



**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

The Standard Bearer

Upon the incarnation as the beginning and the resurrection as the end depends the gospel, the gospel of our justification. If that child of Bethlehem is not God, He did not bear our sin. And if He is not raised, He failed to atone.

See "Separated unto the Gospel" — p. 3

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In This Issue ...

Herman Hoeksema was, by all accounts, a great preacher. It will be evident from his series of sermons on Romans which begins in this issue that at the heart of his preaching powers was the gift of exegesis. He had a profound, penetrating insight into the meaning of Holy Scripture and a wonderful ability to teach this Word of God to the people of God. Our readers will delight themselves in these meditations.

Mr. James Lanting informs us concerning the inexorable progress of one of the most significant movements in the United States, indeed in Western civilization: the legitimizing and legalizing of homosexuality. Lanting explains the decision by the U.S. Supreme Court this summer overturning a Colorado law that prohibited giving homosexuals special rights. See "Church and State."

Rev. Gise VanBaren reviews the decisions by the 1996 synod of the Christian Reformed Church. One of these decisions was the refusal to change an earlier decision authorizing the ordination of women to all church offices. Read "All Around Us."

Not to be overlooked is the poem by Suzanne Terpstra Looyenga. With the unique power of poetry, it speaks to the struggle of the suffering believer. Read, and then reread, "Reckoning."

A somewhat different dress, but the same *Standard Bearer*, now beginning its 73rd year.

— DJE

Separated unto the Gospel

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

Romans 1:1-4

It is not known what is the beginning, and what is the origin of the church at Rome. Certain it is that the Romish tradition that Peter was the founder of it and that he was the first bishop cannot stand the test of Scripture. We may believe that, if the apostle Peter had been instrumental in establishing the church at Rome, at the time when Paul writes this epistle, the apostle Peter must still have been there and he must still have been, according to the Roman Catholic claim, overseer of the church. And that is impossible. For Paul would never interfere in another man's work. He would not have written this epistle.

Besides, in the long list of names mentioned at the end of the epistle, Peter is not even mentioned.

As to the origin of the church,

there must have been a good deal of connection and traveling between Jerusalem and Rome. There were connections of business, etc. Besides, the large congregation at Jerusalem soon was scattered, due to persecutions. Undoubtedly many went to Rome. Perhaps the congregation at Rome was finally established by one of the helpers of the apostles, although it is not certain.

According to the evidence of the epistle, the congregation consisted of converts out of Jews and Gentiles.

As to its contents, the theme of the epistle is clear. This is due to the fact that there was no particular reason in the congregation which causes the apostle to write this epistle. There were no heresies and no particular sins against which the apostle is called to warn the congregation. He simply states that he longed to see them, but was let hitherto. And so he felt the need of writing them. What we have, therefore, in this epistle to the Romans is a quiet development of one theme. That theme is that a man is justified, not by the works of the law, but by faith in Christ.

We find that there is a three-fold division. The first is that it is impossible for man to become righteous before God on the basis of works. The second is the expounding of the positive doctrine of justification by faith. And the third is the application of that doctrine of justification by faith to them that are so justified. Inasmuch as that is the main theme, and inas-

much as that faith by which man is justified cannot possibly rest on the word of man, the apostle introduces himself to the Roman church in our text as one separated unto the gospel. That is the theme of this part of the epistle.

A Significant Gospel

Notice that the apostle is speaking of the gospel of God. The gospel, as to the meaning of the word, is good news. It is a good message, a tiding of joy. As to the scriptural meaning, the gospel is in the first place a message from God. That is an essential element of the gospel.

In the second place, it is a message from God to His people as they are in this world. It is a message from God in this world of darkness, of sin, and of death. It is a message from God in that world in which His people are by nature children of wrath. It is a message from God in that world in which His children are loaded with sin and in which everything about them testifies of sin and of death. In that darkness comes a message. It is a message that comes from heaven, a divinely authoritative message, a message that is glad news.

That news consists in this that those who are in darkness see a great light; that those who are in sin receive righteousness; that those who are in death, receive life. That is the gospel.

Now notice that the apostle tells us concerning that gospel that it is the gospel of the Son of God,

Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of the Standard Bearer.

Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the object of that gospel. It is concerning Him that glad news comes from heaven. It is the gospel concerning His Son, who as we know Him, as He stands with His face toward us, is the Lord Jesus Christ, and who as He stands with His face to the Father, as we do not see Him and know Him, is the eternal Son. As He stands with His face to us, as we see and know Him, He is Jesus of Nazareth, who became like unto us and walked among us for thirty-three years. He is the object of that glad news.

If you ask, what does God declare concerning His Son, what is the contents of that glad news, then the apostle mentions two facts. The first is His incarnation. The second is His resurrection.

Notice: "concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." That, God declared concerning His Son.

According to the flesh, He was made of the seed of David. Flesh in the text does not mean sinful flesh, but means His human nature. It means His human body and soul. Jesus, according to His body and His soul, was made. He was made of the seed of David. That is, He assumed, He took upon Himself, that flesh, that body and soul. He took that flesh from the heart of the covenant line which was in David. You may notice that, according to prophecy, the heart of the covenant line runs through David's house. The covenant line is like a pyramid that has for its base the seed of the woman. For its apex it has the house of David. The last that we have in Scripture concerning the coming of the Son of God in the flesh is that He will take on the flesh and blood, not merely of man, but of David. Jesus could not be a Roman; He could not be

a Greek. But He took on the flesh from the heart of the covenant line. He was made of the seed of David.

That, God declared. That is the gospel, you understand. That is the one fact of the gospel.

The other fact is the resurrection. God declared concerning His Son that He was powerfully declared to be the Son of God, so that we also know Him as the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. "Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead," the apostle says. "According to the spirit of holiness" stands over against the flesh here. The spirit of holiness is not the third person in the Trinity. It is not the Spirit of sanctification, as the Dutch translation has it ("*De Geest des heiligmaking*"). But the spirit of holiness refers to the divine nature of Jesus.

God is a spirit. His nature is spiritual. The chief characteristic of God as a spirit is that He is holy. When the apostle says that He was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness, the meaning is that Jesus according to His human nature is of the seed of David, but that according to His divine nature He is the Son of God. Now then, that is the gospel.

That powerful demonstration of Jesus as the Son of God is the resurrection. When He lies as a babe in Bethlehem, that does not become manifest. As far as we can see, He is just like any other babe. But when He rises from the dead, we have a powerful demonstration that He is the Son of God.

Now then, we have this: The gospel is glad news, coming from heaven, concerning the Son of God who, as we see Him, is Jesus Christ our Lord. That which God declares concerning His Son is that according to the flesh He is of the seed of David, but according to His divine nature He is declared

to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead.

Why does the apostle select these two? It is evident that these two mark the beginning and the end of His being with us. That period was *the* period. In that period the gospel is realized, the gospel which concerns His Son. It is in that period that God comes from heaven in His Son, is with us for thirty-three years, and then returns. All that lies between that beginning and that end constitutes the gospel of our salvation. That is the only historical basis for all that we believe. That is really the gospel.

Now what happened?

In the year A.D. 1 God came, through His Son, into our darkness. Here, there was nothing but darkness, sin, and death. The Son of God came into our darkness and death. If He was not

*On the
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righteousness
which is
by faith.*

the Son of God, then there is no gospel. Then there is no hope. If the modern interpretation is correct, there is no gospel. On the incarnation of the Son of God hangs all the righteousness which is by faith.

He entered into our life. He became like us in everything, sin excepted. He became a man among men, weak and suffering. Not only that, but He died. He died as all men die. But if that is all that can be said about Him, there is no gospel. For, viewing Him as the Son of God entering into our night, we are watching and wondering whether He will come out of that night. No man ever did. No man ever entered into our night and came out of it. When the Son of God comes into our night, the question is, what will become of Him? In breathless expectation the church stands and asks the question, what will become of Him?

He was raised! The Son of God came, and He walked among us, and he bore our sins, and with our sins He sank into death, but

He was declared to be the Son of God in the resurrection. Upon the incarnation as the beginning and the resurrection as the end depends the gospel, the gospel of our justification. If that child of Bethlehem is not God, He did not bear our sin. And if He is not raised, He failed to atone. But in the resurrection He was powerfully declared to be the Son of God. That is the gospel.

Divinely Declared

That gospel God declares. We read in the text that it is the gospel of God. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God." It is the gospel of God. That is, God is the author of that gospel. God made that gospel. He conceived of the glad news concerning His Son to His people. He made that gospel. God is the author of that gospel because He realized it in the fullness of time. In the fullness of time God rent the heavens and sent His Son into our darkness. He loaded upon Him our sin. He gave Him over to the death of the cross. He poured the vials of His wrath over Him. And He raised Him; He glorified Him; He set Him at His right hand in the highest heavens; He gave Him the Spirit without measure.

But the gospel is also the gospel of God in the sense that He declares it. He is the only one who is able to declare it. In the first place, this is because man is not able to understand and interpret that gospel concerning the Son of God. Suppose that it was left up to man to interpret the facts. He would never come to this gospel. All the philosophy of man cannot interpret that Babe in Bethlehem. All modern theology, for that is modern theology, in interpreting that Babe, sets aside God's interpretation of that Babe, and then you have nothing left but that an

ideal man is born. Modern theology is the setting aside of God's interpretation. After setting aside God's interpretation, it interprets that Babe itself. Then you have nothing left. For there is nothing to see. From our side that Babe is just like all others. That is modern theology concerning the cross. Set aside the declaration of God concerning the cross, and you have nothing left but the pitiful spectacle that a man is cruelly put to death, whether that man be guilty or innocent.

In the third place, the gospel must be declared by God because it is only on the basis of God's declaration that we can believe impossible things. I believe in such impossible things as the forgiveness of sin. That that God who is unchangeably righteous forgives sin is impossible. Yet, on the basis of God's declaration, I believe that the impossible is possible.

On the basis of God's declaration, I believe that the impossible is possible.

All such things that are contradicted by all that is around me, I believe. I live in the valley of death. I die and I am gone. In the midst of that, I believe that I have eternal life. All about me contradicts it. And I believe. Why do I believe? Did Moses say so? Then my faith is vain. Did Isaiah say so? Did Paul? That faith cannot rest on the word of man. If I am to be confident of that righteousness and life in the midst of death, then there is only one that can tell me. If there is ever to be glad news for me, then it must be God that brings it to me.

This is what the apostle says. That is why he says, "The gospel of God, which He had declared afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures," that is, in the old dispensation. He declared it through His prophets. He declared it as a promise. In the old dispensation God said, "My Son will come." His people suffered. But they clung to that word of God. They died in that faith, not having re-

ceived the promise. God finally declared it through His Son, when He sent Him into the world. Through Him God spoke directly to His people. He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; I am the resurrection of life."

A Necessary Separation unto that Gospel

In the new dispensation, the apostle says, He still declares that same gospel. The apostle means to say, "Don't take it as my word. If you ask me, how did you get it, Paul? Did you go to school to learn it? Did you prepare for it? Did you receive it by coming into contact with philosophers? What then? The answer is, 'Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, that is, His slave, who is to speak what He tells me to.' "

"Called to be an apostle!" It was far from the mind of Paul to become an apostle. So far was it from his mind that he persecuted the church, and raved against that gospel. But Christ called him. He separated him unto the gospel. He so separated him that Paul became the instrument of the Spirit to receive the gospel and to declare it. So that we have that gospel in the Holy Scriptures. The Scriptures are God's testimony concerning His Son to His people.

The practical application is that upon the basis of God's declaration we believe, as soon as that gospel speaks to our heart, the impossible possibility, by the grace of God, that our sins are forgiven and that we have eternal life. The Son of God was made flesh from the seed of David.

Do you believe it?

The Son of God was raised from the dead. Do you believe it?

Do you say of the Son of God, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom I belong?" Then this gospel is yours, and you can rejoice, "I then, having been justified by faith, have peace with God." □

Changes in the Next Volume

The October 1 issue of the *Standard Bearer* begins a new volume of the magazine.

Much will be the same as the last volume.

At its annual meeting in June, the staff approved the following changes.

Some of the meditations will be sermons on Romans preached by Herman Hoeksema in First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, as taken down in shorthand notes and then transcribed by Martin Swart, long-time member of First Church. There is strong internal evidence that Hoeksema preached these sermons in the late 1930s. The long-hand transcription will be edited for publication by the editor of the *SB*. There are plans that these rich, powerful, and very valuable sermons, most of which have never before been published, will eventually be published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association as a sermonic commentary on Romans.

We open up the series in this issue with Hoeksema's sermon on Romans 1:1-4, "Separated unto the Gospel."

Interspersed among these sermons will be meditations by others.

We welcome Rev. Mitchell Dick to the staff of regular contributors. He will replace Rev. Carl Haak in preparing explanations and outlines of select passages of Scripture, especially for the benefit of the classes of Bible study among our readers. He will take up where Rev. Haak left off in the gospel of John.

We encourage the various societies and classes to study the gospel of John at this time, using the introductions provided in the *SB*.

Our thanks to Rev. Haak for his work.

Rev. Kenneth Koole will cooperate with Rev. Arie denHartog in the column, "In His Fear." We have asked Rev. Koole to concentrate on the subject of Christian education.

Rev. Steven Key will continue to teach Reformed doctrine, following the order of the traditional six loci (topics) of Reformed dogmatics: the doctrines of God; man; Christ; salvation; church; and last things. He had willingly stepped in already last year at our request to help out in the department of "Taking Heed to the Doctrine."

The rubric, "Strength of Youth," is dropped, at least temporarily. Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma moves over to the rubric, "When Thou Sittest in Thine House," to take on, with Mrs. MaryBeth Lubbers and Rev. Ron VanOverloop, the responsibility for articles on Reformed family life.

Assisting Rev. Ronald Hanko, Rev. Jason Kortering, and Rev. Thomas Miersma in producing articles on missions will be Rev. Allen Brummel, member of the Foreign Mission Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches. We welcome Rev. Brummel to the staff and look forward to his contribution.

The other rubrics and writers remain as before.

A number of ministers have agreed to write a few articles on various topics of their own choosing. Time must show who they

are and what, their subjects.

Contributions from our readers are welcome, according to the policy that is stated on the masthead.

One name no longer appears on the masthead. Because of age with its infirmities, Rev. John A. Heys is no longer able to write for the magazine. He has graced the pages of the *SB* for more than 50 years. He has written regularly. He has written much. He has written well. Nor, in my experience, did he ever miss an annual staff meeting. The *SB* has been vitally important to him.

To the Rev. John A. Heys, on behalf of the staff and the readers of the *SB* all these years, thank you.

As for us to whom the duty now falls to carry on, may we be faithful.

The next issue of this magazine — October 15 — will be a special, Reformation issue devoted to the doctrinal and ecclesiastical struggle in the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1953. Our



Rev. and Mrs. John A. Heys

readers will recall that the special issue last year was "The Reformation of 1924." Copies of that spe-

cial issue concerning the history and issues of the origin of the Protestant Reformed Churches out of

the Christian Reformed Church are still available. ■

— DJE

A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism

10. A Spiritual Fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff.

The literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy ends in a carnal Messianic kingdom.

The literal interpretation of the prophecy of Isaiah 65:17ff., advocated by postmillennialist Christian Reconstructionism, ends in an earthly kingdom of Christ.

Besides, a consistently literal interpretation leads to absurdity. Not even the most ardent advocate and practitioner of a literal interpretation of Isaiah 65:17ff. can carry it off, as was demonstrated in the previous editorial.

But Old Testament prophecy of the coming Messianic kingdom may not be interpreted literally. To do so is, at best, to become a dispensational premillennialist, turning eschatology into the restoration of Old Testament Israel and its earthly glories, and, at worst, as Herman Bavinck warned us, to lapse into Judaism.

The New Testament instructs us to interpret Old Testament prophecy spiritually. In the earthly figures familiar to the prophets and their hearers, the Holy Spirit of Christ foretold the spiritual glories of Jesus Christ, His church, and His new creation. Those earthly features of the prophecy — houses, fruitful vineyards, successful labor, trouble-free days, no crying, long earthly life, Jerusalem — are not the reality of the prophecy.

They never were the reality of the prophecy.

They were not the reality of the prophecy for the spiritual Israelite at that time. He or she saw through them and beyond them to better and higher prospects: the things that eye has not seen, that ear has not heard, and that never entered into the heart of man to imagine, the things that God has prepared for them that love him (I Cor. 2:9).

Must it be spelled out? Houses, fruitful vineyards, successful labor, trouble-free days, no crying, long earthly life, and Jerusalem are all things that eyes have seen, ears have heard, and have entered into the heart of man to imagine. These are not the things, therefore, that God prepared for the spiritual Israelites who loved Him.

Those earthly trivia, once used to represent the heavenly kingdom and life, certainly are not the reality of Old Testament prophecy for us New Testament believers who have already begun to experience the life, riches, and glory of the risen Christ by the gift and indwelling of the Spirit of Pentecost.

I do not think that the postmillennial Christian Reconstructionists really appreciate the absolute disinterest with which the Reformed amillennialist regards the splendid earthly kingdom of postmillennialism.

Suppose for a moment that the Christian Reconstructionists by their constant badgering of the

churches and by their own heroic efforts, in alliance with the charismatics, bring about their dream. The whole world, including every nation, is governed by Christians and fulfills the fondest expectations of Kik, Boettner, Rushdoony, North, Chilton, Gentry, and the others.

We Reformed amillennialists will not be jumping for joy. Why should we? There will be death in that world. Sooner or later, we will still have to feel the bitter pang of separation from a beloved wife, child, parent, and friend. What difference does it make that we go through this grief after 500 years rather than after 50 years? Indeed, the grief after 500 years of love must be worse than the grief after 50.

There will be sin in the postmillennial kingdom. Every day we will know our misery of guilt and shame, the worst misery of all. Every day anew we will have to battle indwelling sin, which wrenches from us the groan, "O, wretched man that I am." What difference does it make that Gary North sits on the throne of the world and that Kenneth Gentry, Jr., is in charge of radio, television, movies, and the internet worldwide?

There will be hordes of ungodly in this postmillennial kingdom, on the admission of even the most optimistic postmillennialists themselves. They will hide it. Outwardly, they will conform to

the law of God, particularly the civil regulations of the Old Testament Bible, either out of selfish desire to enjoy the material prosperity or out of fear of Christian Reconstructionist vengeance. But in their hearts they will hate God. They will be rebels inwardly against the Christ. At the end of the millennium they will rise against the Lord (Rev. 20:7-9).

This will grieve the Reformed amillennialist. If there were but one enemy of Christ in the kingdom, this would grieve him. For there would be in the Messianic kingdom a despising of God's commandments, at the very least in the hearts and minds of the ungodly. And, as the Psalter puts it, "because Thy statutes are despised, with overwhelming grief I weep."

There will be no vision of God in the face of Jesus Christ in this kingdom of postmillennialism. Still only in a glass darkly.

For these reasons alone, we Reformed amillennialists would not be enthusiastic over Christian

Reconstructionism's kingdom. Indeed, we would be groaning, as we do today, waiting for the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23). We would be crying night and day for divine vengeance on Christ's and our enemies (Luke 18:1-8). We would be praying fervently, "Lord, put an end to this postmillennial business as soon as possible, and come quickly."

What is even more distressing for the Reformed amillennial believer is that this postmillennial kingdom is supposed to be the culmination and final form of the Messianic kingdom. According to the postmillennialists generally and the Christian Reconstructionists in particular, with the ending of the millennium the kingdom of Christ comes to an end. The eternity that follows will not be the Messianic kingdom, but only the bare kingdom of God.

As regards the kingdom of Jesus Christ, that's it!

That earthly reign by means of the church, filled with sin, death, and unregenerate reprobates who

hate and curse Christ morning, noon, and night, is the climax and conclusion of Christ's kingdom.

Behold ... a dismal flop!

If that is the Messianic kingdom at its very highest and greatest, Christ is destined to be displayed publicly as a royal failure.

The Christian Reconstructionists never tire of railing upon Reformed amillennialists as defeatists. They do not hesitate to accuse the church in history of being responsible for the failure of their millennial kingdom yet to appear.

Talk about defeat!

Is their earthly kingdom with its sin, death, and sinners the best that Christ can do as king?

That Christ is a sorry failure.

I do not believe it for a moment. The Reformed amillennialist recoils from the very notion as blasphemy.

The postmillennial dream is not the Messianic kingdom, much less the apex and end of it.

Nor is this the prophecy of Isaiah 65:17ff.

As we shall see. □

— DJE

Cloud of Witnesses

Prof. Herman Hanko

Martin Luther: German Reformer

Introduction

God had preserved His church throughout the dark and dreary Middle Ages when apostate Rome controlled the life and consciences of

men. He had preserved His church through the Waldensians hiding in the valleys and caves of the Alps to escape the brutality of the Inquisition. He had preserved His church through faithful followers of the two Johns: John Wycliffe and John Hus.

But the institute of the church was corrupt and the saints of God had no place to go with their children to be nourished by the Bread of Life. And gradually, under Rome's terrible pressures, the

church became more difficult to find.

God has His own way and His own time of doing that which needs to be done to preserve His church. Applicable to the church as well as to creation is the old adage: "It is always darkest just before dawn." Darkness grew deeper in Europe under Rome's heavy hand; the dawn was about to break. It broke with the coming of an insignificant monk out of Saxony in Germany when hope

Prof. Hanko is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

for reformation was gone. It broke from an unexpected source and in a surprising place. It is the story of one of the greatest works of God in the church since the time of the apostles. It is doubtful whether such a story shall again unfold until Christ returns at the end of time.

The Reformation in Luther's Soul

From our earthly and human perspective it seems as if God is never in a hurry. He seems to take His time about things which appear to us to be so crucial that any delay is disastrous. So it was with Luther.

In the latter part of the 15th century, the situation in Europe seemed to be so bad that, if God did not do something very shortly, it would be too late and the church would be forever gone from the earth. Reformation had to take place or reformation would never take place.

But, although when the reformation did come it came as the mighty surge of a tidal wave which engulfed Europe, it after all came very slowly and scarcely noticed. It came as a still small voice in the soul of Martin Luther.

Martin Luther was born November 10, 1483 in Eisleben, Prussia, in Saxony of Germany. His parents were rather poor, but honest and industrious, pious members of the Romish church. And Luther was brought up under the strict discipline and superstition of the church. He received his early education in Mansfeld, Magdeburg, and Eisenach. Because his parents were unable to support him, he sang to earn a bit of money and was helped by Ursula Cotta, wife of one of the wealthy merchants in Eisenach. His upbringing was the rough training of the peasantry and he bore the indelible marks of his upbringing all his life. It made him a man of the people.

At 18, in 1501, he entered the university of Erfurt to study scho-

lastic thought, logic, metaphysics, rhetoric, and physics — the traditional studies of his time. Because the Renaissance had entered German universities too, he also studied the Latin classics and developed in poetry and music. Probably at 20 years of age he saw a complete Bible for the first time, at which time began also a struggle in Luther's soul which, created by God, was the burden of his own personal salvation. In 1502 he graduated from the university with an A.B. degree and three years later obtained an A.M., roughly equivalent to a Ph.D. today. Law was his main concern, because it was his father's wish that he devote himself to what was one of the most promising careers in Roman Catholic Europe.

But God had other plans. Two events brought Luther into a monastery: one was the sudden death of a friend either killed in a duel or struck by lightning; the other was a terrible thunderstorm in which he thought he would die and pleaded with St. Anne to spare him, promising, if spared, to become a monk. He was spared, and a monk he became — on July 16, 1505.

He wanted to be a monk because he thought of the convent as the way to bring some peace to his fear-filled soul — peace which came from the assurance of God's love. God put him in a monastery so that he could learn the utter uselessness of every prescription Rome offered to attain this peace. But Rome's prescriptions were no prescriptions at all, because they were based on what man had to do.

And, indeed, in the monastery he tried it all. As he himself put it, he out-monked all the monks. He mistreated himself so badly with various works of penance that he harmed his health. He confessed sins to his superior so often and in such detail that he was told finally either to commit some sin worth confessing or to quit both-

ering a busy man with silly little things.

God sent him some help in the monastery, perhaps sufficient to keep Luther sane, although not sufficient as yet to bring Luther peace. The help came from Johann von Staupitz, the Vicar-general of the monastery, one who because of his mystical leanings knew more about salvation than the whole Romish church, but who never left Rome for all that. von Staupitz directed Luther to Scripture, turned Luther's thoughts to the forgiveness of sins in the cross, and planted the seeds of the priesthood in Luther's soul. In 1511, in one of Luther's periods of black despair, von Staupitz, while sitting with Luther under a pear tree in the garden of the monastery, told Luther to prepare himself for preaching by becoming a Doctor of Theology. Luther's response was: "Your honor, Mr. Staupitz, you will deprive me of my life." Only half in jest, Staupitz replied: "Quite all right. God has plenty of work for clever men to do in heaven."

The time spent in the monastery was necessary for Luther to realize that the theology of the Romish church was wrong because it taught salvation by works. And the works which God required could never be performed by man. Luther himself was plagued with the thought that one either did not do enough good works, or the works which he did were not sufficiently good to earn his salvation. And because no works could earn salvation, the peace and joy of salvation could not be found in Romish prescriptions. Luther needed to learn this lesson in the school of the Holy Spirit, because no reformation would ever be possible without learning it.

Luther's Conversion

Luther entered the priesthood and said his first mass on May 2, 1507. But he continued his studies towards a doctorate in theol-

ogy which, when completed, opened the door for him to become professor in the University of Wittenburg. In the winter of 1512 the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther began his teaching with lecturing on the Psalms, on Romans, on Galatians, on Hebrews, and again on the Psalms. He saw these studies as crucial and later said: "In the course of this teaching, the papacy slipped away from me."

The breakthrough in understanding came with new insights into the phrase, "The righteousness of God," as it appears in Romans 1:17: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." Luther had always thought of God's righteousness as God's essential perfection and His consequent hatred of sin. He looked at God's righteousness as God's burning wrath against any one who did not keep God's ways perfectly.

But in what later has become known as Luther's "tower experience" he suddenly came to understand that the phrase, "the righteousness of God," did not refer to God's hatred of sin rooted in His own perfection, but meant that God imputed righteousness to the sinner without works and only because of the merits of Christ. It was a righteousness freely given to undeserving sinners by faith. It seemed to him, Luther later said in describing this event, that the gates of heaven themselves were opened before him. Suddenly his awful sense of guilt and unworthiness fell away; his desperate attempts to achieve peace with God through his labors seemed stupid and useless; all his monkish rituals were exercises in futility. He was without any sin, not because he did not sin, but because Christ's righteousness was freely given. He was, as he described it, righteous and a sinner at the same time. This brought peace, even in the struggle with sin.

The full implications of this

theological "breakthrough" did not dawn immediately on Luther. Once having seen this great light, he now had to re-read and re-study the Psalms and Paul, for, understanding that salvation through imputed righteousness lay at the heart of Scripture, he had to look again at it all from the viewpoint of this "heart."

The Reformation

The reformation had been, by God's grace, completed in Luther's soul. It was now time for the work to begin in the church at large. God had readied the man He was to use, and even if Luther did not know it, the people of God were now to be led out of the Egypt of Rome's church into the Canaan of the gospel. And Luther was appointed the Moses.

The work began when the monk Tetzel decided to hawk his indulgences in Saxony of Germany, where the news of it came to Luther's attention. Luther, convinced in his own soul of the evil of indulgences, decided to open the subject to debate among the monks of the Augustinian Order of which he was a part. To invite others to the debate, he attached 95 theses to the chapel door of the church of Wittenburg, as notice, to anyone wishing to participate, what the subject of the debate would be.

It became evident from this time on that the reformation was indeed the work of God, not the work of Luther. It had been God's work in Luther's soul, but it continued to be God's work as well. Luther himself, in describing the progress of the Reformation, was later to say:

The first thing I ask is that people should not make use of my name, and should not call themselves Lutherans but Christians. What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone.... How did I, poor stinking bag of maggots that I am,

come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name?

Or a bit later, in a sermon:

I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept, or drank Wittenburg beer with my Philip and my Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing. The Word did it all.

This conviction of Luther that what happened was God's work was apparent at the time of the theses. Luther, rather innocently, wanted a general discussion. God took the theses and through the marvel of the printing press caused them to be distributed through the whole of Europe, and they shook Europe to its foundations. The theses were the germ of the gospel of salvation in Christ alone, a truth for which Europe hungered. □

... to be continued.

Apples of Gold

Reckoning

(Romans 8:18)

Counted —

All counted — hairs,
Sparrows' falls, and tears,
Stars, stumbling sheep;
He knows their number,
Does not slumber,
Does not sleep.

And we,

Who, nightly counting,
Tally losses slowly mounting,
Numbering trials, griefs, and
pains,
Fail to reckon,
Fail to see our Keeper beckon
As He sums the heavenly gains.

— Suzanne Terpstra Looyenga

Liberty

To appreciate the concept liberty or freedom as an aspect of salvation, we must understand its counterpart of slavery or imprisonment as an aspect of the curse. These ideas are contrasted in Isaiah 61:1, where the prophet states that he was anointed by the Spirit "to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." The chief prophet, Jesus, applied these words to Himself at the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4:18). True liberation theology is the setting forth of God's only begotten Son, joined to human nature, as the only way by which man must be saved.

It belongs to the curse of God upon the sinner that he is a slave to sin (Rom. 6:6), a captive to the evil motions of his flesh (Rom. 6:12), a prisoner in solitary confinement with the death sentence upon him. Man's condition of captivity or liberty is always the outgrowth of his state or relationship to the law of God. Does the holy Judge of heaven and earth declare a man to be innocent according to the law? Then he is a free man. Or, does the righteous Judge declare a person to be guilty and yet under the law's curse? Then he is a captive, bound fast under the dominion of the law.

The Hebrew word for liberty is very expressive: it means roomy, spacious, or broad. We may think of a child joyfully romping across a broad meadow of grass and flowers, enjoying the fresh air and sunshine. The contrast is the cramped experience of a smelly cell where one's activity and view are severely restricted. The Greek word for liberty expresses the idea of being without restraint, not a slave, exempt from liability, completely free. Again, the contrast is that of being hemmed in, a slave to a cruel master, liable to punishment, without hope in the world.

That Christ proclaims liberty to the captives, that there is a church that enjoys that liberty and gladly preaches the liberating gospel to the ends of the earth, is solidly based on the work of Christ on the cross. He was made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem (purchase free) those that were under the law (Gal. 4:4). Christ has redeemed the elect church from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). Believers, as children of the promise and born of the Spirit, are not children of the

bondswoman (Hagar), but of the free (Sarah) (Gal. 4:22-31). But if someone thinks he must do something to be saved in addition to the work of Christ (such as circumcision or any other work of the law), he is a debtor to do the whole law. Then Christ profits him nothing, he is fallen from grace (that is, he may not claim salvation is by grace alone, otherwise grace is no more grace), and he entangles himself again in the yoke of bondage (Gal. 5:1-4).

After Paul has established that justification is by faith alone without the works of the law (Gal. 3:11), he goes on to warn the freely justified sinner not to use liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but to serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13). And Peter instructs those who have been made free "not to use their liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God" (I Pet. 2:16). Being made free from sin by being baptized into the death of Christ, we have become the servants of God, and have fruit unto holiness, with the end everlasting life (Rom. 6:22).

Although the curse of the law has been removed from us in that Christ bore that curse away as our Substitute, strikingly the law continues to occupy an important place in the Christian's life. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the law shall never pass away! Freedom and law are not mutually exclusive. Freedom is not to do what one pleases, but to do what pleases God! A life of freedom is not a life of disregard for the commandments of God, but it is a life lived with the law inscribed on our hearts by the Holy Spirit, a life of constant meditation upon the law, a striving to bring every aspect of our lives into harmony with God's precepts. For the law does not forbid us any good thing! Life under the law of God is roomy, spacious, and broad! The psalmist explains, "And I will walk at liberty; for I seek thy precepts" (Ps. 119:45). And James, as he insists that faith is a living, working faith, calls the law of God the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25), and the royal law of liberty (James 2:8-12). To walk with God, to walk as God walks, to walk thankfully as God decrees, that is glorious liberty (Rom. 8:21).

All the truth as it is in Christ, embraced with a believing heart, makes us free (John 8:32). If the Son makes you free, then are you free indeed (John 8:36)! □

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Our Death in Adam

Sin entered this world exactly as it is recorded for us in the book of Genesis, chapter 3.¹ We believe the historical account of God's Scriptures. According to God's own account, as revealed by His Spirit to Moses and thus recorded in Genesis 3, a sorrowful transgression took place in that beautiful garden which was the first paradise. In the midst of that God-glorifying creation, in that tabernacle which God had created as the place where He delighted to meet in covenant fellowship with the man whom He had created after His own image, in that paradise where everything breathed of the perfection and greatness of the living God, there man sinned and brought corruption upon himself and his posterity.

There in the first paradise the perfect man robbed God of His due honor. He cast God out of his heart. He severed the bonds of friendship, only to reestablish a bond of friendship with the devil himself. He who had been created to manifest his love and affection to his Creator committed spiritual suicide. He kindled the fires of hell, as it were, with his own hands! And, in doing so, Adam brought the whole human race into the bondage of guilt and sin and death.

By man corruption entered the world — by man who was created in the image of God. By man who was in need of nothing, to whom

God had given everything, the whole world was cast into spiritual poverty. By the first man, Adam, the whole human race was cast into bondage to sin and corruption. Dead in sin! That describes man as the consequence of Adam's fall.

An Unpopular Doctrine

The truth of which we speak is a very unpopular doctrine. That man sins is undeniable. Sin is everywhere. It surrounds us; it follows us; it is within us. It speaks to us from every page of our daily newspapers. It is openly portrayed on the television screen and is found in the streets of even our smallest communities.

Furthermore, that sinful man is under the power of death is also undeniable. There is no man that will say with confidence, "I am not going to die." Sin and death are a universal phenomenon in this world—although some, not knowing or not believing the Bible, may want to avoid connecting the two.

But the *extent* of sin's power over man is a very unpopular truth today. In this day when self-esteem is the rage, and when any talk about sin is viewed as a thing detrimental to man's psyche, to speak about being corrupt and filled with hatred and evil is not popular, even among those who are called to preach the Word. Many who stand in pulpits today would rather speak sweet things, without regard to whether or not they be true. When the Heidelberg Catechism insists that we are so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all wickedness except we

are regenerated by the Spirit of God, it is no wonder that men object strenuously.

This rejection of what the Bible says about the extent of our corruption is nothing new. It really goes as far back as Adam, who pointed his finger at the woman, the implication being that he was not as bad as she.

But there are questions that arise in our minds which Adam did not have to face. After all, he was directly involved in committing the first sin. But how is it possible that I am corrupt for that which Adam did thousands of years ago? I don't know the man; I was not there when he sinned; I likely don't even have the same skin color. How can I bear any blame or guilt for something *Adam* did?

Those are questions that demand an answer. Regardless of the answer, the fact is clearly set forth in Romans 5: By the one sin of Adam, the whole human race was brought under the dominion of guilt and corruption. But how? That is the question.

The Influence of Pelagius

There was a man who came up with an answer to this question. His name was Pelagius. He was a church man, a monk, who lived in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. His answer was basically

¹ Because Prof. H.C. Hoeksema's account of the fall is being reprinted in the *Standard Bearer* I will not enter into a discussion of the historical development of the fall, but refer the readers to those articles.

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this: All sin must be an individual act, and all guilt is only the consequence of that individual act.

That answer of Pelagius sounds pretty good, doesn't it? I like that. It seems only fair. If Adam did something, that's not my problem. If you sin, that's not my problem. Only if I commit the sin do I bear any consequences of it.

Pelagius taught more. He taught that the sin of Adam affected only himself, and did not corrupt his children at all. All infants, therefore, are born in exactly the same state and condition as that of Adam before the fall. The problem is: Adam gave us a bad example, and we by nature are imitators. We too must make choices, as Adam had to, between good and evil. And because of the evil environment into which we are born, most of us *become* sinful and corrupt.

I like that too, don't you? When we do wrong, you see, we can blame our environment. We can blame the bad example of our parents. We can blame sinful church members. We can blame that teacher, that employer, that politician.

Along these same lines Pelagius taught that the solution is to be found along the lines of gradual development. If we can improve a man's environment and give him a better education and better surroundings, he soon will choose what is right and will serve God.

Pelagius did not want the truth of total depravity. He did not want to say that man is bad, rotten to the core. He wanted to find good in man, in *every* man, an *original* goodness in every man, by which man himself has power to prevail over evil. The problem was that his answer had no basis in Scripture. It was, therefore, a wrong answer.

God raised up Augustine to defend the truth of the Scriptures over against the Pelagian error.

And through the course of history God preserved the true faith in the line of those followers of Augustine, who himself followed the teachings of Scripture.

The trouble was that not many wanted to stand with Augustine on the foundation of Bible truth. The teachings of Pelagius, because they were so appealing to the nature and pride of man, were well received by the church at large.

Before too many years, with only slight change, the views of Pelagius had become the views of the church. And those views, which in their altered state became known as semi-Pelagianism, permeate not only the entire Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation, but, sad to say, much of Protestant doctrine as well in our day, even in those churches that once were Reformed. The truth of total depravity is corrupted and rejected.

Adam's Legal Headship

When we turn to Romans 5, verses 12 and following, we find the very clear teaching that we stand in such a close relationship to Adam that his fall had a profound effect upon us all. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.... Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. 5:12,18).

The same truth is expressed in I Corinthians 15:22: "For as in Adam all die...."

That one man, Adam, was the gateway through which the awful flood of sin broke upon the whole human race. And in the wake of that flood of sin came death. Because we are Adamites, we are under sin's domain.

The explanation for that is found in this, that Adam stood as the legal head of the whole human race.

You will notice that the whole section of Romans 5, verse 12 to the end of the chapter, speaks in legal terms—offense, judgment, condemnation, righteousness, justification—all legal terms. In the eighteenth verse it is not the question of personal corruption and actual, personal sin that the apostle speaks about. He is speaking about our *guilt*.

To be guilty is to be deserving of punishment, a punishment that fits the crime of which we are guilty. The apostle speaks of judgment that comes upon *all* men because of one man's offense.

Condemnation has come upon all men. And this condemnation is just! But what is its justice? This condemnation comes upon all and has its basis of justice, not in the many offenses of all men, but in the one offense of the first man, Adam. Adam's guilt is imputed, is charged, to all mankind, to each and every one of his posterity.

The only way that that can be is on the basis of a legal oneness between Adam and all men. There is a legal solidarity of the entire human race in Adam as its representative head.

The truth of Scripture condemns all individualism when it comes to man. That is why the unity of the church is such an important factor, to which we are called repeatedly in Scripture. We are *one* body. And though there are many individual members, many persons, yet are we *one*. So it is with the entire human race.

Pelagius and all his followers want individualism. Scripture condemns individualism and teaches *corporate* oneness, *corporate* responsibility, *corporate* guilt. When Adam sinned that first sin in paradise, *we* sinned. We *all* sinned in Adam. We all became guilty when that one man, Adam, our legal head, fell and declared war against the Almighty God.

Perhaps the question arises: Why did God create the human race with such a legal solidarity in

Adam? Be careful how you ask that question. If your question contains even a hint of sinful criticism of God's way, to you comes the Word of God in Romans 9:20: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" God has the perfect right

as Creator to form His creation according to His will and good pleasure.

But should you ask the question by faith, with the desire to know your Creator better — Why did God create the human race with such a legal solidarity in Adam — the answer from Scripture is plain: In wisdom God es-

tablished such a legal relationship between Adam and the human race, for it was His purpose to save to Himself a people in Christ. From that fallen race in Adam, God would redeem a people who stand in a similar relationship to their Redeemer who is Christ, the last Adam and the Lord from heaven. □

Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

U.S. Supreme Court Rejects Colorado's Constitutional Amendment Repudiating Preferential Treatment of Homosexuals

We cannot accept the view that Amendment 2's prohibition on specific legal protection does no more than deprive homosexuals of special rights. To the contrary, the amendment imposes a special disability upon those persons alone. Homosexuals are forbidden the safeguards that others enjoy or may seek without constraint.

Romer v. Evans, U.S. Supreme Court (1996)
(Majority opinion).

The Court's majority opinion contains grim, disapproving hints that Coloradans have been guilty of "animus" or "animosity" toward homosexuality, as though that has been established as Unamerican. But I had thought that one could consider certain conduct reprehensible — murder, for example, or polygamy, or cruelty to animals — and could exhibit even "animus" toward such conduct. Surely that is the only sort of "animus" at issue here: moral disapproval of homosexual conduct, the same sort of moral disapproval that produced the centuries-old sodomy criminal laws that we held constitutional in *Bowers*.

Romer v. Evans (1996) (dissenting opinion).

The Cultural War

May landlords refuse to rent to homosexual partners when doing so would violate their conscience? May municipalities deny pension death-benefit payments requested

by "life partner" survivors of homosexual employees? Must insurance companies ignore the distinctive health insurance risks associated with insureds who are homosexuals? May a public school district refuse to hire a teacher who is an avowed lesbian? These and many other homosexual issues have fueled an unprecedented and bitter cultural debate in this country during the last decade. But because homosexuals have recently become politically powerful in cer-

tain cities, they have managed to sponsor and enact expansive legislation that affords them special status. These ordinances typically prohibit "discrimination" against them in housing, employment, education, and health and welfare services.

The Colorado cities of Aspen, Boulder, and Denver recently enacted such ordinances which banned such "discrimination" against persons "because of their sexual orientation." These munici-

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pal laws affording special protection of certain persons because of their immoral sexual conduct enraged many Coloradans who then sponsored a statewide referendum to amend the Colorado state constitution to prohibit homosexuals from being singled out for special treatment. After a contentious and caustic campaign, the so-called Amendment 2 was adopted in 1992 by a majority of voters in a statewide referendum. Homosexual "task forces" immediately filed suit to have the courts declare that Amendment 2 violated the U.S. Constitution which guarantees all citizens "equal protection of laws."

The *Romer v. Evans* Decision

In a bitterly divided 6-3 decision released early this summer, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the homosexual plaintiffs, holding that Amendment 2 evidenced an impermissible "animus" or "animosity" toward homosexuals which deprived them "equal protection of the law." Homosexual groups across the country were jubilant, ecstatically declaring *Romer v. Evans* a victory exceeding their most optimistic expectations. The national press, particularly the weekly news magazines, ran stories of elated leaders of homosexual organizations pictured with raised and clenched fists of triumph.

Evangelical leaders, "family value" proponents, and most conservative constitutional scholars were stunned by the *Romer v. Evans* decision thwarting the citizenry of Colorado's intent to preserve traditional sexual mores. The *Romer v. Evans* decision is rapidly earning notoriety for its glaring lack of legal rationale, substituted only by the Court's transparent endeavor to legislate rather than interpret our nation's laws. Also noticeably absent from the majority's opinion was even a passing reference to its *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision of only ten years ago in which the Court upheld the

constitutionality of the Georgia sodomy criminal statute. Judge Scalia, a Roman Catholic, filed a vigorous dissent castigating the majority for a decision devoid of "support in law or logic."

Amendment 2

The state constitutional amendment challenged by homosexuals was an attempt by the voters of Colorado to repeal the controversial ordinances passed by several municipalities protecting persons discriminated against by reason of their supposed "sexual orientation." The Amendment 2 read as follows:

Neither the State of Colorado nor any of its agencies, political subdivisions, municipalities or school districts shall adopt or enforce any law or policy whereby homosexual, lesbian or bisexual orientation, conduct, practices or relationships shall constitute or entitle any person to have or claim any minority status, quota preferences, protected status or claim of discrimination.

Colorado and proponents of the amendment argued to the Court that Amendment 2 merely "puts gays and lesbians in the same position as all other persons" and "does no more than deny homosexuals special rights." The State of Colorado also justified Amendment 2 as providing respect for other citizens's freedom of association, in particular the liberties of landlords or employers who have personal or religious objections to homosexuality.

The majority opinion rejected these arguments, finding instead that:

Amendment 2's sheer breadth is so discontinuous with the reasons offered for it that the amendment seems inexplicable by anything but animus toward the class that it affects; it lacks a rational relationship to legitimate state interests; it raised the inevitable inference that the disadvantage im-

posed is born of animosity toward the class of persons affected.*** We must conclude that Amendment 2 classifies homosexuals not to further a proper legislative end, but to make them unequal to everyone else. This Colorado cannot do.

Scalia's Dissent

Justice Scalia, joined by Justice Clarence Thomas and Chief Justice Rehnquist, filed a strongly worded dissent arguing that the Court had absolutely no legal justification for preempting the will of a majority of Coloradans. The amendment denying special status to homosexuals, wrote Scalia, is "not only unimpeachable under any constitutional doctrine hitherto pronounced, it has been specifically approved by Congress and by this Court."

In holding that homosexuality cannot be singled out for disfavorable treatment, this court contradicts a decision, unchallenged here, pronounced only 10 years ago in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, and places the prestige of this institution behind the proposition that opposition to homosexuality is as reprehensible as racial or religious bias. Whether it is or is not is precisely the cultural debate that gave rise to the Colorado constitutional amendment (and to the preferential laws against which the amendment was directed). This Court has no business imposing upon all Americans its own resolution of that debate, pronouncing that "animosity" toward homosexuality is evil. I vigorously dissent.

Addressing the majority's first argument that the challenged amendment denied homosexuals equal protection of the laws, Scalia argues the amendment prohibits only *special* treatment of homosexuals and nothing more. The only denial of equal treatment the homosexuals have arguably suffered is this: They may not obtain preferential treatment without

amending the state constitution. If this is denial of equal protection, Scalia writes, then "our constitutional jurisprudence has achieved terminal silliness."

Special Protection for Homosexuals

The dissent also addressed the majority's failure to recognize the legitimate rational basis for the amendment, i.e., the prohibition of special treatment for homosexuals. Scalia then chides the majority for not even mentioning the *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision:

In *Bowers v. Hardwick* we held that the Constitution does not prohibit what virtually all States had done from the founding of the Republic — making homosexual conduct a crime. It is if it is constitutionally permissible for a State to make homosexual conduct criminal, surely it is constitutionally permissible for a State to enact other laws merely *disfavoring* homosexual conduct. (After all, there can hardly be more palpable discrimination against a class than making the conduct that defines the class criminal).

And *a fortiori* it is constitutionally permissible for a State to adopt an amendment *not even* disfavoring homosexual conduct, but merely prohibiting *special protection* upon homosexual conduct.

Justice Scalia also criticized the logic of the majority opinion by referring to the analogy of the current prohibition of polygamy. In fact, the constitutions of Arizona, Idaho, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Utah contain provisions even today declaring that polygamy is "forever prohibited." Thus, argues Scalia, polygamists, and those who have a polygamous "orientation," have likewise been singled out for a "much more severe treatment" than the mere denial of special treatment or favored status of homosexuals:

The majority's disposition today suggests that these [anti-polygamy] provisions are unconstitutional, and that polygamy must be permitted in these States on a state-legislated, or perhaps even local-option, basis — unless, of course, polygamists for some rea-

son have fewer constitutional rights than homosexuals.

Conclusion

Certainly the *Romer v. Evans* decision is one of the most deplorable Supreme Court rulings in recent years. As Justice Scalia laments, the absurd notions that homosexuals deserve preferential status and that Western society's traditional disapprobation of homosexuality constitutes illegal discrimination, now have the imprimatur of the U.S. Supreme Court. Although the ordinances adopted by Denver, Boulder, and Aspen are not yet universal, it is not unreasonable to assume that countless cities and counties will now be compelled by homosexual proponents emboldened by *Romer v. Evans*, to pass similar laws requiring landlords, employers, public service establishments, and others to violate their moral and religious conscience by acquiescing to the increasingly offensive demands by the homosexual community, or face criminal or civil liability for violating these new laws. □

Contending for the Faith

Rev. Bernard Woudenberg

More About Logic

In the February 26 issue of *Christian Renewal* there appeared the following letter by a Mr. Tim Gallant reflecting on our past writings. It read as follows:

Limits of Human Reason

I have followed with interest the discussion between J. Tuininga, B. Woudenberg, and other brothers from the Protestant Reformed,

Liberated, and newly-federating churches. It seems to me that the heart of the issue involved with the Protestant Reformed understanding of the covenant and their rejection of the free offer has not yet been articulated clearly.

It is thought that we who accept the free offer reject logic. The problem, however, is not with logic *per se*, but rather with the exaltation of finite human reason over the Word of God. We do not hold contradictory views in tension, but we recognize that the richness of biblical revelation must

fix human reason within its prescribed bounds. Unbelievers, we know, suppress the truth (Rom. 1: 18), making their autonomous reason the arbiter over God. But beyond this extreme lies the possibility that we, even as believers, demand that as finite, sinful creatures we can fit an infinite, incomprehensible God into our logical constructions. This is another, more subtle form of idolatry of reason, which, I concede, most of us are guilty of in one way or another.

The PR's do not see how God

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can freely offer the Gospel to unbelievers, while simultaneously decreeing them to reprobation. But using identical logic, Arminians do not see how God can freely, "sincerely" uphold His righteous Law, and yet decree that men break it. Or, to put the matter even closer to home, does God really sincerely despise sin in His children? If so, why do they yet sin since God has the power to change this fact? Are His statements about His hatred of sin insincere? Should we mark them with asterisks? What about Adam? Did God decree the Fall? If He did not, then He is not absolutely sovereign. But how could He justly decree the Fall, when Adam was not created corrupt? For that matter, how could Adam fall if he was created upright?

You see, we are dealing with reason both crippled by the Fall, and limited by creaturehood. What may seem contradictory to it may be perfectly consistent, but simply beyond our grasp. A statement that rings of truth in one sense may be untrue in another, and we may have difficulty in distinguishing between those senses. The law of non-contradiction still stands, but we have to concede that we are necessarily limited in our application of it.

Meanwhile, drawing the Protestant Reformed line in the sand, the Declaration of Principles enshrines the refusal to concede such limitations. Or is it enshrined? Woudenberg denies that the PR's have elevated the Declaration to confessional status: "It was not that anyone joining our churches was required to consider this binding on their consciences...." On the other hand, what he does not tell us is that it was made very clear that no man holding to the Liberated view of the covenant would ever hold ecclesiastical office in the PR churches.

Functionally speaking, this means that the Principles were treated as a confessional matter.

The PR's claim that the Principles are simply a return to the early faithful teaching of the confessions and the Reformed Fathers. In actuality, the Principles contradict the confessions. For example, the Canons of Dort say that "the children of believers are holy, not only in nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they, together with the parents, are comprehended" (1.17). This has led to PR contortions: Gen. 17:14 now means that the father who fails to circumcise his child has broken the covenant by failing to pass on the sign. In arguing this, Woudenberg writes, after a "close look at (this) leading text," that "the breaking of the covenant is not to be first in it and then out."

Apostasy is impossible. But how can this interpretation stem from a close look at this verse? For it is the "uncircumcised male child" — that is, the "person (who) shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant." It is beyond question that the primary covenant-breaker in the text in question is not the father at all, but the child who has not received the sign — "in (the covenant) and then out."

Moreover, Woudenberg's suggestion is in direct contradiction to Hebrews 10, which tells us that he who has broken covenant has "trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which *He was sanctified* a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace" (v. 29). There is no honest way of escaping the force of these words. The Spirit of grace sanctifies people in the blood of the covenant — and these people are not elect. There is grace, there is sanctification in the covenant ("in it"), and there is apostasy ("out"). [It should be clarified that covenant judgment visits disobedient children within, and also excommunicated children without. Excommunication itself is, of course, a covenant judgment.] That is not Arminianism,

it is not irrational; it is simply the biblical doctrine of the covenant, which seems to defy (not deny) logic.

It is not enough to deny the "new hermeneutics." We also must deny any thorough-going rationalism which flattens the textured richness of God's Word for the sake of fitting it into the limited envelopes of our reason. Because of this, we must resist the Protestant Reformed approach to Scripture on these issues. We must be reformed to all of God's Word, in the glorious completeness of its counsel.

Tim Gallant
Sexsmith, AB

To this I submitted the following reply:

Dear Mr. VanDyk,

I was intrigued by Mr. Tim Gallant's letter in your February 26 issue of *Christian Renewal*, primarily because it brings our discussion of the place of logic in Christian thought into a new and altogether desirable area.

To begin with, it is always interesting to hear others describe what we in the Protestant Reformed Churches are supposed to believe and teach, when what they say is such that one like myself, who has lived his life at the heart of the PRC, has never heard or taught. And yet, perhaps, this is to be understood, seeing it clearly derives, not from a study of our material, but from certain cursory deductions made according to a logic quite different from our own; and it is that difference to which our discussion now turns.

This is the real value of what Mr. Gallant brings out. Rather than faulting us for using logic at all, as the others have done thus far — on the presumption that logic in itself is something bad — he recognizes the need for it; for, whether one acknowledges it or not, some kind of logic has to be there if intelligent communication is to take place. There has to be

an understanding of how thoughts relate, and a standard by which truth is gauged. The question is what logic this is to be.

In our day we live in a world permeated with a logic of relativity (Einstein amazingly seems to have left his mark almost everywhere). Nothing is true or false in itself, but only as it relates to other things; and at any time that can change. What is true at one time, and with relation to one thing, becomes the opposite at another. But we have learned to live with such contradictions, and even become fascinated by them, as nearly every form of modern art — to say nothing of politics, etc. — brings out. Each in its own way seems to have become completely taken up with meaningless contrasts and conflicts, as though that is what life is all about. And it has folded over into religion as well, until faith is seen as a leap into the incomprehensible darkness of enigmas and dilemmas, rather than the “certain knowledge” and “assured confidence” we have been taught by our past.

And yet, as modern as this might seem, its history lies deep in the rhetorical logic of ancient times with its concept of *duplex veritas* (double truth). Already in 1277 a group of students from the College of Arts at the University of Paris, who wanted to maintain the non-Christian views of Averroes, were disciplined for defending the proposition, among others, that theologically the world was created, but philosophically it is eternal — anticipating Howard VanTill by a bit, it would seem. But it was not until the Renaissance that such views came into their own, and were carried via humanism into northern Europe. Philip Melancthon defended rhetorical logic insistently, allowing him, as it did, to uphold both the theology of Luther, based on the bondage of the will, and his own favored view of synergism, with its presupposition that the human

will is free. Nor was it long thereafter that Peter Ramus made out of rhetorical principles a popular form of logic based on “eloquence” as its standard for determining truth, after which he joined the Reformed church world and spread his views broadly among many of its scholars. It was in this that Jacobus Arminius was first trained — and I can point out precisely where, in the first defense of his (Arminian) principles while debating with Francis Junius (a student of Calvin’s and a strong proponent of traditional logic), he used the principle of contradiction both to affirm the basic attributes of God appealed to by Junius, and deny them in the same breath, as, for example, when he argued “God possesses the eternal and unchangeable form ... in a changeable way.” To him such contradictions were acceptable as long as they could be convincingly put.

Striking, however, is the similarity of this to those who would criticize us in the PRC. It is not as though I would accuse them of Arminianism (the matter is far too complex for such simplistic judgments; and I would think better of them than that); but their rejection of consistent logic certainly leaves them defenseless against it, as becomes evident when Rev. J. Tuininga is driven to claim that to be Reformed is to be neither a consistent — or “hyper” — Calvinist or an Arminian, but both. And it is this, I would suggest, that causes Mr. Gallant to be caught on the horns of the dilemmas he lists when he asks, “Does God really sincerely despise sin in His children? If so, why do they yet sin since God has the power to change this fact? Are His statements about His hatred of sin insincere? Should we mark them with asterisks? What about Adam? Did God decree the Fall? If He did not, then He is not absolutely sovereign. But how could He justly decree the Fall, when Adam was not created corrupt? For that mat-

ter, how could Adam fall if he was created upright?” These tensions to him I am sure are very real, as his logic demands they be. And that is the point. When contradictions are accepted, nothing is right or wrong in itself, and every question someone would think to bring up regarding the Scriptures must be taken seriously, as Mr. Gallant thinks he must. But it doesn’t have to be that way.

When one accepts the often stated principle of Scripture that God in his revelation does not contradict himself, one can, by carefully comparing each Scripture with all Scriptures — in the way traditional Reformed hermeneutics always did — find those currents of thought that run consistently through the whole, and set them forth as truth (as our confessions have done), and reject their opposites as error (as they all do as well).

But that is not all. Sound logic also tells us where not enough is known for surety such as this, as in those instances where God has withheld certain things from us, like He did when Moses, struggling with the question of how Jehovah could both be just in the punishment of Israel’s sin and still lead them graciously into the promised land, exclaimed, Exodus 33:18, “I beseech thee, show me thy glory,” to which the Lord replied, :20-23, “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.” God would reveal as much as it was good for Moses to know, but no more — and strikingly what He revealed was the doctrine of election (compare Ex. 33:19 with Rom. 9:15,16), but not who the

elect are, or why they are chosen and others passed by. Such limitations proper logic recognizes, and is satisfied to stay within, without having to struggle with their contradictories, as Mr. Galant seems pressed to try.

And there is more. Besides the things which God tells us He has withheld, there are others in the Scriptures, of which good logic warns us we do not know sufficient to be sure. It may be that not enough has been revealed, but it may also be that our study has simply been inadequate, or that God has not yet given us the spiritual insight required (for understanding God's Word, after all, takes more than just mental acumen; one must be led into it by the Spirit, a gift only grace can provide [John 16:13]). Nevertheless, one can and should continue

to search, as the Bereans did [Acts 17:11]; and in doing so he will grow, whether he come to final conclusions or not, into a greater appreciation for and fellowship with the living God (which is what the covenant is finally all about).

And so, perhaps above all, what sound logic does is to protect us from radical conclusions with inadequate footing in the Word. No one should presume that, because he has found a text or two which seem to support a favored view of his, that he is free to present it as God's Word regardless of how it conflicts with other texts; and yet, with all of the Pentecostal influences of our day, this is exactly what is being done repeatedly. But it should not be. Before anyone accepts or teaches anything, he should be sure that it is in harmony with the whole of

what God has said (for which test our creeds are a wonderful tool); and, until he does, to discuss it perhaps as something to be considered, but without claiming it to be God's Word.

And so, we would hope and pray that what remains of the Reformed faith today will draw back from this strange flirtation with contradictory logic, and return to the way of the fathers in which only sound theological development can take place, and which we have received from the past be preserved.

In many ways this strikes at the heart of the whole matter, for it deals with the oneness of God; and few things are more basic than this. But it also reaches out and touches on nearly everything else, as we hope to show as we go on. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

John: From the Mountain Top

(Searching John with Purpose)

With this study we begin our searching the Scriptures together.

A few things before we begin.

First, as to the manner in which we ought to engage in Bible study: May we ever be as the Bereans! May God grant us His grace and Holy Spirit to search the Scriptures as becomes Christian nobility! May the profit of our searching be our sanctification unto the praise of God!

Second, we plan on continuing a study of the gospel according to John. This study was begun a few years ago in this magazine by the Rev. Carl Haak. The reader or societies which are interested in studying John and who do not have Rev. Haak's previously published articles are welcome to copies of these. Just contact the business office of the *SB*.

Third, as we study the Scriptures together there may be questions the reader may have. Here is an open invitation to ask them of me in the pages of this magazine. I do not claim, of course, to have all the answers. But certainly we shall search the Scriptures together, and be built up in our faith!

Perspective

The gospel according to John was inspired for a special purpose. That purpose is expressly stated in John 20:31: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

Though the text tells the reason, first of all, why Jesus' signs (miracles, v.30) were written down, it is clear from the whole book of John that the whole book was written for the same purpose. *John is inspired by the Spirit of God to reveal the identity of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and to give faith and life through His name!*

I would like the purpose of John expressed in John 20:31 to be

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our "mountaintop," from which we view the fertile plain which is this entire gospel. This being the case, three things follow which will be important for our study of John.

First, since the Spirit inspired John to reveal that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, we ought to search John especially for this truth. In other words, we ought to be focused. To be sure, we should learn everything we can about every aspect of this Word of God. We must know, for example, who the Pharisees are of whom John speaks. We ought to investigate the various ceremonies involved in the Old Testament Passover feast, and other feasts mentioned in John. And knowing the geography of Palestine will be helpful. But in all things we must see how Jesus is set forth as the Christ, the Son of God. If we miss this, then our study will be hindered.

Second, since the Spirit's purpose for writing John is that we *believe* what is said of Jesus, then we too will want to be confirmed and built up in our faith. We want to know the Scriptures, and to be able intelligently to discuss them and witness to the truth. But our primary purpose is to *believe*, and to *grow* in faith in Jesus the Christ of God!

Third, since the Spirit's purpose in writing John is that we believe what is said of Jesus in order that believing we might have life, as we study John we will want to be appreciating more and more that life we have in Christ. Our goal, too, will be that our believing study will help us to live out of that life, and to look forward to the glorification of that life in heaven.

The first chapters of John seen from the mountaintop

* *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*

The reader will note how the identity of Jesus as the Christ the Son of God is brought out in every chapter of the book of John.

The whole book is, as one commentator has said, a veritable "self-disclosure" of Jesus. In John Jesus is revealed: both through His own deeds and words, and through John's inspired commentary on the blessed Savior.

See how this is the case! In the beginning verses we are introduced to One, Jesus, who is the eternal Word of God, very God Himself and the revelation of this God (1:1-18). In the same chapter Jesus is pointed out as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29,36). In chapter 2 He performs His first miracle at the marriage in Cana, showing plainly His divine, creative person and His office as Messiah. John 3 reports that the Son was sent into the world to be its Savior. And so on through the chapters: the revelation of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God!

That ye might believe!

John emphasizes the importance of *true faith* in this Jesus who is the Christ, the Son of God. More than Matthew, Mark, and Luke combined, John uses the verb "believe." In addition, there is much instruction given on true faith, and many miracles are recorded in John for the express purpose, as John says, "that ye might believe."

Thus we read that John came to bear witness of the light, that all through Him might believe (1:7), and that as many as received (believed) Christ, to them gave He power to become the sons of God (1:12); that the disciples when they witnessed the miracle of Cana believed (2:11); that the Son of God is sent that whosoever believeth on Him might have everlasting life (3:16). Faith is described as "drinking" of the water Jesus gives (4:14); believing Christ is believing Moses and all of the Old Testament which testifies of Him (5:39ff.); and in John 6:50, believing is described as eating Christ, the bread of life.

Having life through His Name!

What blessed life there is through the Name, and believing the Name of Jesus! This life of faith, John teaches, is a life not from blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (1:13). Further, the life we receive through faith is a life of the fullness of God in Christ (1:16); a born-again life (3:1-13); a life sustained by the water of life which is a well of water springing up into everlasting life (4:14). It is a life, too, of body and soul due to the Father's raising up the dead, the Son quickening whom He will (v. 21), and our being raised up in the resurrection unto life (v. 29). And in John 6, through the record of the feeding of the 5000, we learn of the abundance of the life Jesus gives: for eating of this One, the bread from heaven, is to have everlasting life (v. 47).

For study, meditation, and discussion:

* The Bereans "searched" the Scriptures daily. They probably did not have concordances and commentaries as we do. Discuss how these "helps" to our searching are beneficial. What else is important for our searching the Scriptures?

* In introducing this study I have suggested a "perspective," a viewpoint from which we might study John. Do you think that the entire Scriptures may be read, for our edification, from this same vantage point of John 20:31?

* I have cited only some examples of how John, in the first chapters of his gospel, reveals that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and leads us to faith in Him. Search these Scriptures yourselves for many more examples!

* Since John 20:31 is our "vantage point," let us make sure we are familiar with the names "Jesus," "Christ," "Son of God," and what these signify. Also, be sure to understand "faith," and "believing," and the "life" we have through

faith. You may wish to consult the Heidelberg Catechism for a summary of Scripture's truth regarding the names of the Mediator: L.D. 11-13, and also L.D. 7 on "faith" (cf. also The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 14). But most importantly: discern *from the Scriptures* all that these names and words mean.

* The purpose of the Spirit

through John is that God's elect might believe — for the first time, and, when they are given faith, that believers might also continue to believe and be strengthened in faith. What does this purpose in John 20:31 teach ought to be our focus and goal as we witness to those who do not believe? John's purpose in our believing is that we

might "have life." What is life *without* faith? How does one know when he or she has life? How do we live, enjoy, and show the life we have? What is the origin of the life of which Jesus speaks? Can you show all this from Scripture?

Next time I hope to study with you John 7:32-36.

May God richly bless our Bible study! □

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ An Obituary for the C.R.C.?

One reviews the decisions taken at the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church this past summer with concern and alarm. The course of that denomination, as reported by conservative CRC observers, appears to follow unrelentingly a downhill course.

Some of the significant decisions of the Synod are reported in *The Outlook*, July/August 1996. The reporter, Cornelis P. Venema, mentions some of the following with his own comments about the decisions.

1) The Synod made decisions relating to the diversity within the church (5% are other than white). According to Venema, though the church is rightly reminded of the need to be tolerant and to recognize racial and ethnic diversity, the Synod was inclined to follow the practice adopted within our own country. There appears to be a deliberate attempt to establish a quota system assuring that minorities receive their fair share of appointments within the denomination — appointments based not necessarily upon qualification but on race. A committee composed

of racial and ethnic minority members was appointed. The committee "is mandated to assist in ensuring that committee appointments in the Christian Reformed denomination be sensitive to and inclusive of the various ethnic communities."

2) In decisions relating to inter-church relations, the Synod further distanced itself from the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN). It decided to "discontinue the practice of exchanging fraternal delegates at major assemblies and placing a moratorium on new joint ministry projects." But despite overtures to break relationships, despite grievous doctrinal errors in the GKN, the CRC refused to break the relationship.

The Synod further dealt with correspondence from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) informing it of the decision of the OPC to suspend relationships with the CRC, and break them completely in 1997 if the CRC maintains its stand on "women in office." The Synod also answered correspondence relating to the Presbyterian Church in America's decision to call the CRC to "repent and rescind" the action of Synod 1995 (re women in office).

3) Synod appointed a committee to examine the question of the routes followed for entrance into the ministry of the CRC. Present policy requires at least one year of

training in the CRC Seminary (or acceptance of ministers from other denominations by way of Arts. 7 and 8 of their Church Order). Because of many defections in recent years, there are many of the churches without ministers.

The Synod declared 21 men and 3 women to be candidates for ministry of the Word in the CRC. The vote for the women was separate from that of the men.

4) Synod dealt with various overtures concerning changes in the Church Order. It refused to allow a Classis (or Classes) to be established without regard to geographic boundaries but rather on the basis of doctrinal confession (i.e., those who refuse to declare the word "male" inoperative in their Article 3a.). It did, however, decide that there could be legitimate grounds for a church to be transferred to a more "conservative" Classis (or a more "progressive" church to a more "progressive" Classis).

5) Synod dealt with overtures concerning the issue of homosexuality. Venema states, "Observing the actions and decisions of Synod 1996 relative to the matter of homosexuality, it seems fair to conclude that this issue will be the next to test the resolve of the denomination in respect to its biblical and confessional commitments...."

6) Synod refused to adopt the recommendations of one of its

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study committees to change the three forms of unity by making them more acceptable with "Gender-Sensitive Language." Synod judged "that the CRC Worship Committee had violated its mandate by 'in some cases' changing the theological intent of the confessions."

7) The Synod reaffirmed its decision of last year concerning women in office. A majority and minority report from its advisory committee was presented. The majority report was adopted by an overwhelming vote of 122 yes to 54 no. The motion with its grounds was:

That synod not accede to overtures which ask for a revision of the decision of Synod 1995 regarding women in office, but that Synod 1996 affirm the 1995 decision: "A classis may, in response to local needs and circumstances, declare that the word *male* in Article 3a of the Church Order is inoperative, and authorize the churches under its jurisdiction to ordain and install women in the offices of elder, minister, and evangelist." Grounds: a. Previous study committees ... have established viable biblical grounds for this position. b. It has not been proved that this action is in violation of the Church Order. c. The denomination is not well served by continual reversals on this issue.

8) The Synod took also various decisions on other issues. It refused to declare the teachings of Calvin professor Hessel Bouma III to be in opposition to the position of the CRC on abortion. It adopted a change in Art. 51 of their Church Order to read, "The congregation shall assemble for worship, *ordinarily* twice on the Lord's Day, to hear God's word...." It adopted a schedule for a one-calendar week synod beginning next year. It "provisionally adopted" a new set of abuse guidelines which set aside the guidelines presented to Synod 1995.

Venema accuses the Synod of indecision in key issues before it. His conclusion is this:

As is often the case in such circumstances, synod found a variety of reasons to avoid doing what it was asked to do. Some of these reasons may even have a measure of validity. However, it is impossible to suppress the conviction that *these issues of indecision on Synod's part are symptomatic of a pattern of indecision and uncertainty to speak directly to the controversial issues of the day.* At no previous synodical assembly that I have observed was the appeal to the text of the Scriptures or the confessions as *absent* as it was at this synod. The reason for this absence is not hard to discover — *the Christian Reformed denomination is no longer marked by an exegetical and confessional consensus on the issues before it. The glue that holds the denomination together is increasingly composed of historical and institutional ingredients, decreasingly of biblical and confessional ones.*

Venema concedes that the battle with respect to the "women in office" issue is over. He states, "Let no ink or paper be wasted on writing overtures or appeals to synod on this issue asking for a revision and a return to the historic position. *The time for battling the issue of women in office in the Christian Reformed denomination is, humanly speaking, over.* Here conservatives can almost agree with the progressives in concluding that a continued fight about this issue would be a fruitless diversion of the churches' energy and resources."

Editors Thomas and Laurie VandenHeuvel agree: "But what makes me feel so utterly betrayed now is that the majority has determined something to be right without compelling Biblical warrant. The majority can put into a supplement to Church Order Article 3a something which contradicts Article 3a without providing

the church with any opportunity for ratification. We are betrayed because we are not playing on a level field. The majority gets its way. So, confrontation is over and we lost, not because we failed to debate properly, but because the rules were changed to give the other side the advantage. So the fight is over."

Now what? *The Outlook*, I think rather sadly, does not present a clarion call to reformation. The editorial of the VandenHeuvels speaks of "Confrontation" (which, in their judgment, is now over); "Consolidation" which must now take place especially at the "Inter-Classical Conference" which will be held in South Holland, IL in November; and "Continuation" which really presents no recommendation. In fact, one wonders whether the intent of the editors is to recommend remaining and continuing the fight in the CRC, or something else:

The future of the Reformed faith is bright, however. It might not flourish any longer in the CRC as it once did. But it will flourish. Those who have pledged their lives to uphold this faith are not going to withdraw into a small hurt minority which licks its wounds. Not at all. We will hold forth the great truths of the Reformed faith, probably with others who share this great heritage. There are people who must hear the gospel. There are children and young people to be taught and inspired. We must get on with the Great Commission both in terms of the cultural mandate and the spread of the gospel. The work must be done. We are eager for it.

Venema also expresses opinions on the course the "conservatives" ought to take. He insists that it would be "irresponsible" to continue with "business as usual" in the CRC. However, his proposal is that the "conservatives" remain for the time being in the CRC, gather in "provisional fel-

lowship," and "inform the denomination that they reserve the right to declare inoperative those sections of the Church Order and its supplements that restrict the freedom of access to their pulpits of men who meet the biblical requirements for office and have been examined by their churches."

He recommends, secondly, that the "conservatives" enter into discussions with existing or newly emerging Reformed denominations "who share their historical

biblical, confessional and church order commitments. The purpose of such discussions would be to separate from the Christian Reformed denomination and join a more biblical and confessionally Reformed communion of churches."

That seems hardly a clarion call either. Doubtlessly, there must be a high degree of frustration by "conservatives" because of the illegal and unbiblical action of the CRC Synod. But ought "conser-

vatives" then "level the playing field" by declaring also parts of the Church Order to be "inoperative"? If the "liberals" can run roughshod over their Church Order, does that justify "conservatives" doing the same thing? And what of "corporate responsibility"? Or is there no such thing? The official decisions of the Synod are the decisions of the Christian Reformed denomination. How long can one remain, in good conscience, under those decisions? □

Report of Classis West

September 4, 1996
at Randolph, Wisconsin

On September 4, Classis West met in Randolph, WI with Rev. M. Joostens of Lynden, WA serving as president of Classis for this session. The main item on the agenda was the examination of Pastor-elect Richard Smit, who had received and accepted the call to serve as pastor in the Doon Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, IA. A special worship service was called by Randolph's consistory for the evening of March 3, at which time Mr. Smit led the congregation in worship and proclaimed the gospel from Genesis 6:8, "Noah's Finding Jehovah's Grace." In at-

tendance were not only the members of the congregation and several visitors, but also the 28 delegates of Classis West, as well as three ministers from Classis East, Pastors Cammenga, Koole and Woudenberg, who were in attendance as synodical deputies. The following day was spent in examining Pastor-elect Smit in the several areas of doctrinal studies, as well as his knowledge of Scripture and the confessions.

Classis West, with the synodical deputies expressing hearty agreement, voted unanimously to approve Pastor-elect Smit's examination, and advised the Doon PRC to proceed with his ordination.

The Protestant Reformed Churches have much reason for thankfulness to God in His continued provision of men to labor as ministers of the Word and sacraments.

Most of the remaining business of Classis was quite routine. Classis West welcomed Pastor Rodney Miersma, who recently took up his new labors in Immanuel PRC, Lacombe, AB, Canada. It was also noted at Classis that Rev. Miersma this year marks his 25th year in the ministry of the Word, and that Reverends Gise VanBaren and Bernard Woudenberg have served now for 40 years in the ministry. How the years so quickly pass!

Rev. Steven Key, Stated Clerk

News From Our Churches

School Activities

In glancing back over the past few issues of the "News," it seems that we were just writing about the end of another school year and now suddenly, almost as if without effort, we find our Christian schools starting up again. Perhaps we take our schools too

much for granted.

The Lord willing, our Hope PR Christian School in Walker, MI will graduate its 50th class in June, 1997. To commemorate this milestone a special program and open house will be held April 18 of next year. We, of course, will have more about that later.

But even as one school makes plans to celebrate its 50th birthday, another is just beginning. That beginning took place on July 30 at our First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI when supporters of the

proposed East Side Christian School met for an organizational meeting to help lay the foundation for the future of their children. On the agenda that evening were Board nominations, presentation of a constitution, and information regarding the anticipated Fall 1997 opening, D.V.

Our denomination's Seminary Convocation was held this year at the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI on August 29. Prof. R. Decker gave the address entitled, "Brethren Pray for Us."

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

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregational Activities

The Council of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI called a General Information Meeting on September 5 for their entire congregation to discuss a rough draft of a building for worship to be constructed on their property. This building would eventually be used for a fellowship room when the sanctuary is completed. The Council was looking for their congregation's agreement with this proposed concept before proceeding with more definite plans.

Members of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI were invited to a family camping get-away for three days in late August. Families spent an enjoyable time together at Baldwin Oaks campground in Hudsonville, MI. Activities included horseshoes, swimming, volleyball, campfires (with s'mores), biking, and more.

As many of our regular readers know, next year's Young People's Convention will be hosted by the congregation of the Hudsonville, MI PRC. Activities at Hudsonville are accelerating with a view to that event on August 18-22 of next year. Hudsonville's convention Steering Committee held an informational meeting after the evening service on August 25. The congregation heard of plans made to date, and they were able to see a video of Camp Miniwanca, where next year's convention will be held.

Evangelism Activities

From all reports coming from the British Reformed Fellowship's Family Conference held July 27 through August 3 in East Sussex, England, it seems to have been a tremendous success, with more than 100 participants. There was

much interest shown, and delight was expressed in the Reformed faith. If you care to mark your calendars, the next conference of the BRF will be held in two years, D.V., in a castle in Northern Ireland. The subject will be the "Doctrine of the Last Things."

You may remember that our Trinity PRC in Houston, TX has been busy with an active outreach to the large Indian population in the Houston area. In news from Trinity, we learn that Pastor Mahtani and Mr. Jerry Nainani recently traveled to Dallas to meet with the SWAMI Executive Committee to discuss future plans for a conference in Houston and another in India in 1997. It is also encouraging to note that this group has, at Trinity's recommendation, adopted the Apostles' Creed as their "Statement of Faith." These young Sindhi converts are eager to receive further instruction in the Reformed faith.

The Loveland, CO PRC shared some responses they have received from their "Home Page" on the Internet. Responses have come from Hong Kong, California, and Germany. And a respondent from Germany perhaps summed up the intent of our churches' outreach

best when he wrote, "I was happy to have found your site among other Christian sources. It is a wonderful feeling that there are Christians everywhere in the world, and one can keep contact with unknown friends and brothers in the name of the Lord."

Mission Activities

The Hull, IA PRC has made a trio for calling a missionary to Ghana. Revs. W. Bekkering (Pella, IA), W. Bruinsma (First, Holland, MI), and A. denHartog (Hope, Redlands, CA) were on that rio.

From their trio, the Hope PRC in Walker, MI has extended a call to Rev. denHartog.

Rev. W. Bruinsma has accepted the call he received from the Kalamazoo, MI PRC.

Rev. R. Flikkema and his family moved to Jenison, MI at the end of August. While he waits upon the will of the Lord, he will be teaching catechism for different churches and leading some societies.

Food For Thought

"Our hearts are like the earth upon which we tread; let it alone, and it is sure to bear weeds."

— J.C. Ryle on Proverbs 29:15 □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies' Society Ruth of Hope PRC (Walker, MI) expresses sincere Christian sympathy to fellow member Theresa Reitsma in the death of her husband,

TOM REITSMA.

May she and her family find comfort and peace in God's Word, "But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies" (Lamentations 3:32).

Ev Langerak, Secretary

NOTICE!!!

On September 1, 1996, our pastor, **REV. RODNEY G. MIERSMA**, completed 25 years in the ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches. For this we praise and thank our covenant God.

"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord: and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor. 4:5, 6).

Jim Wierenga, Clerk
Immanuel PRC
Lacombe, AB, Canada