galatian converts were zealous but not correct (Gal. 4:17). These biblical examples of false zeal serve as a warning to us. In religious circles today the watchword is *sincerity*. It is not thought important what a person believes or how he lives as long as he is sincere. Notice how sincere he is! Well, the Jews were sincere in their works righteousness. In fact there was a sect of the Jews, called the Zealots who were rigorous in their adherence to Mosaic law, using force to get others to agree with them. (Perhaps Simon Zelotes, one of the twelve, was so named because he belonged to this sect before his conversion.) Today, the Roman Catholics, and members of various cults, are also sincere. So much for sincerity if it does not burn with holy fire! God's jealousy (self-zeal) burns against all those not in harmony with the Holy Scriptures.

The greatest example of holy zeal is that of Jesus Christ, whose zeal for the house where God's honor dwelleth consumed Him at all times! See Him cleansing the temple at the beginning of His earthly ministry, driving out the merchandisers and their animals with a whip, upsetting their money tables, proclaiming the truth of His Father's house. Remember another man after God's own heart who was eaten up with an identical zeal (Ps. 69:9). Yes, the Jesus who is portrayed today as so harmless that He would never hurt a fly was red in the face, was incited to slash right and left with a scourge, spoke hard words, because there burned in His heart such a love for God, such a desire for His glory, such a longing for the perfection of His cause, that with utter self-forgetfulness He never considered His own name and standing. For these things He prayed more than any man; for these things He labored so arduously that He often forgot to eat. It was His meat to do the will of God who sent Him and to finish the work given Him to do (John 4:34). In all His work He was driven, filled with fire, consumed, until He gave Himself to be consumed on the cross.

Are there men, women, and children filled with that same zeal today? Yes, there are. For not only did Christ give Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, but He also "purifies unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). Every member of the body of Christ partakes of His anointing and partakes of His fire and zeal. Every child of God is concerned to bring forth good works which will be to the praise of His Father in heaven. A lukewarm Christian is a contradiction in terms (Rev. 3:15, 16).

May the zeal of Christ consume you and me! May that be our meat and drink all our days. □

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada.

The Day of Shadows

Rev. John Heys

Hated By, Yet Elevated Above

In Genesis 25:19-26 we find an amazing and very revealing act of our God in His sovereign grace.

Esau and Jacob were born to Isaac and Rebekah. And therein we are given a picture that reveals to us an extremely important truth, and a shadow of what we have in God's grace, and shall enjoy when Christ returns to bring His church to everlasting glory.

It is true that God had promised Abraham that he would have seed like the sand on the seashore, and like the stars of heaven in number. Of that we read in Genesis 18:18 and 22:17. He was promised more descendants than he could count. And Abraham believed that. He even saw the beginning of the fulfillment of that promise. Likewise Isaac and Rebekah held on to that promise, even though for a time God gave them no fulfillment of it.

When in His providence and grace our God gave Isaac and Rebekah sons, we have a manifestation of the fulfillment of that which is called the Mother Promise, or Protevangel, and is presented in Genesis 3:15. Bear in mind that Adam and Eve fell into the hands of Satan, and took his position that God had not only lied to them, but also hated them. For, according to Satan, God had deceived them about the value and power of the fruit of one tree in the garden of Eden. And

they died spiritually that day. Yet in His grace God revealed that He was going to cause some of their descendants to be a people that would be born again, and would love God and hate Satan. Salvation was promised as coming to some of the seed of Adam and Eve, as a free gift of God's grace.

Now, as pointed out before, the Hebrew word used in Genesis 3:15, and is in the King James Version translated as bruise, means crush. God promised the crushing of the head of Satan and his seed, and the crushing of the heel of the elect seed chosen in Christ. In the deepest sense, of course, this means that Satan would get men to crucify Christ, and that His people would be tormented and persecuted by the devil and the citizens of his kingdom of darkness. An awesome future is here predicted, but also a most blessed bliss and glory for those who belong to Christ by God's sovereign predestination.

Now in the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah we have a very awesome and revealing fulfillment of that promise which God gave His church the day that Adam and Eve fell into sin. And as we consider the lives of these two sons of Isaac, and grandsons of Abraham, we see so clearly the spiritual separation that exists in the human race. Indeed, what a tremendous difference is presented to us between these twin sons of Isaac! True, they were born of the same parents and on the same day, because they were conceived the same day. But, even in their physical strength and appearance they were so very, very different. And let us not over-

look, or look away from, the *spiritual* difference that is presented to us in what we read concerning them.

Esau was born first, but our God had caused Jacob to have a firm hold on Esau's heel. Esau did not have hold of Jacob. Before they were born there was a remarkable struggle that caused Rebekah to ask God why she was thus. And God pointed out to her the fact that each son represented and would bring forth a different nation, and that one would be stronger than the other. The idea is not simply that Esau will be stronger than Jacob. The two nations will differ in their power and life. The one son, Esau, will have descendants who will have the power to crucify Christ, who is the seed of Jacob, and of the Christian people whose King He is. And that son, Esau, will have descendants who are antichristian and who will be very strong physically, but will serve the Christian seed of Isaac. Do not overlook the fact that by crucifying Christ, who is the Seed of the woman, Esau's spiritual seed was unconsciously and unwillingly serving all the spiritual seed of Jacob, namely, the elect. That blessed Seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who was slain as our Head, triumphantly cried out, "It is finished!" The work of making us righteous was finished. ALL of our sins were paid for in full. Our Savior now could cry out with a loud voice, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." For He had suffered fully all the hellish agony our sins called for and He came to take away. All our guilt was removed. The work of removing it was finished. And He could now commend His spirit into God's hands.

Rev. Heys is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

There at His cross we have the answer to Rebekah's question as to why she was troubled by two sons struggling within her. The one son pictured Satan's spiritual seed that would reveal hatred against Christ and His church. The other son pictured the members of that church of Christ, that is, the members of His body, being attacked and struggling within her. Let us take hold of that truth in the Mother Promise, that God would put enmity between the two seeds that were in Rebekah, which enmity is a picture of that constant struggle between the church and the world. But the word of God is that, by all means, victory for God's church is certain.

A single-letter word can often mean very, very much. To Satan our God said, "I will put enmity...." I, the one and only true God, the almighty Jehovah, will put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent! Satan worked enmity in the heart of mankind and got man to become spiritually dead. For man it all became hopeless! And Adam and Eve did not run to God in sorrow for their sin. They ran away from Him with their bodies, because Satan had gotten them to run from Him with their souls. But, in His grace, God will and does put enmity in the hearts of His elect against Satan and his host of unbelievers. And that is why there is this enmity manifested, even before they are born, between Esau and Jacob. Our gracious and almighty God saves us first of all from our lack of interest in the salvation He prepared in Christ. As He told Satan, He will put enmity in the hearts of some against Satan and his spiritual seed.

*... absolutely ALL
of our salvation
is God's gift to His elect.*

In the awesome struggle that afflicted Rebekah so greatly, we have the shadow of a wonderful, comforting event that should not be over-

looked or denied, but held tightly. For there are two basic truths which we should take hold of and keep in mind, no matter what Satan says about salvation through men who are his tools. What God says is what counts!

That enmity between Esau and Jacob, even before they were born, reveals a truth that, sad to say, is denied on many pulpits today. The truth presented here in Genesis 25:19-25 must be maintained and proclaimed, namely, that absolutely ALL of our salvation is God's gift to His elect.

Our God did not tell Satan, and let Adam and Eve hear Him say to Satan, that He was going to offer salvation to a fallen human race, and invite men to let Him give salvation to them. God clearly and emphatically in that Mother Promise says, "I will." He does not say, "I would like to see you be saved. Accept My offer, so that I can begin to realize it in you." Hold on then to that powerful statement, "I WILL put enmity...." That He declares, not only because He is God and not dependent upon man's will, but because, as He told Adam, one sin would make him die spiritually that day. And dead men cannot give life to their children. Adam and Eve lost all power to hand down to anyone in the human race the desire to be sons of God who love Him.

When Rebekah cries out, "Why am I thus?" she clearly revealed that she had no power to change the natures of the children inside of her. In fact it is quite possible that twins were never born before, and that she did not then even know that she had two sons in her. Nowhere in Scripture do you find the word twins before this painful situation in Rebekah. And surely not even today can twins within a woman have their natures changed by man. It is God who assures us that HE will put the enmity in whom it pleases Him.

However, there are questions we might ask, such as, Why did all this happen? Why did God cause such completely different twin sons to be born to Isaac and Rebekah? Why was Rebekah told that the elder would

serve the younger? What truth is manifested in this incident? Of what is it a shadow?

*Every child
comes into this world
spiritually dead,
until God causes
that child to be
born again by Christ's Spirit.*

To Rebekah God did reveal the truth that she would bring forth two opposing nations, and that every child born to believers is not going to be a believer. In fact, go back to Adam and Eve. Their firstborn son, the firstborn son to be born to mankind, was a reprobate who committed that terrible crime of murder! Isaac and Rebekah could not, any more than could Adam and Eve, bring forth a believer. Every child comes into this world spiritually dead, until God causes that child to be born again by Christ's Spirit.

But hold on to that comforting truth that the unbelievers shall and do serve the believers. Did not the unbelieving Israelites crucify Christ? They did not do so because they were seeking our good. But at the cross the elder was indeed serving the younger. For in God's mind and heart the way of salvation was planned, and needed that cross of Christ.

And we ought not to ask, pretty soon, why we are in the woes which the Antichrist heaps upon us. That Antichrist, unconsciously and unwillingly, will be fulfilling God's counsel. God will be using him to usher in the day when Christ will return to bring His church to glory. Indeed, that elder antichrist shall serve the younger elect for whom Christ died. And the awesome struggle between Esau and Jacob, before they were born, pictures how the world and the false church unwittingly and unwillingly, yet very really, are serving the church of Christ by doing that which is necessary before Christ returns. All they do is in God's plan for our good. And how

wonderful it will be when the shadow is gone — because Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, has come — and we see and enjoy all the blessedness of the salvation which He realizes for us.

Through the apostle Paul, in Romans 8:28, our God sets forth that

wonderful, comforting truth that “all things work together for good to them that love God.” And although by the world, namely, the Esaus, we, the Jacobs, are hated, we will be elevated highly above them. For it pleases God

to use them for the fulfillment of His covenant promises to us. We are hated by Satan and the world of unbelievers; but God uses them so that we will be elevated above them in the glory of Christ’s kingdom. □

Book Reviews

Reading Scripture in Public: A Guide for Preachers and Lay Readers, by Thomas Edward McComiskey. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991. 196pp., \$7.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. R. Decker.]

The reading of Holy Scripture is a very important element in the worship service. It is much more than a “preliminary.” It should be done, in the opinion of this reviewer, very early in the worship service, just after the first Psalm of Praise is sung. All of the singing, the congregational prayer, the giving and receiving of the offering, and the preaching find their meaning and significance in the Word of God. In brief, worship is the believer’s hearing God’s Word and his faith-response to that Holy Word. Hence the importance of the public reading of Scripture.

Part I of this book (the first five chapters) deals with this all-important element in the liturgy. The author believes we must find and communicate the meaning of the particular passage in our reading of Scripture. He offers helpful suggestions to do just that. Especially in this section of the book will the preacher find helpful the exercises at the end of each chapter.

In Part II (the last five chapters) the author applies the principles of reading Scripture in public. Of particular value are chapters 8 and 9 in which the author writes of using one’s voice effectively in public reading of the Bible.

Preachers ought to be concerned

about all this, and they would do well to read this book. Others who are called upon to read the Bible in public — ruling elders, Christian school teachers, and Sunday School teachers — will also benefit from a reading of this book.

The author, Thomas E. McComiskey, is acting director of the Ph.D. program at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. He has a Ph.D. from Brandeis University. ■

The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus against the Heresies. Selected and introduced by Hans Urs von Balthasar. Tr. John Saward. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990. 111 pages, \$10.95 (paper). [Reviewed by the Editor.]

The church father Irenaeus is regarded as the first great Christian theologian. Born about A.D. 130, he knew Polycarp, disciple of the apostle John, by personal acquaintance. The main work of Irenaeus that has come down to us is his *Against the Heresies*. It defends and explains the Incarnation against the Gnostic opposition to the material world. The original title was *Five Books on the Unmasking and Refutation of the Falsely Named Gnosis*. God the Son, Irenaeus contends, became flesh to redeem human flesh from its sinfulness, not from its fleshliness.

The Scandal of the Incarnation is a selection of outstanding passages from this great work of Irenaeus.

This is His Word, our Lord Jesus

Christ, who in the last times became man among men, in order to join the end to the beginning, that is, man to God (p. 43).

The introduction by Roman Catholic theologian von Balthasar is helpful, especially for grasping the heresy of Gnosticism. The Protestant reader will have to be on guard, however, against von Balthasar’s Roman Catholic interpretation of Irenaeus.

The book is a good introduction to Irenaeus and to the earliest treatment of the doctrine of the Incarnation in the post-apostolic church. ■

The Plan of Salvation, by Benjamin B. Warfield. Boonton, New Jersey: Simpson Publishing Company, 1989. 113 pages, \$11.95 (hardcover). [Reviewed by the Editor.]

This is a reprint of the great Presbyterian’s classic work contrasting the Calvinistic view of God’s plan of salvation with the various forms of the only alternative. The alternative in all its forms, whether sheer Pelagianism, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, or Arminianism, makes God’s will to save dependent upon the will of the sinner. Thus, whereas Calvinism teaches that God saves, the anti-Calvinistic religions teach that the sinner saves himself, God only making salvation possible. “There are fundamentally only two doctrines of salvation: that salvation is from God, and that salvation is from ourselves” (p. 27).

With profound insight into the truth of God’s sovereignty in saving sinners, as well as into the truth of the

deadness of the sinners who are to be saved, Warfield insists that "particularism is the mark of Calvinism" (p. 89). Sovereign particularism characterizes the plan of salvation (election), the redemption of the cross, and the actual saving of the sinner by the Holy Spirit. The universalism that consists of a will of God that elects all, a redemption intended for all, and saving operations directed to all is radical deviation from, and basic opposition to, Calvinism.

How professing Calvinists today can harmonize their teaching of a love of God for all and a sincere desire of God to save all in the preaching of the gospel with Warfield's insistence on Calvinistic particularism is a mystery. In fact, of course, Calvinistic particularism and the "well-meant offer" cannot be harmonized. The latter is just the latest apostasy from Calvinism, that is, the biblical gospel of salvation by sovereign grace. A gospel revealing God's love in Christ

for all sinners and crying out God's desire to save everyone to whom the gospel comes is the most recent form, to use Warfield's pungent expression, of the "useless ... talk of salvation being for 'whosoever will' in a world of universal 'won't'" (p. 43).

Warfield boldly presses the claims of Calvinism: "Calvinism, with its doctrines of election and irresistible grace, is the only system which can make credible the salvation of any sinner" (p. 72). His exposure of the doctrine opposed to Calvinism is devastating: "The denial of particularism ... is logically the total rejection of Christianity" (pp. 89, 90). Such defense of the faith is sorely needed in our compromising, cowardly age.

The Reformed reader may demur from Warfield in two areas. First, advocating the infralapsarian conception of the decrees of God, Warfield charges that "supralapsarianism errs therefore as seriously on the one side as universalism does on the other" (p.

21; cf. also pp. 90ff.). To be faulted is not his embrace of infralapsarianism, for the Reformed creeds allow him this, but his condemnation of supralapsarianism as error, indeed, error that is as serious as universalism. The Reformed creeds and churches have never condemned supralapsarianism, but have rather permitted it as a legitimate way of holding the eternal counsel of God. The Synod of Dordt deliberately refused to reject it.

The second area of difference is Warfield's postmillennialism. Warfield proposes that, "when Christ comes, it will be *to* (my emphasis—DJE) a fully saved world ..." (p. 104).

This short work deserves the widest distribution. It is grand reading. Since this work has not been included in the published editions of Warfield's writings and since it has long been out of print, Simpson Publishing Company has done good service in making it again available. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Let's start this edition of the "News" with a quick look at calls that have been extended to our churches' pastors.

First, since Prof. Hanks declined the call to serve as pastor of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, Southeast's Council presented a new trio to their congregation consisting of the Revs. D. Kuiper (Lacombe, BC), C. Terpstra (South Holland, IL), and G. VanBaren (Hudsonville, MI). On the evening of January 19 they extended a call to Rev. D. Kuiper to come over and help them.

We can also report here that Rev.

R. VanOverloop, presently serving as pastor of the Bethel PRC in Elk Grove Village, IL, declined the call he had been considering to serve as missionary pastor to the members of the Covenant Reformed Fellowship of Larne, Northern Ireland.

Mission Activities

First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI, the calling church for the mission work in Jamaica, has asked Rev. B. Gritters, pastor of the Byron Center, MI PRC, to lead the next scheduled conference in Jamaica. This conference involves four weeks of teaching the officebearers from the seven churches on the island. Current plans call for Rev. Gritters to be accompanied by his father, Ed Gritters, an elder from the Hope PRC of Redlands, CA. The Lord willing, they will be

gone the month of February.

Our readers may remember that it was reported here previously that these conferences will deal with the six loci of Dogmatics. These sessions will be taught about three times a week, with the remaining time given to establishing the leadership in the local churches. Rev. Gritters will teach the theology, while Ed Gritters will busy himself with the practical aspects.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Society of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored a Dutch Psalm Sing on January 20 at Raybrook Manor, a retirement home in Grand Rapids, whose residents, if you haven't already guessed, are to a large degree Dutch.

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

The PRC of Byron Center, MI invited their community to three community-wide Bible Study Classes dealing with questions about the church, or Biblical Directions for a Faithful Church.

Some of the questions these classes hoped to answer were: "What is the Church? Where can you find it? Does God command believers to make sure that they are members of some church? And, What Church should I join?"

These are important questions, and it was Byron's intent to discuss these questions and see what God's Word had to say in answering them. The classes met on three successive Thursdays; January 16, 23, and 30, at the Byron Center Public Library. Each class consisted of a short lesson followed by refreshments and a question and discussion period.

If you are a regular reader of the

Standard Bearer, then you no doubt read Rev. R. Moore's two-part guest article entitled, "Unbelief's Attempt to Dismiss Sin" (Dec. 1, Jan. 1 issues). Well, when Rev. Moore was in Lacombe, BC for church visitation with the Immanuel PRC there, he also presented a public lecture on behalf of Immanuel's evangelism committee. The lecture was entitled, "Unbelief's Attempt to Dismiss Sin."

Congregational Highlights

Before taking leave of Immanuel PRC, let us also add here that this church in Lacombe took a big step toward the goal of establishing their own church home, when they approved at a congregational meeting in December a proposal to purchase four acres of land. However, this purchase will not be made until approximately 60% of the purchase price has been raised by pledges. In an

unrelated matter, it was also decided to re-shingle their parsonage roof.

The congregation of the Hull, IA PRC approved a financial plan which involves both a pledged amount and a monthly budgeted amount to finance their proposed new church sanctuary. The pledge-drive part of this plan was to take place after the first of this year. A successful drive will mean that Hull could begin building this spring.

You may remember that the Bethel PRC in Elk Grove Village has moved from their past meeting place, the Ascension Lutheran Church, to a new location at the Children World Learning Center. As an expression of their appreciation for the support given them financially the past four years by Bethel, the Lutheran Church donated sixty folding chairs and a lectern. □

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On February 8, 1992 our parents,

MR. and MRS. BERNARD MEELKER,

celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary. It is with deep gratitude and humility that we thank our God for faithful parents who have instructed us in the covenant of grace. We are mindful of the words of Psalm 115:1:

"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."

- * Tom and Gretine Bodbyl
- Maria, Larissa, Joel, Nate, Eric
- * Berend and Janine Meelker
- Chad, Brent, Deanna, Andrew
- * Henry and Karen Meelker
- Casey, Kevin, Clint, Nick
- * Rog and Hilda Gritters
- Sharon, Gerrit, Kaylynn, Jordan
- * Dan and Anna Mae Bodbyl
- Amanda, Tina, Rosanne, Seth
- * Gerrit and Bonnie Meelker
- Brandon, Breanna
- * Bert

Redlands, California

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Society of the Hull Protestant Reformed Church expresses its Christian sympathy to a fellow member, Mrs. Frank Vogel, in the death of her brother,

MR. ARVIN BOMGAARS.

"The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace" (Psalm 29:11).

Rev. Richard Moore, President
Mrs. Ken Hoksbergen, Secretary

NOTICE!!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Doon, IA, on Wednesday, March 4, 1992, at 8:30 AM, the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the Stated Clerk, 30 days before Classis convenes. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the Clerk of Doon's Consistory using the forms provided for that purpose.

Rev. R. Hanko,
Stated Clerk

(Note: Because of an unexpected delay in the postal service's handling of the letter from Rev. Hanko, the above announcement could not appear in the February 1 issue as intended.)

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

January 25, 1992 marked the 35th wedding anniversary of
REV. and MRS. GISE VANBAREN.

We are thankful to our covenant God that He has blessed our parents and grandparents with these 35 years of marriage. It is our prayer that our God will continue to bless them in the years to come.

"Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the Lord thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he swore unto thy fathers: and he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee" (Deut. 7:12, 13a).

- * John and Valerie VanBaren
- Jennifer, Jordan, Jill, Jared
- * Bob and Carolyn Prins
- Kyle, Eric, Kristen, Briana
- * Gerry and Heidi VanBaren
- * Mike and Mary VanOverloop
- Derik, Keith
- * Kevin and Denise Haan
- Mitchel
- * Daniel, Philip, and Rachel VanBaren

Hudsonville, Michigan

REMEMBER

Remember thy Creator all thy days,
For this doth lead to wisdom's ways.
Bless His Name! His praises laud,
For in the beginning, God!
In six days brought forth
All the heavens and the earth.

With mighty power He called forth light,
And separated the day from night.
The firmament and all its starry frame
Proclaims aloud His glorious Name.
The seas and all that in them is,
The earth, seed-bearing trees and herbs are His.
Sun, moon, and stars, He made them all,
Birds, creeping things, and animals great and small.

And then upon the sixth day of the week
The Triune God within Himself did speak,
Let us make man, out of the dust,
In Our own Image, righteous and just.
And when before His finished work He stood,
God saw that it was very good.

Then God rested on the seventh day
From all the works that He had made.
He sanctified this holy day,
And His blessing on it laid.

Remember thy Creator all thy days,
For this doth lead to wisdom's ways.

But, says the fool within his heart,
That is not how it all did start.
There was a big bang and a shout,
That's how it all came about.
It's a Jewish myth; it's fraud —
There is *no* God.

Then after a million years or so
A little fish from the sea on land did go.
Instead of water surging through his gill,
He developed lungs that with fresh air did fill.
And after many millions of years more,
The fish developed into a monkey on the shore.
And from the ape came Neanderthal man,
Who lived in a cave for a span.

Climbing ever higher on evolution's ladder,
Did it produce a man that was better?
Ah, no! Whoever goes to such a school,
Now and forever remains a fool.
Oh, foolish man, do you have a rod
Wherewith to measure the works of God?
Nay! Man was placed within the confines of a week,
With one blessed day, the light of God's face to seek.

Remember thy Creator all the days of thy youth,
Guided unto the wisdom of truth.

Now listen to the universe as it sings
Of seas and rivers and many things.
The mountains skip like rams
And the little hills like lambs.
Listen to the waves as they dash upon the shore,
The lightning flash and the thunder crash,
Little birds chirping in branches of trees,
And the sighing of a gentle breeze.

Sweet, melodious tones floating on the air,
Proclaiming aloud God's tender love and care.
Seven tones of music of God's covenant of grace,
Wherein He draws His people in loving embrace.
Four tones of action, three of repose,
To bring sweet melodies to an harmonic close.
Each tone a magnet, with special drawing power
Disturbing its course, will make the music sour.
Wandering about on action tones alone,
Shunning the magnet of a sweet repose tone,
Can only produce an unfinished symphony.
Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

Ye who are weary, heavy laden and oppressed,
Come unto me and I will give you rest.
I am the bread of life, I am the vine.
Eat of this bread, Drink of this wine.

Remember me.

Sue Porte*

*Miss Porte, an 89-year old member of the congregation of Redlands, CA, not only wrote this poem, but also read it at last year's graduation program of Redlands Protestant Reformed School.