



***A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine***

The Standard Bearer

**The gospel is a living,
transforming power which,
if it touch
your inmost heart
so that you are
connected with it,
drives away your sin,
your darkness, your death.
The gospel does that.**

See "The Gospel a Power of God" — p. 75

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In This Issue ...

"Rome may be powerful, but it has never seen anything as powerful as this."

This was Herman Hoeksema's conviction about the gospel, as it was the apostle's before him. The conviction comes out in the sermon that serves as the meditation in this issue, the second in the series on Romans originally preached in the late 1930s and being published for the first time.

This conviction explains Hoeksema's rejection of the notion, now dominant in nominally Calvinistic churches as it has always been in the Roman Catholic and free willist Protestant churches, that the gospel is a mere, well-intentioned, but ineffectual, offer.

When the almighty power of the gospel comes into contact with your soul, what do you do? You believe. You surely believe. You absolutely believe. You cannot help but believe. God works through the gospel that faith in your soul.

Read "The Gospel a Power of God."

And "remember the poor," which, wrote Paul, "I also was forward to do" (Gal. 2:10).

Mr. Gordon Schipper confronts us with this calling in connection with the office of deacon in the church. One aspect of the work of the diaconate on which Mr. Schipper comments is tuition bills for education in the Christian schools. Should the family who cannot pay their tuition seek help from the deacons, that is, the church? And should the church help?

Read "The Office of Deacon and Congregational Life."

—DJE

The Gospel a Power of God

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Romans 1:16, 17

Introduction

The word of my text gives a reason for something which the apostle had spoken of in the immediate context. There the apostle had said that all that is within him is ready to preach the gospel to them that are at Rome also. As the reason for that statement, or for something that lies at the basis of that statement, the apostle says that he is not ashamed to preach the gospel of Christ at Rome.

He was not ashamed to preach to them at Rome, as perhaps it had been slanderously said of him. To the contrary, he had long had the desire to visit them. This desire may have been born from the fact that the Roman church was well spoken of. Their faith was spoken of throughout the whole world. The reason was, perhaps, that they had suffered persecution and had endured. However that may be, the apostle had written that he always remembered them in his prayers. When he prays for the

saints in Rome, he also makes request that the Lord may open the way for him to go to Rome. That is his desire.

He explains this desire as having a twofold reason. In the first place, he wants to impart some spiritual gift unto them, or, as he explains it, "that I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me."

In the second place, he would like to preach in Rome so that he might have some fruit among them, even as elsewhere. But he had been let hitherto, to come unto them. The Lord had closed the way for him. But he longed to come. For he is not ashamed to preach the gospel in Rome.

He explains why he is not ashamed. That gospel is a power. It is not a word of man. It is not a philosophy. It is not an offer. But it is a power. If it were a philosophy or an offer, one might be ashamed of it. But the gospel is a power of God unto salvation. It is sure to have effect. That the gospel of Christ is a power unto salvation has its reason in this, that therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.

A Power, What?

The apostle says that the gospel of Christ is a power unto salvation. We must, therefore, ask three questions. In the first place, what is that power? The answer is: the gospel of Christ. In the second place, unto what is the gospel of Christ a power? The answer is: unto salvation. In the third place, why is the gospel such a power?

The answer is: because it is the gospel of God.

The gospel is glad tidings, a joyful message. That is the meaning of the word. It is a joyful message from God. That is essential to the gospel. It is a glad message from God concerning God's Son. The gospel is always that. It is a joyful message from God concerning God's Son. It is a joyful message from God concerning His Son that chiefly contains two elements. The first element is that the Son of God is, according to the flesh, of the seed of David. The second element is that He is powerfully declared to be the Son of God in the resurrection. These two elements must always be in the gospel. It is a message from God to His people as they are in the darkness of this world. That is the gospel.

In harmony with that, the apostle in the text calls the gospel the gospel of Christ. Christ is the center of that gospel. The gospel has Christ for its contents. It is the gospel of the whole Christ. It is the gospel of Christ as He was foreshadowed in the old dispensation. It is the gospel of Christ as He walked among us on earth for thirty-three years. It is the gospel of Christ as He interpreted Himself through the apostles. That is the gospel. It is the gospel of Christ, because in that gospel Christ tells all about Himself — His incarnation, His walk here on earth, His suffering and death, His resurrection, His ascension. Having told all about Himself, He interprets Himself through the apostles. That is the gospel.

Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of the Standard Bearer.

That gospel, the apostle says, that message from God concerning Christ, is a power. A power is, in general, virtue to accomplish something. Electricity is a power. Why? It accomplishes something. Wind is a power. Steam is a power. A power accomplishes something; it has effect. That anything is a power must be seen by its effect.

The question is, therefore, what does the gospel effect? The text says that the gospel effects salvation. It has the sure effect of salvation. The gospel of Christ is a power. It is a power unto salvation.

Salvation from what?

In general, salvation from this world and all that this world stands for. The gospel of Christ is a power to save from this world with its sin, with its corruption, with its misery, with its death. It is a power to save from the world in which we live, in which we are born, in which we suffer, in which we die. It is a power to save from the guilt of sin in which we are born, from the corruption of sin from which we cannot deliver ourselves, from the power of death by which we are held. It is a salvation from this world and all that this world stands for.

Salvation unto what?

It is a salvation unto righteousness, both in the legal and in the spiritual sense.

Therefore, when the apostle says that the gospel is a power of God unto salvation, he means that the gospel of Christ has the inherent virtue to roll away your sin, to drive out your darkness, to cut the shackles of death, and to translate you into a state of righteousness, of holiness, and of life. That transformation, which Scripture calls salvation, is the effect of the gospel of Christ.

Not, it may be.

Not, perhaps it will be, if you meet it half way, if you accept it.

No, it *is*. The gospel is that power. It surely transforms. The

gospel is a living, transforming power which, if it touch your inmost heart so that you are connected with it, drives away your sin, your darkness, your death. The gospel does that.

How is that possible? How can it be maintained that the gospel is such a power?

You understand, this can never be said of any word of man. The Bible as such, which is the infallible revelation of the gospel, never transforms you. If I should preach until midnight, my word would never transform you. You might judge it, you might agree with it or disagree with it, but my word would never transform you. If I should get down on my knees and beg you, my word would never transform you. My word has no power, beyond the power of persuasion. Persuasion will never change anyone from a state of unrighteousness to a state of righteousness, from a state of corruption to a state of holiness, from a state of death to a state of life.

For this reason the gospel can never be an offer. An offer is powerless. I offer you something, but you shut your hand and refuse to receive what I offer. The power is gone. An offer has no power.

But the apostle says that he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, because it is not a human word, but the power of God. That is why he is not ashamed to preach that gospel, even in Rome. Rome may be powerful, but it has never seen anything as powerful as this. The gospel is a power. Why? Because it is the gospel of God.

What does this mean? In the first place, it is the gospel of God because He is the author of it. In the second place, it is the gospel of God because He realized it. In the third place, it is the gospel of God in the sense that He declared it. He declared it throughout the history of the world.

But when now the apostle says that the gospel is a power of God, he means that God also delivers

that message into your soul. Only when through the word the gospel is carried by God into the heart as a power which God uses, it becomes a power unto salvation. When God carries that gospel into my heart, the effect is that I say, I am a child of God, my sin is rolled away, I am delivered from the power of death. Though my conscience testifies against me, I know that I am righteous before God.

A Power, Why?

Why is that gospel a power unto salvation? The apostle says: "therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." This is not the reason why the gospel is a power, but why it is a power unto salvation. In order that you may understand what this means, I call attention to the following truths. In the first place, God is righteous, unchangeably righteous. The righteousness of God means that He always acts and thinks and wills in accordance with His holy being. God's righteousness is an attribute. God is righteous.

In the second place, that unchangeable righteousness of God as an attribute of God means that He can only love the righteous. He cannot love the unrighteous, for He is righteous. God is angry with the unrighteous. He is angry with the wicked every day. God cannot love the unrighteous. I do not say that He cannot transform them. That is just what we are talking about. But He cannot love the unrighteous. He hates all who are not in harmony with His being. He makes them the object of His wrath. Being the object of His wrath, they must perish.

In the third place, righteousness, that is, the state in which we are in harmony with Him and with His will according to His own judgment over us, is an indispensable requirement of salvation. Only the righteous can live. Righteousness is an indispensable requirement of salvation.

But we are unrighteous. We are unrighteous in the sense that we have sinned. We are behind in our obligation. Our obligation is to love God with all that we are and have, and at all times. Not only are we behind in our obligation, but we fall behind more and more. For we are corrupt. Therefore, our state is such that we can never become righteous. Everything around you, even your daily newspapers, points its finger at you and tells you that you are damned. Everything within you and without you testifies that you are unrighteous, corrupt, damned. In every sense of the word salvation is impossible, because righteousness is unattainable.

In the fourth place, the text says that in the gospel of God a righteousness of God is revealed. That does not refer to the righteousness of God as an attribute, but it refers to a righteousness which God has prepared and which He will give to you. The text does not mean to say that God is righteous. But it speaks of a righteousness which God has prepared and which He gives to His people.

It is the righteousness of God because God conceived of it in His eternal counsel. It is the righteousness of God because in time He

realized it, by blotting out the sin of His people. He realized it in Christ, in the cross. That righteousness of God which He conceived of in His counsel, and which He realizes in time in Christ is declared in the gospel, in which the righteousness of God is set forth.

If that gospel is delivered into your heart, what do you do? You take hold of it. You believe. I do not say, you *must* believe. I do not *persuade* you to believe. When the almighty power of the gospel comes into contact with your soul, what do you do? You believe. You surely believe. You absolutely believe. You cannot help but believe. God works through the gospel that faith in your soul.

A Power, unto Whom?

That is why the gospel of Christ is a power to everyone that believeth. Whatever the phrase "from faith to faith" may mean (for that is not so easy; in the original it reads: "out of faith and into faith"), it surely means that the gospel is a power out of faith and unto faith. For faith is essentially the tie that unites with Christ. That faith, God gives through the gospel. Because faith is the spiritual connecting power with Christ,

it is faith in that gospel. Because the gospel reveals Christ, faith is a certain knowledge of that gospel. Because faith is a certain knowledge of the gospel of Christ, he that believeth says, "I am righteous before God." For that reason faith is a sure confidence, so that he that believes relies on that gospel. For that same reason he lives from that gospel.

The last clause of the text might be read, according to the original: "the just by faith, shall live." That is, he that is righteous by faith, shall live. But it can also be read: "the righteous, by faith shall live." It is my conviction that the apostle means both. The minute we look away from Christ, it looks hopeless. Therefore, let us clearly see the gospel of Christ. We must write death upon all our own works. When I have thrown away all my own works, then my eye, by the faith of the gospel, is fixed only upon the righteousness of Christ.

In the second place, the apostle means that the righteous out of faith shall live. Here there is so much that condemns us as unrighteous. But the time will come when God will cause us to become manifest, by a final justification, as perfectly righteous. The righteous by faith shall live. □

Editorial

A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism

11. A Spiritual Fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff. (concluded)

The postmillennial dream of a "Christianized" world in history rests finally on Old Testament prophecy of a coming, glorious kingdom of Christ (see the

editorial, "Those Glorious Prospects in Old Testament Prophecy," in the Aug. 1, 1996 *Standard Bearer*).

That Old Testament prophecy

which more than any other is supposed to prove postmillennialism and refute amillennialism is Isaiah 65:17ff.:

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth ... I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.... There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.... The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock.... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

Postmillennialism, which can find no support in the New Testament's massive teaching of apostasy from and persecution of the church in the last days, appeals to Old Testament prophecy inasmuch as postmillennialism insists on interpreting this prophecy literally. On a literal interpretation of Isaiah 65:17ff., there will be an earthly fulfillment of the prophecy: an earthly kingdom of Christ with carnal delights, especially long physical life (see the editorial, "A Spiritual Interpretation of Isaiah 65:17ff.," in the Sept. 15, 1996 *SB*; for the postmillennial interpretation of the Isaiah passage, see the editorial in the Aug. 1, 1996 *SB*, pp. 439, 440).

In the editorials in the September 15 and October 1, 1996 issues of the *SB*, I demonstrated that there neither *may* nor *can* be a literal interpretation of Isaiah 65:17ff. The prophecy must be interpreted spiritually and has, accordingly, a spiritual fulfillment.

What now is the spiritual interpretation and fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff.?

Comprehensively, Isaiah 65:17-25 prophesies the entire saving work of God in Jesus Christ. As is customary with the prophets, Isaiah sees this work as one, great event, much as one sees the distant mountains as one, great range. Included are both the perfection of salvation (and of the Messianic kingdom) in the Day of Christ and the beginning of salvation (and of

the Messianic kingdom) throughout the present age between Pentecost and the Day of Christ. All of this salvation, of course, has its basis in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for God's elect world.

That this is, in fact, the content of Isaiah's prophecy is proved from New Testament comment on the passage. In II Peter 3:13, the apostle applies the prophecy of Isaiah 65:17 to God's work in Jesus Christ on the day of Christ's second coming. In the context of the teaching that the present creation will be destroyed by fire, Peter says, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

The apostle Paul, however, instructs us that there is also a fulfillment of the prophecy throughout the present age. In II Corinthians 5:17, he tells us that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

The authoritative New Testament explanation of the prophecy is that God's saving work in Christ will be a renewal of the creation for the benefit of the church, the "elect" of Isaiah 65:22, at the second coming of Jesus, which renewal begins already now in the regeneration of each elect personally.

There is nothing in the New Testament reflection on the prophecy that so much as hints at an earthly kingdom in history consisting of carnal benefits, physical dominion, and worldly peace.

Specifically, Isaiah 65:17ff. is the prophecy of the new world of heavens and earth that Jesus Christ will create at His second coming. This is the plain teaching of Isaiah 65:17ff. itself: "I create new heavens and a new earth." This is the New Testament explanation both in II Peter 3:13, already quoted, and in Revelation 21:1: "And I saw a new heaven and a new

earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea."

When He comes again in the body, at the end of history, Jesus Christ will destroy the present form of the creation in order to re-create the heavens and earth that God made in the beginning in their new, glorious, final form. The creation will share in the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:19-22).

This new world will be the dwellingplace — the home — of the new human race in Christ, the elect church from all nations, believers and their children (Is. 65:22, 23). The new creation will be home to the saints because Jehovah God will live with them there in Jesus Christ in the fellowship of the everlasting covenant. The new world that is coming will be "my holy mountain" (Is. 65:25).

There will be no trouble and no sorrow there, absolutely none — not one tear (Is. 65:19). Revelation 21:4, the New Testament light on the prophecy, informs us that the reason is that there will be no death in the new world. Christ, mighty Messianic king, will have destroyed the last enemy for us (II Cor. 15:26).

As is typical of Old Testament prophecy, the prophet announced this coming deathless world in figurative language: long, earthly life (v. 20). No baby will die in infancy; to die at 100 years of age would be accounted mere childhood; all the inhabitants will fill their days. The reality is: no death! everlasting life in resurrected soul and body, because the life of the people of God in the new world will be the immortal life of the risen Christ.

The New Testament gives this explanation of this and similar, figurative Old Testament prophecies everywhere, e.g., John 5:25, 26. Revelation 21:4, the authoritative New Testament interpretation of Isaiah 65:20, puts beyond any doubt that this is what Isaiah

meant: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death."

Cursed sinners will be excluded from the new world, existing everlastingly under God's curse in hell (Is. 65:20b; cf. Rev. 21:8).

The lifting of the curse from God's beloved world on the basis of Christ's redeeming death and by the power of His renewing Spirit will extend to the animals. There will be animals in the new creation, just as there were animals in the original creation of Genesis 1 and 2. Christ's redemption will be enjoyed by them, so that they will live in peace with each other as they did in the original phase of creation before the transgression of the first and unfaithful king (Gen. 1:29-31). There will be no death in the world of animal and plant.

The complete absence of death in the new world will be due to the perfect purging of sin from the creation. Peter tells us this: "...wherein dwelleth righteousness" (II Pet. 3:13). Only righteousness will dwell there. No unrighteousness whatever will be found there. All ungodly men will have perished under the judgment of God (v. 7).

Is this not a wonderful salvation?

Do not believers and their offspring have a grand hope, abundantly able to sustain them in all their present tribulations?

Is not the everlasting kingship and kingdom of Jesus the Messiah glorious?

Will not His victory be manifested as incomparable? All foes destroyed, even death. All God's people perfectly delivered from sorrow and death unto the bliss of fellowship with the triune God in His Face, Jesus the Christ. The creation itself transformed into a new world, whose goodness and splendor cause the old form of the world to fade forever into forgottenness.

All this fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff. will be spiritual. The prophecy holds before us, as it held before the true Israelite in Isaiah's day, a spiritual salvation; spiritual blessings; spiritual life; and, indeed, a spiritual world. For the last Adam is spiritual, and we expect to live a spiritual life in our spiritual body in a spiritual creation (I Cor. 15:42ff.).

The second specific fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17ff. is the spiritual life in Christ by faith of every regenerated child of God in the time between Pentecost and the second coming. This is the authoritative explanation of the Isaiah prophecy by the apostle in II Corinthians 5:17: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." He is a new creature already, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 65:17.

The new world that is coming in the Day of Christ already breaks into the present world by the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit of Christ. It breaks into the heart of every elect child of God. It makes him a new creature. There is in his life a beginning of the deliverance from sin, sorrow, and death; of the joy; of the profitable,

holy work; of the fellowship with God; of the everlasting life, of Isaiah 65:17ff. This shows itself in his confession and behavior. It brings down upon him the persecution of those who hate the Messiah and oppose His reign, the enemies of the new world.

This powerful beginning of the new world in the life of the Christian here and now does not, however, gradually bring about the culmination of the kingdom of Christ in creation. Regenerated saints do not realize postmillennialism's "golden age."

As our present, earthly body becomes the future, spiritual body by the wonder of resurrection in the Day of Christ, so also does the present, pitiful, earthly creation become the future, glorious, spiritual creation by the wonder of recreation in the Day of Christ.

"Behold," says Jehovah by the prophet, "I create new heavens and a new earth."

Man cannot accomplish it.

Redeemed man cannot accomplish it.

Not even the postmillennialist.

□

— DJE

Thankful Living

I thank the Lord this morning
Before I rise from bed —
Thank Him for sleep, and ask for strength
To face the day ahead.

This noon I pause to thank Him
For leading me and giving
The gifts I need to do my work
In ways of Christian living.

At eventide again my thanks
Before His throne ascends.
His blessings filled the busy hours;
My head before Him bends.

And now as I retire, I see
That — leaning on His grace,
Each challenge and each trial
Was not my own to face —

My Savior led me through this day
And He will lead me all the way!

Thelma Westra

The Office of Deacon and Congregational Life

The diaconate functions as an integral part of congregational life. The deacons have a visible part in every worship service. The congregation interacts with the diaconate at every worship service. The deacons regularly visit appropriate members of the congregation. All in the congregation know that they can seek the assistance of Christ for their physical needs. Each member should reflect on his calling to support the diaconate in its work, and on his calling to seek financial assistance when he has true physical needs.

The most common way we interact with the diaconate is the collection for benevolence that takes place during the worship service. We should note that the collection for benevolence is more than one collection out of many. This collection is the primary collection in our worship service. It has greater spiritual significance than the general fund collection, even though the general fund may amount to more money. The general fund should be viewed more as an obligation than a "freewill" offering. The other collections for kingdom causes are appropriate and worthy of our support, but they are not on a par with the collection for the benevolent fund. Remember that the deacons are not just money collectors who count the monies and send a check to the various institutions. Deacons are

collecting money for the poor! That is their office. All the other collections are secondary. Never forget this. Make sure that the children understand the purpose of this collection.

Secondly, we should note that giving to the poor is part of our worship on the Sabbath day. Lord's Day 38 binds this upon us as part of keeping the Sabbath day holy. The Catechism notes that we keep the Sabbath day by supporting the ministry of the gospel (general fund), and that we "diligently frequent the church of God to hear His word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call on the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian." The Catechism thus specifies that the contribution for the poor is an element of the worship service. Giving to the poor is worship.

This has an implication for the frequency of benevolent fund collections. It may not be necessary to have a benevolent collection every worship service, but it seems appropriate to have one each Lord's day. At the least we can say this, if the care of the poor is not in the heart and mind of the congregation on the Lord's day, our worship is not acceptable to God. God loveth a cheerful giver (II Cor 9:7).

We need to reflect on our level of giving to the diaconate. How has our giving changed over the years? Have we been giving at nearly the same level for the last 10 or more years? Are we giving

at the same level as when we were children? Does our giving consist of mere pocket-change? We need to bring the amount of our benevolent-fund contributions up to date. At present, the economy is prosperous in the west Michigan area. There is low unemployment. The calls for benevolent assistance are not as numerous in such times. But the times will change. We will be seeing times when hours are cut and jobs are lost. We will be seeing situations when people lose their health insurance and incur large medical bills. The ungodly will increase their efforts to squeeze God's people out of the workplace. We are starting to see that our government is realizing that it cannot afford to pay for as many services through the Medicare program and that it needs to shift more and more of the financial burden onto the elderly. We hear talk of the possibility that Medicare will be bankrupt in a few years. There are many factors that could combine to bring about drastic changes in our financial situation.

I believe that we will see a trend toward more and more calls for benevolent assistance. I believe that the magnitude of the need will be greater than is commonly thought. There will be large financial obligations to meet. There will be long-term financial obligations to meet. We need to anticipate times when our benevolent contributions may have to increase tenfold!

This will be a very spiritual

Mr. Schipper is a member and former deacon of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, MI.

time for the congregation. Members in the congregation will reflect on how many material things they have and realize that they have much more than they need. Households will discuss their priorities and consciously decide to lower their standard of living in order to contribute to the deacons. All family members will participate in this. Fathers will be spiritual leaders and stress the calling and privilege to care for the poor even when it means that some of the things we like to have or like to do will have to be set aside. As each family member puts money in the collection plate, that collection will have concrete meaning because the money represents something that the family is willingly giving up in order to care for the poor. In such times, the office of deacon will be very prominent in the mind of the congregation.

While these circumstances will draw our attention to the office of deacon in special measure, there is no principle difference between the time described above and a time of relative prosperity. Our consciousness of the diaconate and our calling to provide the deacons with many good means to relieve the poor should always be prominent in our minds.

Note with me the judgment of God upon the people that have lost their concern for the poor. "They sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; that pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor" (Amos 2:6, 7). At the same time, the rich were lying "upon beds of ivory, and stretch(ing) themselves upon their couches, and eat(ing) the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall" (Amos 6:4). The cruel treatment of the poor in the land was one of many transgressions which marked the apostate northern kingdom and made them ripe for judgment.

Yet, we should note as well that the lack of concern for the

poor is not unconnected with all the other evils which marked the nation. They had departed in many areas of doctrine and had corrupted the true worship of God with their false worship at Dan and Bethel. Because they had lost sight of the holiness of God, they lost sight of their own spiritual poverty. Having no concern for their own spiritual poverty, they disdained those who were physically poor.

Right knowledge of God and appreciation for our deliverance from spiritual poverty always leads to a genuine concern for those in physical need. We have freely been given spiritual riches through the cross of Christ. It is a small matter to give of our material possessions. After all, what do we have that we have not received? The doctrine of sovereign grace impacts our attitude towards the poor. A heart that is truly thankful to God is a heart that is truly compassionate towards his fellow saints. Mercy and truth are met together.

Even as the congregation must have a heart for the care of the poor, we also must stress the need for the poor to come to the deacons. This can be a problem. The diaconate can be perceived as a last resort. For a number of reasons, some of God's people wait too long before seeking help from the diaconate. It seems that some consider it shameful to seek the mercies of Christ. Others don't want to "burden" the church. When God directs the circumstances of our lives such that we are poor, we need to avail ourselves of the office of mercy in the church. When should we do this? The position of Scripture is that if we have food and raiment, we must be content. Therefore it is clear that we must seek financial help from the deacons when we do not have the means to provide for the basic necessities of life.

Does this mean that a family is obligated to sell every posses-

sion, and wait until they cannot put a meal on the table before they seek assistance? Certainly, this is not the case. There will need to be sanctified judgment exercised by those in financial need, as well as by the diaconate. In general, we may say that when a person or a family is living in an adequate home, has used its savings, and does not have the means to meet legitimate financial obligations, it should seek financial assistance from the deacons. This situation assumes that the family already has sought help from other family members. One's family is the first place to seek help. Scripture makes this very clear. I Timothy 5:8 instructs us that those who will not provide for their own house deny the faith and are worse than unbelievers. While the context indicates that the primary focus of this passage is the care of aged parents by their children, it is certain that family members with more than sufficient means may not refuse to help their own brothers and sisters who do not have enough.

One situation deserves special attention in this connection. This is the matter of Christian school tuition. Because tuition is a large bill, it stands out as a big factor in the financial picture for any family. Because our schools have been more than reasonable in accommodating late payments, tuition frequently has been an item that people do not pay on time when there is a financial pinch. In spite of the fact that we all have been told that church budget and tuition are the first two items in priority when we pay the bills, these priorities are not always followed. And, when that happens, within a short time the past-due tuition builds to a substantial amount and the family is in financial trouble. Assuming that they have asked their family for help, they now face the question of what to do. They realize that they ought not to be in this situation.

The family is correct. They ought not to be in this situation. Tuition comes before every other financial obligation except our obligation to the church. This is because we consider Christian education to be the means whereby we fulfill our baptismal vows concerning the instruction of our covenant children. Paying our tuition on time is a matter of seeking "first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33). Secondly, we should note that our schools are parental schools. They are owned and operated by our brothers and sisters in the church. When we fail to pay tuition on time, we are unilaterally exacting an interest-free loan from the rest of the parents. Also, we need to be aware that our schools do not operate with large cash reserves. When we fail to pay on time, we create financial hardship for the schools. It is our brothers in the church who need to meet extra nights in order to deal with cash-flow issues. Lastly, past-due tuition is unacceptable because we break the promise that we made when we enrolled our children. We promised to pay the tuition on time. We are obligated to keep our word.

Late tuition has been a major problem in our schools. Boards have had to adopt strict, "hard-nosed" policies concerning late tuition payments. They have learned that leniency only caused families to get into deeper financial trouble. In many of these cases, it seemed that there was a great hesitancy to seek help from the church. I have personal knowledge of the fact that at the same time that several of our schools in the west Michigan area had large amounts of past-due tuition, there were diaconates whose biggest problem was no requests for financial assistance. The deacons had nothing to do, and the schools had tens of thousands of dollars in past-due tuition. Brethren, these things ought not so to be.

In spite of the fact that a family should not present themselves to a diaconate with a past-due tuition problem, it is not a rare situation. I have heard it said that deacons should not pay tuition. This sentiment proceeds from the idea that tuition is supposed to be paid first, and therefore should never be the item that brings a family to the diaconate. I fear that this sentiment can be a barrier to

a family seeking the help they need. Any family that finds itself unable to pay its bills, needs to go to the deacons. Don't wait. Even if the reason is past-due tuition, go to the diaconate. Even if the reason is gross financial mismanagement, inappropriate expenditures, or other matters that reveal poor stewardship, go to the diaconate. The deacons have an obligation to be prudent in their distribution of the alms, but they are not going to withhold assistance just because a sinful or unwise practice has caused the problem. They will call for proper stewardship and to living within means. They will call for biblical priorities in paying bills. They will assist in getting a financial situation under control. And they will be generous in the financial assistance they give because they have many good means available.

Finally, they will open the Scriptures and bring a word of comfort. They will demonstrate that these circumstances have been ordained by God so that Christ could manifest His mercy to them in a direct physical way. The assistance is financial and material, the blessings are spiritual. □

Cloud of Witnesses

Prof. Herman Hanko

John Calvin: Father of Calvinism (1)

Introduction

When Karl Barth was preparing a series of lectures on John Calvin, he wrote to a friend:

Calvin is a cataract ... I lack completely the means, the suction cups, even to assimilate this phe-

nomenon, not to speak of presenting it adequately. What I receive is only a thin little stream and what I can then give out again is only a yet thinner extract of this little stream. I could gladly and profitably set myself down and spend all the rest of my life just with Calvin.

No one can possibly question

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the assertion that John Calvin is the greatest reformer of all time. More books have been written about him and his theology than about any other figure in the history of the church. All those who in the last 450 years have cherished the doctrines of sovereign grace have claimed Calvin as their spiritual father. And all who confess a theology thoroughly biblical and embodied in all the great creeds of the 16th and 17th centuries call their theology Calvinism. Other than the sacred Scriptures themselves, there are few if any books that have exerted the influence on subsequent centuries that Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* has had down to the present.

Yet, Calvin never, after he began his life's work, strayed far from Geneva, a relatively small city in French Switzerland. It was here he came on a stormy night; it was here he stayed, frightened by the threat of William Farel; it was here he did all his work. But now his work has circled the globe. The only explanation for it can be that God, through Calvin, brought reformation to His beleaguered church.

Background in Switzerland

The part of Switzerland which is of interest to us was called French Switzerland because it bordered on France and the French language was spoken there. It was composed of the cantons of Geneva, Vaud, and Neuchâtel. In the canton of Geneva was the city by the same name on the shore of a lake also called Geneva.

The government of Geneva requires a brief explanation because it was to play a major role in the Reformation there. The citizens of the city met annually in the General Assembly to choose four syndics and a treasurer. The citizens were in turn ruled by a Little Council of 25 which included the current syndics and those of the previous years. The Council of 60, appointed by the Little Council,

decided matters of larger policy. In 1527 a Council of 200 was added which included the Little Council and 175 others chosen by the Little Council. It was especially this latter body which gave Calvin many of his problems.

The Reformation had come not only to Germany, but had spread also to other parts of Europe. In Switzerland Zwingli had done the majority of the work, and in Geneva the way for Calvin had been prepared by the fiery and radical Reformer, William Farel.

Berne, to the north of Neuchâtel, had joined the Reformation in 1528 and sent ministers into French Switzerland to preach the gospel there. Farel was the leader, and a more powerful figure could scarcely be found.

Farel's entire work was carried on with struggle and in turmoil, and in 1532 Farel was driven from the city. In 1534 he returned and through disputations and preaching won a bit of breathing room for the Protestants who were converted under his preaching. But in his favor was the fact that, because Geneva was so small, it was technically under the rule of Basel, and Basel supported the Reformation. Gradually the priests, monks, and nuns began to leave the city, and the Reformation was officially established in 1535 and 1536. But the city remained the heir of Roman Catholicism: a place of frightening moral conditions.

Calvin's Youth

Calvin was born on July 10, 1509 in Noyon, France, 26 years after Luther's birth. While Luther was born in a part of the church where piety and religion were emphasized, Calvin was born into a part of the church which treasured education and culture. Little is known of Calvin's mother. His father was apostolic secretary to the bishop of Noyon, but fell into financial difficulties, became an embarrassment to the church, and was excommunicated.

Almost from the start Calvin was destined for the clergy, and in his 12th year he received part of the revenue from a chaplaincy which supported him in his studies. His studies, while in various schools, were mainly in Paris. Perhaps they all can best be summed up by the following description of his work in the Collège de Montaigu,

a famous school known for its stern discipline and its bad food. Erasmus, who studied here a few years before Calvin, later complained of the spoiled eggs he was forced to eat in the refectory. Calvin's lifelong problems with indigestion and insomnia probably derived from the rigid fare and his penchant for burning the midnight oil at Montaigu. Later legend has it that during these years, his fellow students awarded Calvin the nickname of "the accusative case." While this is not true, Beza, in his adoring biography, acknowledged that the young scholar was indeed "a strict censor of every thing vicious in his companions." While his classmates were cavorting in the streets or running off to wild parties, Calvin was busied with the niceties of nominalist logic or the *quaestiones* of scholastic theology.

All in all, Calvin received one of the best educations in the humanities available at that time and emerged from his education a thorough-going humanist. He had made theology the object of his studies, switched to law, and then returned to theology. In 1532, still seemingly untouched by grace, he wrote a commentary on an essay by that old pagan Roman Seneca entitled "On Mercy."

Calvin's Conversion and Early Work

But God had begun His work in Calvin. Already the first influences of any beneficial sort were from two professors, one named Cordier, who was later to become a Protestant, and the other Wolmar

by name, a Lutheran in profession.

Unlike Luther, Calvin was always reticent about himself and his conversion. Beza tells us that Calvin's father persuaded him to study theology because Calvin "was naturally inclined [to theology]; because even at an early age, he was remarkably religious, and was also a strict censor of everything vicious in his companions." Calvin, in an autobiographical note found in his letter to Cardinal Sadolet wrote:

When, however, I had performed all these things (satisfaction for offenses and fleeing to the saints), though I had some intervals of quiet, I was still far off from true peace of conscience; for, whenever I descended within myself, or raised my mind to thee, extreme terror seized me — terror which no expiations nor satisfactions could cure.

That sounds a lot like Luther.

Calvin came to Paris at the very time when Reformational ideas were altering the thinking of many. In 1533 Nicholas Cop became rector of the University in Paris and delivered a plea for reformation in his inaugural address, which some claim was prepared by Calvin. Persecution broke out when a paper, sharply critical of the mass, was widely distributed in Paris and a copy was nailed to the palace door. Cop and Calvin were forced to flee for their lives. And so Calvin was brought to the point where he repudiated the church of Rome and wrote his first theological work, a paper on, of all things, soul sleep.

For about three years Calvin wandered as an evangelist in Southern France, Switzerland, and Italy. Part of the time he was under the protection of Queen Marguerite of Navarre, sister of the king of France; part of the time he was in Ferrara of Italy in the court of the Duchess of Renee; and part of the time he visited Basel where he came into contact with some of

the Swiss Reformers.

These must have been years of intense study in the Scriptures because Calvin began his work on the *Institutes* during this time, the first edition of which was published in 1536.

But whether Calvin liked it or not, Geneva was to be his home for the remainder of his life. It all started when Calvin, on his way to Basel, was forced to detour through Geneva. In this city he spent the night thinking that he would come and go unobserved. But his presence was noted and Farel was informed. Farel immediately visited Calvin and implored him to stay in Geneva and help with the work of reformation. Calvin was adamant in his refusal. Shy by nature and determined to devote his life to scholarship and study, Calvin wanted no part of the turmoil which would result from efforts to make Geneva a city devoted to the truth of Scripture. But after calling down from heaven curses upon Calvin should he refuse, Farel persuaded Calvin that his place was indeed in the city.

First Stay in Geneva

And so Calvin's work in this city began. The date was September 5, 1536.

The city, with the effects of many centuries under Roman Catholicism woven into the fabric of its life, was filled with every vice and required great labor to bring its citizens under the yoke of the

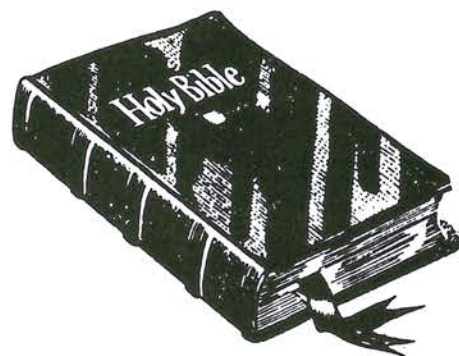
gospel. To accomplish this, Calvin began teaching, convinced that instruction in the truth was the only road to reformation. He began expository lectures on Paul and the New Testament, and a year later was ordained a pastor.

Together Farel and Calvin drew up a confession of faith and rules of discipline which were approved by the Council. In fact, the Council supported all the efforts for reform in doctrine, liturgy, and morals.

But that did not mean that the opposition had been persuaded. Gradually Calvin's enemies were able to marshall their forces. Their opposition was especially against the Catechism and the laws which had been passed against prevalent sins. As they gained strength, they gained numbers on the Council and were able to moderate the efforts towards reform.

Two issues especially brought things to a head. The Council of 200 decided to instruct the reformers to practice open communion so that no one could be barred from the Lord's table. This was a death blow to Calvin's discipline. The second issue was a decision by the Council to make use of Bernese liturgy in the worship. Calvin did not object as such to the liturgy used in Berne, but he did object strenuously to the right of the Council to decide such matters for the church. Neither would budge, and the result was that the Council passed a decision to expel Farel and Calvin from the city. □

... to be continued.



Missions — The Ghana Field

We have been asked questions about our field in Ghana, and about our reason for requesting of Synod that we open this field in Ghana without a core group of believers being in place on the field.

The latter really has to do with the whole idea of how missions ought always to be carried out. In answer to that question, we note first of all that there are times when a group of believers in some location requests our churches to labor in their area. The members of this group may have come into contact with our churches and then desired to hear more of the truths which we hold precious and which we proclaim in our churches as we preach the Word. When we receive such a request we must investigate as to whether we are able to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to this area and preach the Word there.

In a sense, this request becomes a "Macedonian call." It is such because, through the request from people interested in the truth as we proclaim it, the Spirit leads us to investigate and to bring the Word to this area. However, it differs from the apostle Paul's call to Macedonia in this, that the apostle, when he received the vision, knew without a doubt, because of direct revelation, that he was to go to Macedonia and preach the Word in this part of the world. We have requests from

many areas by some individuals or groups of people, but because this is not direct revelation from God it is necessary that we investigate whether the request is made seriously and whether we are able to help in the particular instance. It is through the process of investigation that we come to a conviction (and we believe that this is by the Spirit's leading) as to whether or not we should begin a mission labor in a certain place and at a certain time.

But it must be remembered that, even in the direct "Macedonian call" that Paul received, he was sent not to a particular group of believers or to a "core group," but to an area where God was pleased that he preach the gospel promiscuously, and this, unto the gathering of believers and the establishment of congregations. Paul preached the Word and God gave the increase. He was not ashamed of preaching the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:14-16).

It is in this same way that we are called to labor on any field that we enter, whether there are in that area some believers with whom we may have contact, or whether we are laboring strictly in the midst of unbelievers. It is necessary that we preach the pure gospel of Christ, in strict adherence to Scripture. And God will give the increase according to His good pleasure.

The apostle Paul (or the other apostles, for that matter) did not join himself to groups of believers who were already in a certain place, and then, in some sort of joint venture, attempt to bring the

gospel of Christ. In fact, the apostles did the very opposite, as we read in Acts 19:18-20: "And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." In each area in which they labored they brought the same gospel and established the same type of worship services, and ordained men with the same qualifications into the same offices. (In Jerusalem, see Acts; in Ephesus, see I Timothy 3; in Crete, see Titus 1.) And all of this sets a pattern for our own labor, for the apostles, under the inspiration of the Spirit, gave us the scriptural record of the worship and of the officebearers and their labor in the places where the gospel was preached.

We find that the apostle Paul went first to the synagogues, if there were such in the cities where he labored. There he preached the antithetical Word of God, calling those in the synagogue away from the old dispensational worship and away from the apostate teachings of the Pharisees, to the gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified and raised. He did not go to the synagogues to mix the gospel of Christ with their customs of worship, but to call them unto the new dispensational church. The result was that he went from the synagogues to the streets of the cities to address the Word of God to such as the Lord would lead to the preach-

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ing of the Word. Then, in strict accordance with the Word, congregations would be established, and officebearers would be ordained. This is the testimony of sacred history again and again as recorded in the book of Acts.

Again I say, this is the way that our missions ought always to be carried out. The missionary on the field is to bring the pure gospel of Christ, and the goal is to establish a congregation that is founded in every part upon the regulations of Scripture and in accordance to all the principles of Scripture. It is necessary that we preach only the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation, and that we also then oppose those that cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of Scripture (cf. Rom. 16:17-18). When we fail to do this, our mission labor either fails or is at best very weak, and the result is that God's Name and honor are not maintained as they ought to be, and then God's children are not blessed as they should be. This means, for the Protestant Reformed mission labor, that the Protestant Reformed distinctives must be maintained throughout the labor and work. They ought never to be compromised. This is so in the areas of doctrine and of life, in the areas of worship and of order. Thus we read in Colossians 3: 16-17: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."

It did not matter to the apostle Paul or the other apostles what the culture was in the area in which they worked. They brought the gospel in the same way, and established the same structured congregations. From their epistles we receive instruction for our church structure and worship, no matter

whether the epistle was addressed to the Ephesians, who for the largest part served idols in their history, or to Rome, where mythical gods were served in their history, or to the Hebrews, where Judaism was followed in their history.

In the church the elders and deacons had the same requirements for office; the preaching of the Word was to be the same; the life of the people was to be such that they cast off the old ways of unbelief and customs to serve the living God faithfully according to His Word.

Now, to accomplish this on the mission field, whether in the States or in Ghana, we ought not to be affected by the customs of the particular area in which we are working. Especially is this so on the foreign field, where the background and culture of most of the people are based upon pagan worship and heathendom. But this is often the case elsewhere too, when we are called to work with those who are nominally Christian, whose traditions of worship, of songs for worship, and of order for worship are based upon their free-will theology, or their Pentecostalism, or their independentism, or whatever.

Dear readers, if we believe that our churches are founded, rooted, and grounded in the truth, and that we hold the truth steadfastly, and that we are blessed by this faithfulness to the Scriptures in all of our worship and life, is this not what our desire should be for all those to whom we have the opportunity to bring the gospel?

It is exactly for this reason, that we do not begin in Ghana with a group that is already there. We surely could have a group that would want us to work with them, but then we would not be following the scriptural example of the apostles. If we are going to labor on the mission field, then we must labor by the pure preaching of the Word, and Christ shall gather those that are ordained unto eter-

nal life. The congregation(s) that will be gathered will then love the same truth that we love. The congregation will live under the same yoke of Christ that we live under. The congregation will have the same offices as the congregations did in the days of the apostles; they shall love the same confessions which set forth faithfully the truth of the Scripture; they shall have the same sacraments administered according to the Word as we do; they shall have the same love for God, the same appreciation for the covenant that God sovereignly establishes with us and our seed; they will be husband of one wife, wife of one husband, in their life on earth; they will worship together as families, etc. For we with others of the elect in this world have one Lord, and the one Spirit works in the hearts of the one body of Christ. To begin work with a group that already has in place its own way of worship, with all of the errors that may be a part of that worship, would mean that the preaching at the outset is compromised. (Of course, if they have not the errors, then we need not labor there, for God would already be worshiped there in spirit and in truth.) Wherever we go to bring the gospel as Protestant Reformed Churches, we must go with a view to setting up a Protestant Reformed mission — not because of *our* name, for of ourselves we are nothing, but because it has pleased our God to keep us faithful to the truth and to preserve in our midst a pure worship. He has blessed us tremendously. It is our desire that all of God's children may have this blessing.

Our intention is to preach the gospel in Ghana from the very beginning twice on the Sabbath, once on the basis of the Heidelberg Catechism. We shall sing the songs of Zion from the Psalms, in English from the Psalter, and in the native language from the Psalms written in that language. We shall have a distinctively Protestant Re-

formed church worship, with all the reverence that is God glorifying. This will probably mean that we will begin with a relatively small group of worshipers, but it is the preaching of the gospel that brings to the activity of faith. We will begin to hold Bible studies in addition to the Sunday worship, for those interested. And we will

trust that our God will bless this labor. When our Lord brings to our mission His saints, they will be one with us in faith and blessing. May God grant that it be so. And may we wholeheartedly support this work as churches, with prayers, gifts, letters, visits, etc. Then not only shall those that Christ gathers in Ghana be blessed, but so

shall our churches be blessed. □

Notice: Those of our readers who are on the Internet, and who wish to obtain up-to-date information about the PRC field in Ghana, are invited to check out Rev. Moore's homepage. His address is: <http://www.mtcnet.net/~revmo/>

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Steven Key

Totally Depraved

Because of the legal relationship between Adam and the whole human race, Adam's fall brought us all under condemnation. As we learn in Romans 5:12-18, God established such a legal relationship for His own good pleasure. He did so in wisdom. It was His purpose from eternity to save to Himself a people in Christ (Eph. 1). Decreeing even the fall to serve that purpose, the sovereign God would redeem from that fallen human race in Adam a people who would stand in a similar legal relationship to their Redeemer, who is Christ, the last Adam and the Lord from heaven.

But if we are fully to understand the effects of Adam's fall upon the whole human race, we must also realize that Adam stands not only in a legal relationship to those who would follow him, but also in an *organic* relationship as the first father of all mankind.

If it were possible, we could all trace our genealogies back to Adam and Eve. We stand in an organic relationship, a *family* rela-

tionship as it were, with Adam and Eve. And just as our own children bear our natures, so we also bear the nature of our parents, all the way back to Adam and Eve. Adam's human nature is imparted by conception and birth to the whole human race.

The Consequence of Adam's Fall

The consequence, of course, is this: Because Adam's guilt brought upon him the curse of death and the pollution of sin as its punishment, the same corruption is passed from generation to generation.

Our sin, therefore, is not merely in the act. It is a fundamental corruption of our whole nature!

From the moment Adam sinned, death was inflicted upon him.

And that death, the punishment of his guilt, is rightly described in our Reformed confessions. In the first article of the Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine in the Canons of Dordt, the corruption of fallen man is described. He brought upon himself "blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity and perverseness of judgment"; he "became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart

and will, and impure in his affections."

In other words, his whole nature became corrupt.

That corruption was not only Adam's. It has become *ours*. Adam, as the father of the human race, carried with him into that abyss of corruption and death every Adamite that would ever be born. In Adam *our nature* became so corrupt that we are conceived and born in sin (Ps. 51:5).

Dead in trespasses and sins—that is what we mean by "total depravity."

Spiritually dead! That is what we are as the children of Adam. And when you think of total depravity as *death*, it is not sufficient merely to liken the natural man to a corpse that has been buried. After all, we do remain active. A more accurate illustration would be that of a corpse that is lying out in the open under the heat of the sun, and that is rotting and casting off a putrid stink! A vivid illustration, indeed! And disgusting! But no more disgusting than you and I are in the sight of God as those fallen in Adam!

Bear in mind, this is part of the necessary knowledge that we must have, if ever we are to see our need for Christ.

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The Extent of Our Corruption

Not only must we know ourselves as sinners, but we must also understand the extent of our sinfulness and the horror of our sinful nature.

Scripture is very graphic in its portrayal of the extent of this sin in the human race and in every individual of the human race. Psalm 14:2,3 and Psalm 53:2,3: "The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

In Romans 3:9-18 we are given another graphic display of the human race as it appears before the Holy God. I quote only part of that passage. "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.... There is no fear of God before their eyes."

That is a judgment that falls upon all without exception, Jew and Gentile alike, church man and heathen. "They are all under sin!" Such is the dreadful and damnable corruption of man.

The question immediately arises, and it is expressed as a teaching tool in our Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 3: "Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?" Is the situation *that bad*?! The authors of the Catechism stood before Scripture and gave answer: "Indeed we are, except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God."

We are dead, *totally* depraved, corrupt through and through — unless by the Spirit of grace God regenerates us, gives us the new birth by which we are united with Christ by the bond of faith.

With this judgment of God re-

vealed in the Scripture we must learn to agree, discovering first of all that which is applicable to our own heart and mind and life: God searches not only our outward life, but the deepest recesses of our hearts and minds. I say again, sin is not merely in the act. It is a fundamental corruption of our whole nature!

The Appearance of Goodness in Man

We realize that this clear teaching of Scripture concerning man's total depravity presents us with an apparent problem. It is true that the natural eye observes many actions of men that appear to be good and commendable. In times of disaster, for example, we see unbelievers reaching out to help their neighbors. We see acts of kindness, acts that are commendable and helpful to fellow men.

How are we to harmonize this apparent good in the natural man, at least in *some* who are unbelievers, with the clear teaching of God's Word that man is totally depraved and that none does good?

That is one of many apparent problems that should compel us to search the Scriptures.

One of the many solutions to that problem has been presented in the theory of common grace. One side of that many-sided theory says that God's grace is at work in the heart of the ungodly, so that even though *inwardly* the sinner remains full of darkness and corruption, *outwardly* he does much good in God's sight. Though an evil tree, a man is able to bear good fruits. So says the theory of common grace.

That theory, from a practical point of view, has devastating consequences. Ultimately it causes (and has caused) the lines between the church and the world to be totally obliterated. To our grief we have seen the theory of common grace used as the ground for those who called themselves Christians to surge into the world to partici-

pate in all sorts of ungodly activities and to find fellowship with unbelievers.

After all, if it is true that the ungodly can do much good, then there is a measure of good to be found in *every* aspect of society. Then even the most perverse movies and television programs can be enjoyed by Christians and can be reviewed by religious magazines, for, after all, "there is at least a measure of good in all these things."

But when we face the question, "What about this outward appearance of good in the natural man," common grace is not the answer — because common grace is not to be found in the Bible, but only in the imaginations of men.

Christ Himself says (Matt. 7:16-18), "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" The answer is obvious. Of course not! "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

So what about this problem of what we see?

The problem is with our perception of things. What *we* may call good is not necessarily what *God* calls good.

Scripture speaks only one language when it comes to the so-called good of the natural man. God expresses one judgment, and that is that there is no good. We may refer to Romans 14:23 as one example. "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Whatever work or whatever thought that does not have its root in *Christ* is forever rotten in God's sight, corrupt through and through.

That is fundamental to our own life, to our own faith. We must understand that outward actions mean nothing in God's sight, except they are rooted by faith in Christ. Our only hope is Christ, nothing in ourselves, absolutely nothing.

If you want to talk about outwardly good works, there is a passage in Matthew 7 that is absolutely devastating. That is Matthew 7:21-23.

There Jesus refers to those who confess the name of the Lord. They belong outwardly to the church. He speaks of those whom we would view as exemplary citizens. They are those who do all kinds of good outwardly. They even prophesy in Christ's name! Among these people are *preachers*, mind you! There are those who even cast out devils in the name of the Lord. Let's apply that. They cast out the devils of drunkenness and drug abuse, adultery and fornication. They help others clean up their lives.

These are wonderful people! They are — from an outward point of view.

But Jesus says, "I never knew you." And that means that they never knew Him. They didn't know Him by faith. They didn't know Him as the Majestic God, before whom we must bow the knee

in repentance and prayer. They didn't know Him as the One who alone could save them.

And Jesus says, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Amazing! Though they did all these things that society marks as outstanding works of good, the judgment of Christ is that they are nothing but "workers of iniquity"! Their works, which were judged so good by man, are condemned by God, because they had not faith.

That is a devastating text to the sinner who is not yet regenerated by the Spirit of God. For except we are born again, we cannot see the kingdom of God. We are dead in sin, wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness.

The extent of our corruption therefore is such that there is no room for salvation apart from the sovereign, irresistible grace of God and the efficacious, particular atonement of Christ.

Our Heidelberg Catechism speaks clear language that is biblically accurate and true. We are

wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness—except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.

And here is our comfort too. For when we confess this from the heart, when we recognize that "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Is. 64:6), then we may also make this humble confession: we have fallen upon Christ, and Christ paid for our guilt. And He renews us by His Holy Spirit, and assures us of eternal life and glory.

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.... For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:1, 8-10).

That alone is our salvation. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

"Come unto Me, and Drink!"

John 7:37-53

It is the last day, that great day of the feast of tabernacles. Jesus has been teaching of Himself and His gospel. The Jews had marveled that such an unlearned man could speak with such wisdom and authority. Some believed this Jesus was the Christ. Some

thought He had a devil. The Pharisees and chief priests had sent officers to take Him. Certain it was that, whatever and whoever He was, this Jesus was causing quite a commotion!

And now Jesus has one more word to say at this feast. This word will do nothing to stop, and everything to promote, the commotion. It will cause a division among the people (v. 43). His word will even stir up hearts to

believe that this One is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Jesus stands and cries out: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (vv. 37, 38).

What does this mean? What does it mean that any who thirst are to come to Jesus and drink? And then, how can it be that those who so drink of Jesus shall have

Rev. Dick is pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.

flowing, out of their own bellies, rivers of living water?

In order to understand the significance of Jesus' words, one must be aware of certain "water rites" which were performed by the Jews at that time at the feast of tabernacles at which Jesus was speaking. The reader may want to investigate the other ordinances and purposes of this feast (cf., for example, Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:39, 40-43; Deut. 16:13, 15, and any good Bible dictionary). But we want to focus on those "water rites." These were not commanded by Scripture. But they had become the Jewish custom already many years before Christ.

About these "water rites" D.A. Carson writes:

On the seven days of the Feast, a golden flagon was filled with water from the pool of Siloam and was carried in a procession led by the High Priest back to the temple. As the procession approached the watergate on the south side of the inner court three blasts from the Shophar — a trumpet connected with joyful occasions — were sounded. While the pilgrims watched, the priests processed around the altar with the flagon, the temple choir singing the Hallel (Psalms 113-118). When the choir reached Psalm 118, every male pilgrim shook a lulav (willow and myrtle twigs tied with palm) in his right hand, while his left raised a piece of citrus fruit (a sign of the ingathered harvest), and all cried "give thanks to the LORD!" three times. The water was offered to God at the time of the morning sacrifice,

along with the daily drink-offering (of wine). The wine and the water were poured into their respective silver bowls, and then poured out before the LORD. Moreover, these ceremonies of the Feast of Tabernacles were related in Jewish thought both to the LORD's provision of water in the desert and to the LORD's pouring out of the Spirit in the last days. Pouring at the Feast of Tabernacles refers symbolically to the messianic age in which a stream from the sacred rock would flow over the whole earth (*The Gospel According to John*, pp. 321, 322).

Jesus, at this time, perhaps at the very moment when the water ceremonies were being performed, declares: "Come unto me, and drink!"

For Study, Meditation, and Discussion

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God

☛ In His word of John 7:37 Jesus declares Himself to be (or at least to *have*) the water of life. Compare this statement with what Jesus says to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4:10ff.). Compare this also with what Jesus says in John 6:35, 48ff. Compare also Isaiah 12:3; 55:1, 2; I Corinthians 10:4; Revelation 21:6; 22:17. How is Jesus this fount of water?

☛ It ought not surprise us that Jesus would explain the ceremonies of an Old Testament feast as having their significance and fulfillment in Him. For Jesus had already declared that the Scriptures "testified" of Himself (John 5:39). Are there other ceremonies connected with the feast of tabernacles which point to Jesus? Give examples from Scripture: the law, the types and shadows, the prophets, the promises, to show that the entire Old Testament was/is a wit-

ness to Jesus the Christ (cf. I Pet. 1:10-12).

☛ The reaction of many of the people to Jesus' words on this last day of the feast was to declare Him to be the Prophet. Others said, "This is the Christ" (vv. 40, 41). What is "the Prophet" to which the people were alluding? Where is this Prophet prophesied, what would He be like, and what would He do? Were the people making a distinction between the Prophet and the Christ? How is Jesus the Prophet in fulfilling His office as the Christ? The officers were to apprehend Jesus for the chief priests and Pharisees. But they did not. And the only reason they could give for not fulfilling their duty was "Never man spake like this man" (v. 46). So true! How?

That Ye Might Believe!

☛ Jesus calls any who are thirsty to come unto Him and drink (v.

37). What is it to "thirst" after Christ and the water He has to give? Are these thirsty ones the same as the "weary and heavy laden," those who have no money, and the sinners — all of whom the Savior God calls to Himself (cf. Matt. 11:28-30; Is. 55:1; Luke 5:32)? What do these descriptions say of those whom Jesus thus calls? Do children of God still thirst? Compare Psalm 42:2; 143:6 with John 4:14.

☛ Implied in Jesus' call to thirsty ones is that some, perhaps many, there are who do *not* thirst. Why does not everyone thirst for the water Jesus has? What do they thirst for instead? Does the call of Revelation 22:17: "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely," imply a *potential* in all men, a *willing potential*, a *free will* to choose for (thirst for) Christ?

☛ The call of Jesus to His people is accompanied with grace and the

Holy Spirit. The result is that His people are converted to Him. Through the Savior's calling His own become, in reality, "the called" (for example, Rom. 8:28, 30; I Pet. 2:9). Prove from Scripture that when God's people hear this call of the Savior they indeed come to Jesus and drink (cf. John 10:27).

☛ There is also a "general," non-saving call of the gospel. This call comes to all who hear the gospel. The Bible teaches that "many be called but few chosen" (Matt. 20:16). Is this "general call" of the gospel an evidence of a general love of God for all men? Does it show a desire on God's part to save all who hear the gospel? What is the explanation of the fact that many reject this general, external call? What is the church's calling — should she preach to all, or only to the thirsty ones? In studying these questions, consider what Scripture teaches concerning the sovereignty of God (Ps. 115:3; Dan. 4:35), the eternal counsel of God (Is. 47:9-11; Rom. 9; Eph. 1), the immutability of God (Mal. 3:6; Job 23:13), the delight of the Savior (Matt. 11:25ff.; Heb. 10:7), the nature of God's love (Jer. 31:3; John 3:16; Rom. 8:39), the extent of the atonement (John 10:15), and the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20). One should consider also the creedal statements concerning these questions: for example, Canons I; II, Article 5; III/IV, A, Articles 8-11; II/IV, B, Articles 5-7.

☛ In verses 41ff. we meet some heretics and popes. The heretics did not believe Jesus is the Christ. They even cited Scripture: vv. 42, 52. This is something true of all heretics: they always come with their Scriptures seeking to prove their point. And they always deny Christ. Dangerous, devilish deniers! The popes (also heretics, as all popes are) are the Pharisees. The Pharisees rebuked the officers who did not bring Jesus to them.

Show from their answer (vv. 47-49) the Pharisees' popish pretension. How can we guard against such hierarchy and proud pretension in the church?

☛ Nicodemus, who had come earlier to Jesus by night (John 3), questions the justice of the Jewish leaders' condemnation of Jesus (v. 51). Verse 50 says that Nicodemus was "one of them." Does this refer to his being one of the disciples, or one of the leaders in Israel? Is Nicodemus being bold, or cowardly, at this time? What would you have said to the Jewish leaders?

Having Life Through His Name!

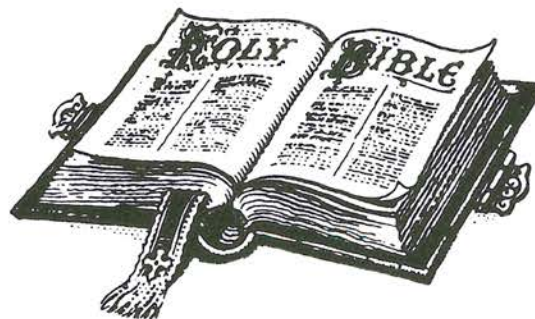
☛ Jesus calls Himself the bread of life (John 6:48), and here in John 7:37ff., the One who has the water of life. Bold claims indeed — especially since they were made in a desert region where such staples as bread and water were regularly scarce! What do these claims of Jesus tell us about His spiritual provision for us? What does His water do for us and in us? Is for you to live Christ (Phil. 1:21)? How do we show this in our living, and in our dying? Think on and discuss this proposition: the world in which we live is a spiritual desert.

☛ In verse 38 Jesus declares that whoever believes on Him will have rivers of living water flowing out of his belly. Then there is the divine commentary that Jesus was

speaking of the Spirit when He spoke of this "living water" (v. 39). At least one commentator (W. Hendriksen) sees this language as describing Zion, the people of God, as being a blessing to others: the water, that is, the Spirit, flows from them to others as they witness (Prov. 11:25; 18:4; Ezek. 47:1-12; Zech. 8:14). Another interpretation is that in this passage Jesus is referring to the abundance of blessing believers enjoy in drinking of Him — so great is their blessing that they "overflow" with it! (Cf. John 1:16; Prov. 4:23; Is. 12:3; 44:3; Ezek. 36:25-27; Eph. 1:3.) Think on the abundance of blessing we have in Christ! How do we show this Spirit-water flowing out of ourselves?

☛ What Scripture "hath said" (v. 38) that out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water? Are we to look for one passage, or several combined (cf. John 20:9)?

☛ Verse 39 states clearly that the "living water" of verse 38 is the Spirit which they that believe on Jesus should receive. Then there is the remarkable statement that the Holy Ghost "was not yet," because Jesus was not yet glorified. Does this mean there was no Holy Ghost in the church and in believers before Pentecost? What advantages does the New Testament church have over the Old Testament people of God (cf. Matt. 11:11; John 10:10; 16:13; Acts 2; Gal. 3, 4; Heb. 8)? ☐



■ "What's Happening to Education?"

It is becoming ever clearer that the education of children in our country has fallen on bad times. One hears much about what ought to be done about this. In an article on "Outcome Based Education," some serious proposals of a disturbing nature are treated. The article claims that the state is attempting nothing less than to control the training of our children from cradle to the grave. Reference is made to certain proposals introduced by legislators in Colorado.

Recently, the State of Colorado has been attempting to entirely rewrite its children's code. As a part of the proposed changes, language was introduced by pro-family legislators to protect parents' rights and prevent unwarranted state intrusion into family life. This legislation was killed in the Senate Judiciary Committee. In undoing the provision, state Senator Dottie Wham, chairperson of that committee, stated that the Colorado Children's Code was no place for parental rights; the Children's Code was there to protect children and it needed to remain for and about children.

Who owns the children? In Senator Wham's view, parents do not have the best interests of their children at heart and the state has a better idea of how children should be raised, even if that means defending children from their own parents. If Senator Wham's views were unique, it might raise a few eyebrows, but in reality it represents what is a major philosophical contender for raising the minds and hearts of children in this country. Indeed,

the concept of guarding children from their parents is one of the major themes drummed by the educational establishment. Take, for example, the words of Kathy Collins, a former legal counsel to the Iowa Department of Education: "Children ... are not 'owned' by their parents.... The Christian fundamentalists who want the freedom to indoctrinate their children with religious education do not understand [that] the law that prevents them from legally teaching their kids prevents someone else from abusing theirs."

There is a proposition on the ballot in the State of Colorado which is supposed to guarantee parents' rights — something the legislature has thus far refused to do. That issue will have been decided in the November 5 elections. There has been much "scare" advertising about the "terrible" consequences of the passage of this proposition.

The same article quoted above states more about the goals of educators in this country. After pointing out that private school and home-schooled students score well above the average on SAT scores, the article states:

This creates a problem for the educators, because their dream of socialism is all-encompassing. As a result, there will be incessant increasing legal pressure to force home schoolers and private schools to conform. The most salient of these will be through the CIM (Certificate of Initial Mastery), mentioned above. If plans go on schedule, and they are to date, it will be impossible to obtain a job without a CIM. A student will not be able to obtain a CIM until he or she meets the outcome standards required by the state. As a result, home and private schoolers will be forced into the system because they will have to "teach to the tests" to achieve the acceptable outcomes.

The implications of all of this for the church are staggering. The new global values are in opposition to much of what Christianity teaches. Since the global values are now being adopted by law and curricula, it is an easy jump to see where the state can just as easily declare the teaching of certain forms of politically incorrect religion to be a psychological disorder. If parents then manifest this "disorder" by teaching it to their children, this would constitute child abuse and at that point the state, in the "best interests of the children," would step in and remove them from their parents to prevent further "abuse." In the United States it would be ludicrous to consider this if it weren't already happening.

This is important that the reader understand: The radical changes in education, which will totally transform this culture, are under way; they are not part of some future possibility. The shift to relative values affects how people will view "freedoms" and "rights" as well as how Christianity will be viewed in just a few years. Consider what it will be like for you to live in a culture which doesn't believe in absolute values, where all rights are based on the feeling of the moment and what seems right, which deems tolerance as the ultimate good but which is mercilessly intolerant of things it deems in opposition to itself.

In other places and times, the church called this persecution.

That presents a serious picture of what the future holds for the church and for Christian parents. Surely it is the calling of the Christian to show opposition to the attempts of many to take away "parental rights." That must be done by way of the vote, as in Colorado on November 5, but also by way of informing those legislators who represent us of our opposition to these attempts of the state to control our children.

Rev. VanBaren is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.

■ Developments in the CRC

Darrell Todd Maurina reports on the first two women ordained into office in the Christian Reformed Church. The first was Ruth Hofman, a minister in the First Toronto CRC on August 24. The report stated:

Hofman's evening ordination service lasted over two hours and included messages from Joan Flikkema, former head of the Committee for Women in the CRC, Rev. Gordon Pols, reporter for the 1992 synodical advisory committee whose recommendation that women be allowed to "expound" paved the way for Hofman's call to First Toronto, and Hofman's father, Rev. John Hofman, retired pastor of Ideal Park CRC in Grand Rapids.

... Other themes raised in the ordination service pointed to more difficult times ahead. Mary Antonides, pastor-elect of Eastern Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, noted that Hofman had been a role model with whom she had discussed how to handle difficult church problems. Pols' message noted the difficulty of dealing with false doctrine. Hofman's own Sunday sermon on Jeremiah 29:1-14 noted the difficulty of false prophets confronting the Israelites. At least one of those difficult problems will include the issue of homosexuality, an issue at First Toronto CRC that long predates Hofman's arrival at the church....

The second woman ordained into the office of ministry was Mary Antonides at Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church. Her ordination was on September 29.

The report stated:

For Classis Grand Rapids East, as well as for the Christian Reformed denomination at large, Antonides' successful passage of ordination exams in a classis that has led the way in advocating the ordination of women marks the successful completion of years of struggle. Antonides' successful exam means that her scheduled September 29 ordination will make her the second ordained woman in the 292,000-member denomination since its synod legalized the ordination of women to all offices of the church....

Later in the exam, Rev. Morris Greidanus of Grand Rapids First CRC recounted the story of a woman who had remarried after a divorce produced by spousal abuse but continued to be troubled by Scriptural injunctions in Matthew 19 specifying that divorce could occur only on the grounds of adultery. Greidanus asked Antonides how she would interpret another passage: I Timothy 2:12's specification that "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent."

"Do you wake up at night and hear Timothy saying to you, 'Woman, be silent'?" asked Greidanus. Upon hearing Antonides' "no," Greidanus commented that "you probably wouldn't listen to him anyway" — eliciting loud laughter from the audience. Antonides then explained her view that the underlying principles of the text such as modesty in dress and propriety in worship were still binding on Christians today, even though its specific prohibitions on women

wearing braided hair, pearls, gold, and fine clothes, or teaching and having authority over men were not.

The repercussions to the decision of Synod on "women in office" continue to be felt through the denomination. Bethany Christian Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois has voted to secede from the denomination. There were only 14 of over a hundred votes cast opposing the separation.

In another vote, the Franklin Lakes CRC in New Jersey also decided to sever relations with the CRC. This small congregation was concerned not only with the issue of "women in office," but also with the question of the authority of Scripture which, they believed, was being eroded in the practices of the church.

In another development, Classis Hudson, on September 25, decided to refuse to seat Rev. Casey Freswick of Newton because of "schismatic activities and statements." The classis minutes noted that "a document is quoted in which Rev. Freswick calls for his church to leave the denomination." All of this took place without any sort of "trial." The action of the classis made it likely that the congregation of Newton will also secede from the denomination.

So the sad consequences of synodical decisions taken in violation of Scripture and its own church order are evident in churches and individuals who continue to leave that denomination. □

Book Review

The Mormon Missionaries: An Inside Look at Their Real Message and Methods, by Janis Hutchinson. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1995. 272 pp. \$9.99 (softcover). [Reviewed by Agatha Lubbers.]

Janis Hutchinson devoted thirty-four years of her life to activity in the Mormon Church during which time she filled two stake missions, married a returned missionary, and sent a daughter on a full-time mission. She writes, "I

know the missionary mind-set, sincerity, and dedication. As a result, I may be guilty of rendering too sympathetic a portrayal of the two Mormon missionaries in this book."

The subjects covered in this

book are the same as the major topics included in the six lesson books used by the missionaries. These major topics are: 1/ Examining the "heavenly Father's plan," 2/ The Book of Mormon as another testament of Christ, 3/ The great apostasy and the gates of hell, 4/ Eternal progression and its destination.

The first chapter entitled "Surprise on Campus" tells about the initial encounter by students at an anonymous Bible college in San Antonio, Texas, with Mormon missionaries. The book begins with the following episode: "Come quick" a student yelled, bursting through the door of the empty classroom where I was correcting papers.... Dashing outside the small wood-framed bungalow where I served as teacher of the cults class at a small Texas Bible college, I suddenly stopped short. I couldn't believe my eyes! There they were! Two Mormon missionaries! And — of all places — at a Bible college!"

Using the classroom as the envelope of the story, Janis Hutchinson employs the dialogue of the characters to tell about the doctrines of Mormonism and to relate how Mormon missionaries

carry their canned message. The dialogue of the characters in this story and the Bible college setting is based on the actual experience of Janis Hutchinson, but the characters are purely fictional and any resemblance to persons living or dead is coincidental.

The reader will discover startling facts surrounding Mormonism's beginnings, is promised an eye-opener concerning the source of Joseph Smith's doctrines, and will learn the shocking motive behind Mormon missionary work. The author indicates that the reader's "own testimony will be strengthened as to the falseness of Mormonism — just in case those television commercials are getting to you."

The Scripture verses used in the text are taken from the King James Version because Mormons recognize no other version except parts of the "inspired translation" of the KJV by Joseph Smith (1833).

In my opinion the most valuable aspect of the book was the chapter entitled "Magic and Masonry: How Joseph Smith put it all together." The impact of Magic and Masonic ideas on the ideology of the Mormon church be-

comes particularly obvious in this chapter.

In one of the episodes in chapter seven the following dialogue occurs. One of the students in the class asks, "After Smith died did succeeding presidents continue in occult practices?" Professor Hutchinson answers, "... Brigham Young used Oliver Cowdery's divining rod to decide where the Salt Lake Temple should be built. In addition when Young and Taylor (second and third presidents) supervised the making of a woodcut seal for the twelve apostles, they copied occult symbols from Jacob Boehm's *Theosophical Works* — a book used for two hundred years by Christian Kabbalists and Rosicrucians."

The book is a polemic against the adherents of this false religion that now number more than nine million. Those reading this book will find that the false doctrines of Mormonism are well-documented and instruction concerning the heresies of this religion are woven through the episodes and dialogue of the story. The book is recommended for your enjoyment and instruction and is recommended for church and school libraries. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregational Activities

From the September "Across the Aisle," the newsletter of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, we find and pass on to you the following good idea. The staff of "Across the Aisle" is trying to encourage everyone in their congregation to memorize and study Scripture regularly. In an attempt to do this this year they introduced

a new monthly feature entitled, "Light unto my Path." Each month they will present a Bible passage in large type (on an 8½" x 11" page) so that it can be easily seen when displayed on a refrigerator, mirror, table, etc. They plan on taking 12 issues to cover Luke 12, where Jesus teaches on a variety of subjects. The first group of verses, Luke 12:1-3, is entitled, "Beware of Hypocrisy," followed by such themes as Fear of God, Do not Worry, and the Faithful and Evil Servant.

Also concerning our First congregation, we note that all of First's married couples were in-

vited to take part in First's Second Annual Traverse City Fall Color Tour. This event was held the first Friday and Saturday in October — a beautiful weekend here in Michigan. Plans called for canoeing on Friday, followed by games and swimming Friday night at a Day's Inn in Traverse City, MI, with a color tour to the Mission Peninsula Lighthouse on Saturday morning.

At their annual congregational meeting held in late September, the congregation of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI did more than elect new officebearers and adopt the yearly budget. They also ap-

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

proved a proposal to hire an architect to draw up plans for their new church home, along with a proposal to accept the offer of Feenstra and Associates to draft a site plan at cost, and a proposal to hold a financial drive for funds to cover these costs.

With summer now a distant memory, we include here one last summer activity of two of our churches in west Michigan. Both the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids and the Faith congregation in Jenison, MI held breakfast on the beach in August. Everyone in these congregations was invited to share a good breakfast with good fellowship on the shore of beautiful Lake Michigan. What a nice way to spend a Saturday morning!

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Randolph, WI PRC sponsored a lecture on September 30. Rev. Carl Haak, pastor of the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL, was the guest speaker that night. He spoke on the subject, "The Building of a Christian Family." The speech was held in the gym at Central Wisconsin Christian High School. Considering some of the problems we all face as families, Rev. Haak

intended to lay out some of the biblical directives leading to a stable and God-glorifying family life.

On Friday, September 27, Rev. C. Terpstra, pastor of the South Holland, IL PRC, gave a speech entitled, "The Individual's Responsibility in the Church's Work of Evangelism" at the Byron Center, MI PRC. This speech, sponsored by the Evangelism Committee of Byron Center, served as a springboard for the fall meeting of the P.R.E.P. (Protestant Reformed Evangelism Planning) meeting hosted by Byron Center the next morning. This meeting allowed area congregations to share their information concerning recent successes or non-successes in various areas of evangelism.

Denominational Activities

Perhaps not coincidentally the annual meeting of the RFPA (Reformed Free Publishing Association) was held at the Grandville, MI PRC on September 26. Since Rev. Terpstra was in town for that evangelism meeting on the 27th, he was able to address the association. He spoke on the topic, "The RFPA, Stimulator of Sound Knowledge in an Age of Ignorance."

The Men's and Ladies' Societies of the Southeast PRC hosted this year's annual Eastern Men's and Ladies' League Meeting on September 24. Prof. R. Dykstra spoke on the topic, "The Great Value of Protestant Reformed Bible Studies."

Minister Activities

Rev. B. Woudenberg, pastor in our churches for 40 years, the last twenty at the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, conducted his last service as an active minister of the Word on September 20. We thank the Lord for his years of faithful service.

Our Hope PRC in Walker, MI has extended a call to Rev. S. Key, pastor of the Randolph, WI PRC, to serve as their next pastor.

Since the decline of Rev. A. denHartog of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, to serve as foreign missionary to Ghana, the Hull, IA PRC made a new trio for calling a missionary: Revs. W. Bekkering, R. Moore, and R. VanOverloop.

Food For Thought

"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness."

— Martin Luther □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 8, 1997, at Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, MI. Material for this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk by December 9, 1996.

Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory of the Randolph Protestant Reformed Church expresses its Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Steve Oosterhouse and family in the loss of Steve's father,

MR. HARRY F. OOSTERHOUSE,

on September 26, 1996.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him" (Psalm 103:17).

Rev. Steven Key, Pres.
Berwyn Huizenga, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The members of the Adult Bible Study Society of the First PR Church of Grand Rapids express their deepest Christian sympathy to our fellow member, Eleanore Bol, in the recent death of her husband,

GERRIT BOL.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 18).

Prof. David J. Engelsma, Leader

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory and congregation of Trinity PRC (Houston, Texas), express their heartfelt sympathy to Eleanore Bol in the loss of her dear husband,

GERRIT BOL.

May she and the entire family find great joy in the Word of God recorded in Psalm 116:15: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Although Gary was not a member of our congregation, he was a great encouragement to us as one of our faithful winter visitors.

Pastor Jai Mahtani, President
Mr. Ben Hopkins, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 17, 1996, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. JOHN BODBYL, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. We, together with them, rejoice in the faithfulness of our God to His covenant with us. "For this God is our God for ever and ever: even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

- ❖ George and MaryLynn Postmus
John, Nathan, Cathy
- ❖ George and Jayne Bodbyl
George, Marcella, Monica, Emily
- ❖ John and Jane Bodbyl
Craig and Jennifer Coleman, John,
Jason, Jeremy, Jim, Julia
- ❖ Tom and Gretine Bodbyl
Maria, Larissa, Joel, Nate, Eric, Stefan
- ❖ John and Joan Mulder
Elizabeth, Lynnella, Jodi
- ❖ Dan and Anna Mae Bodbyl
Amanda, Tina, Rosanne, Seth

Hudsonville, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On November 22, 1996, our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents,

MR. and MRS. MENNO POORTENGA, celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We give thanks to God for their biblical instruction and godly example. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless them in the years to come. It is a great comfort to us and them to "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandment to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

- ❖ Don and Sally Poortenga
- ❖ Terry and Anita Poortenga
- ❖ Tim and Bonnie Poortenga
- ❖ Don and Jann Bruinsma
- ❖ Wes and Cindy Poortenga
- ❖ Ron and Bev Bultema
24 grand children
2 great grandchildren

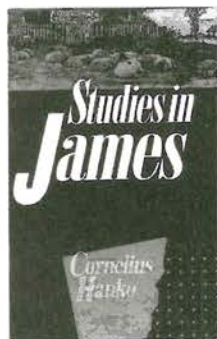
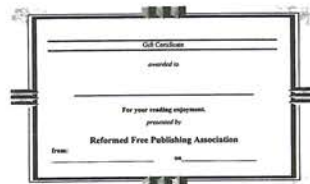
Lansing, IL

From the RFPA:



* Attention Evangelism Committees: Copies of our October 15 issue of the **SB**, the Special Issue on the "Reformation of 1953," are available from the Business Office at 50¢ each, plus postage, while our supply of extra copies lasts.

* Suggestion for Christmas-giving: How about a gift-subscription to the **Standard Bearer**? ... or a gift certificate enabling the recipient to obtain an RFPA book or two of his choice? For information, call the Business Office at (616) 531-1490.



* Newest of the RFPA publications: Study guide, "Studies in James" (64 pages), by Rev. Cornelius Hanko, is now available, at \$4.75. (Book Club members may order this book if they wish, at their usual 35% discount; but, as decided earlier by the RFPA Board, study guides will not be sent automatically to members.) Send order to:

RFPA
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418.

* Book Club membership: Are you a member of the RFPA Book Club? If not, we remind you of the easy way to join by returning the card inserted in the September 1 issue of the **SB** — and obtaining a free book of your selection for doing so!

