



# ***The Standard Bearer***

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



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Site of the 4th Biennial Conference  
of the British Reformed Fellowship  
... see p. 202

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## In This Issue ...

The Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) informs our readers of fruit on the missions labors of the PRC consisting of the institution of a church in Northern Ireland. Not unrelated to the work there is the spreading witness to the Reformed faith throughout the British Isles by the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF). One aspect of this witness is the BRF Family Holiday Conference every two years. The DMC also provides a report of the conference in England this past summer.

The work in Northern Ireland began with contacts established through the energetic evangelism of the PRC of South Holland, IL. The local congregation has her vital role in missions.

The work did not develop according to plan — *our* plan. The unfolding of God's plan for His church there meant disappointment and struggle both for the people of God in Northern Ireland and for us.

Nor was a church born overnight. The time of labor was long. Thirteen years passed between the first correspondence and the organization of a church in 1996.

In His own time and in His way — not ours — Jesus Christ the Lord builds His church.

We rejoice in His church-building in Northern Ireland.

May He continue to bless the faithful and tireless work of Missionary Ron Hanks.

May He prosper and enlarge the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland.

The report of the BRF Family Conference is written by Mr. Lindsay Williams, editor of the *British Reformed Journal*. The report appeared first in this journal and is reprinted by permission. Our readers can subscribe to this informative, hard-hitting periodical by writing the *British Reformed Journal*, "Fairhaven," 9 Chapel Lane, Walton-by-Kimcote, Lutterworth, Leicestershire LE17 5RL, England, UK.

— DJE



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# Delivered to Corruption

**W**herefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

*Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.*

Romans 1:24, 25

## Introduction

I can best express the main thought of this part of Romans 1, in its connection, by saying that sin is very successful and prospers in all that it wills, even unto the end. The reason for this prospering of sin is the wrath of God. The wrath of God prospers sin so that it reaches its purpose. From a spiritual point of view, the sinner does what he pleases. However, sin prospers more than the sinner originally planned.

Let me use a figure. Suppose there is a steep, icy road that ends in a precipice. A man sets his feet on that steep, icy road. What will happen? He will go on. He will be prosperous in his slide down that road. Can he stop? No, he must go on. Why? You say, because of the law of gravitation. That is, perhaps, correct. But what is the law of gravitation? It is the unchangeable operation of God in things. God pulls that man down. Will God stop because a man puts his feet on that slippery road? No, God does not change. What must happen if that man is to stop half-

way, or rather, if he is to go up that steep road instead of down? You say, a wonder. That is a fitting illustration of my text, in its connection.

The slippery road is the process of sin. The man that puts his feet on that road is the sinner, indeed, the whole world. On that slippery road the whole world moves by nature. The power that pulls the world down is the unchangeable operation of the wrath of God. The wrath of God pulls man down from sin to sin, until he reaches the precipice. The only power that will not only cause man to stop, but also cause him to go up, is the gospel. This is why the gospel is the power unto salvation. This is why the apostle is not ashamed of this gospel.

The wrath of God is revealed, the apostle had said. When the apostle says that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, he does not mean to say that God in heaven is angry. But he means to say that there is an effectual operation of wrath in the world. This wrath is present, it is around us, it besets us on every side, it works. In the face of the operation of this wrath, men hold the truth under in unrighteousness. The truth is that God is God, that He is glorious, and that He must be praised and thanked. Men hold this truth under in unrighteousness. They want to be unrighteous. Therefore, they hold the truth under in unrighteousness. As soon as they do, wrath is revealed.

How? In the first place, in that their hearts were darkened, so that they became religiously foolish. This is the punishment of their wanting to do unrighteousness.

Man held the truth under in unrighteousness, and God made them so foolish that they made themselves gods like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Having made these images, they go on, and their hearts become more darkened, until finally they believe that these images which they have made actually are God.

This is always the case. Some people, for example, will find all kinds of excuses for not sending their children to the Christian school. They know better. They know that they should send them to the Christian school. But they seek all kinds of excuses. Once having started on this road, they must go on until they finally believe their own excuses.

So it is here. Man said, "I do not want to serve and glorify God." He held the truth under in unrighteousness. God said, "Go ahead." Then man made images. He knew these images were not God. But God darkened his heart. Man was carried on until finally he believed that these sticks and stones were actually God. This is the course of sin. The next step is moral corruption. This is the inevitable result. A man is like his god. If he makes himself a god, he becomes like the god which he makes. The reason is that wrath pulls him down. God brings His people into heaven. He also brings the wicked into hell.

This is my text. "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served

*Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of the Standard Bearer.*



the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever."

Let me call your attention to this development of sin and to the only power that can save man from continuing on this road of sin, until he falls into destruction.

### **The Meaning**

The text says that God gave them up to uncleanness. What does this mean? All sin is uncleanness. But if we read the rest of this chapter, we will see that the apostle means something specific. What the apostle means with uncleanness is that moral state of heart and mind in which man corrupts himself sexually. Moral dirt is what the apostle has in mind. By this uncleanness, the apostle means that God gave them over to such a condition of the heart and will and mind and desires that they delight in sexual filth. The effect is that they dishonor their own bodies between themselves.

What the apostle means by this he explains when he says that this moral corruption is such that men lusted after men, and women after women. It began with corruption in the spirit; it ends with corruption in the body. This is heathendom. This is civilized Rome. This is reality. This is still the case.

Our text is an explanation of many things that we see around us. It is striking that the world that departs from God gives rise to all manner of uncleanness. Many of our movies would be out of business if it were not for the sexual filth shown in them. What is the reason for the sexually explicit pictures everywhere? Why must even ordinary ads contain unchastity? Unclean minds make unclean things. But remember, the text explains it as a manifestation of the wrath of God. The wrath of God brings men to hell. The wrath of God brings the world to destruction.

Mark well, the text says that God gave them over. People have

tried to explain away the force of this word. They have even found in this chapter a classic proof for common grace. They say that God's giving man over to uncleanness does not mean that God pushes man into sin. This, they say, would be contrary to God's holiness. They say that it rather means that God simply abandoned them. He simply let them go. He let them go as I let go my handkerchief, so that it falls. God first held man back on the road of sin. This is called the restraint of sin. Then God let man go. He stepped out of man's way so that He did not hold him back anymore. Man then slipped down on the road of sin.

This is not so. Did you ever see the law of gravitation stop anyone from going down? Romans 1 teaches that the wrath of God pulls man down. The word used in the original does not mean "to let go." It rather means "to push down," "to deliver up." It is the same word that is used for delivering a prisoner into prison. You do not deliver a prisoner into prison by letting him go and letting him walk into prison of his own accord. The same word is used for the deliverance of Christ into the hands of wicked men.

In this same way God delivers men unto sin. He does so in His wrath. The wrath of God is revealed; it operates in the world. The effect is that men become religiously foolish and morally corrupt.

The text teaches, therefore, that God punishes sin with more sin. The road of the world is sin, wrath, more sin, and more wrath.

### **The Manner**

How does God do this? How does He do this without becoming the author of sin? How is it possible? How must it be explained that the wrath of God, which is the reaction of His holiness, brings the sinner deeper into sin? The text says that God does it through

the lust of men's hearts. God gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves.

The heart is the center of man's life from a spiritual point of view. Out of the heart are the issues of life. All our thinking, our willing, our desiring issues forth from the heart. As the heart is, so is the man, spiritually, morally, ethically.

Now there is nothing wrong in the fact that the heart desires. The heart is made to desire. This is the purpose of the heart. But the normal desire of the heart, apart from sin, is that it desires after God. It desires to be pleasing to Him, to serve Him, to glorify Him. This was the normal desire of the heart. But those desires become lusts as soon as this heart turns away from God. Then the heart fastens itself on other objects, apart from God. It says, "I will no more serve God."

Upon what does the desire of the heart fasten itself, if not on God? It fastens itself upon the creature instead of upon the Creator. It seeks things, and it seeks to press these things into the service of unrighteousness. This is lust. There are many lusts in the world: lust of money, lust of honor, lust of position, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. The lust of money is that we press it into the service of unrighteousness. This is why we have depression.

Now what does God do? He works upon these lusts by His anger. He does not let them go. He works in them. He works in everything. The purpose of God working in these lusts is to bring man as low as possible. Man says to a cow, "Thou art my god." God says, "I will see to it that you fall as far below that god which you made as a worshiper ought to be below his god." Thus man comes to fall below the beast. He does things a beast will never do.\*

God does it! God says to the



sinful world two things. He says, "I will take your heart and guide you in the direction that will bring you lower than the beast that you serve." He says also, "I will lead you to destruction."

#### The Motive

Why? The final reason is expressed in the words, "Who is blessed forever. Amen." The meaning, in the first place, is that God is only good. In the second place, being the only good, He is the only blessed one. He is the only blessed one as the triune God. In the third place, as the infinite good, He wills to become manifest as the one apart from whom there is no blessedness. There may never be anything in which God does not become manifest as the blessed one.

There are two ways in which God becomes manifest as the only blessed one. He becomes manifest as the blessed one in them that fear Him by blessing them. But

with that same unchangeable will to become manifest as the blessed one, He assumes an attitude over against the wicked. The result is that God manifests His wrath by making them unspeakably wretched. Antithetically, it becomes manifest that God is blessed forever. Joy and glory are a testimony that God is blessed forever. Wretchedness and misery testify antithetically that God is blessed forever. There are but two powers operating in history.

The wrath of God is revealed when men serve the creature more than the Creator. This does not mean that they serve the Creator too, but that they serve the creature more. No, the meaning is that they serve the creature *instead of* the Creator. They change the truth of God into a lie. And God pushes man down until it becomes manifest that sin is sin.

I am not ashamed of the gospel. This is the positive thought. I am not ashamed of the gospel.

It is the power of God unto salvation. It is a power on the slippery road on which wrath pushes man down and on which all find themselves.

How can man be saved? By means of instruction? This is impossible. Salvation is not a matter of education. Man wants unrighteousness. What will stop him? Shall we give him an example? There is no example. The whole world is on that path. No, there must be a power that can change that wrath into uplifting love. This power we have in the gospel. The gospel is a power. It is a power to lift man up.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is a power of God unto salvation. The righteous shall live by faith. He that believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. □

\* Hoeksema here is describing the gross sin of homosexuality referred to in the passage.

#### Editorial

## A Candid Confession of the Character of a Conditional Covenant (3)

A staunch supporter of the popular doctrine in Reformed and Presbyterian circles, that God makes a conditional covenant with every physical child of believing parents, has candidly confessed the real character of such a covenant. He frankly acknowledges that, according to this doctrine of the covenant, God loves every physical

child of believers with His covenant love in Jesus Christ and sincerely desires to save every child. This covenant doctrine denies that faith is one of the benefits earned by the death of Christ for the elect children only and that faith is itself included in the promise made by God to the children of believers in baptism.

The candid confession makes

plain, therefore, that it is the character of a conditional covenant to affirm that God's covenant love in Jesus Christ is wider than the elect children of believing parents; that God's covenant love in Jesus Christ fails to save many whom God so loves; and, by clear and necessary implication, that the reason why some children are saved is not God's covenant love, but



their own will and work, that is, faith as their performance of a required condition.

This was the candid confession of Reformed minister, Rev. Cecil W. Tuininga, in the January 1, 1997 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, in answer to questions that I had put to him.

In my editorial in the January 15, 1997 issue of this magazine, I demonstrated that the character of a conditional covenant, as candidly confessed by Rev. Tuininga, is condemned both by Scripture and by the Reformed creeds as a departure from the gospel of sovereign grace.

### Pointed Questions

What I have not yet done is to answer the questions that Rev. Tuininga put to me. After he answered my questions about the real character of a conditional covenant, Rev. Tuininga addressed pointed questions to me concerning the real character of the unconditional covenant: "Now allow me a few questions."

Fair enough.

In what follows, Rev. Tuininga's questions appear in italics. Because of the length of some of them, I will not quote them in their entirety. For the complete questions, the reader is referred to the editorial in the January 1, 1997 issue of the *SB*. My answers immediately follow Rev. Tuininga's questions, in regular type.

1. *Is every baptized child, according to your position, elect and hence saved? How then answer for those who reject the covenant promises? Do they not break covenant with God?*

Answer: No, according to the doctrine of the unconditional covenant of grace, every baptized child is not elect and saved. Some baptized children are reprobate and lost according to God's eternal decree of predestination. This is the plain teaching of the Bible in Romans 9:6-24. Some physical

children of believing Abraham and Sarah, for example, Esau, were excluded from God's saving purpose (v. 15); were hated by God before birth (v. 13); and were vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (v. 22) — all, in God's eternal will of predestination (vv. 11, 15, 18, 22).

This is also the express teaching of the Reformed creed, the Canons of Dordt:

... not all (the physical children of believing parents — DJE), but some only are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal election of God; whom God ... hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have wilfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but ... at last for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and punish them forever.... And this is the decree of reprobation ... (I/15).

These children (whom God alone knows) by their unbelief in later years are guilty of despising God's covenant, God's covenant love, and God's covenant Son (Heb. 10:29). They "break" the covenant in the sense that they grievously violate it by holding it in contempt as it is clearly made known to them in the Word of God and the sacraments; by refusing to embrace it in faith as they are seriously called by God to do; and by disobeying the command to walk in the covenant by a holy life.

But they emphatically do not break the covenant in the sense that, whereas God establishes His covenant with them personally, whether by promise to them or by the work of the Holy Ghost in their hearts, they nullify the promise or undo the work of the Holy Ghost within them. God's covenant of grace with Abraham and his "seed" is sure and unbreakable. It is sure and unbreakable with all the seed of Abraham, which seed is Jesus Christ and all the elect (Gal. 3:16-29). It is sure and un-

breakable precisely by the promise of God, that is, by the promising God Himself (Rom. 4:16).

It is exactly the concern of the apostle in Romans 9:6ff. to deny that God's covenant Word of promise is ineffectual in the perishing of so many physical children of believing Abraham and Sarah (v. 6). The promise to the "seed of Abraham" was not, in fact, addressed by God to, or intended for, all the physical children of Abraham, but only to and for the elect among the physical children (vv. 7-13). The same is true of the promise in baptism today.

Some, and only some, among the physical children of Abraham and Sarah were "the children of the promise" then (v. 8). Some, and only some, among the physical children of believers are "children of the promise" today.

These are the children to whom alone God addressed, and addresses, His promise, "I will be your God, and you will be my child."

This covenant promise is gracious and (if I may be forgiven a redundancy) sovereign. It is never without saving effect. It regenerates, gives faith (in this order!), makes holy, and takes to heaven. The promise — the covenant Word of God — does this. No child to whom God addresses it can victoriously resist it, any more than the effectual call of Romans 8:30 can be resisted by the elect object of the call. "Not as though the Word of God hath taken none effect" (Rom. 9:6). Ever!

### A Desire to Save All the Children?

2. *Does God not love and desire the salvation of all those within the covenant?*

Answer: No, God does not love and desire the salvation of all those, whether adults or children, who may for a time live in the sphere of the covenant. By "living in the sphere of the covenant," I mean that one is baptized into a



true church, is instructed in the truth of the gospel, makes public confession of faith, participates in the public worship of God, and shows himself to others as one walking in obedience to the law. It is one's holding membership in the instituted and visible church.

Scripture sharply distinguishes between this formal membership, on the one hand, and spiritual union with Christ and His covenant people, on the other hand. The prophets repeatedly distinguish the "remnant" from the visible organization of the nation of Israel and from the majority of nominal members of that nation (Is. 1:9). The apostle confirms this distinction and grounds it in God's eternal election: "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5). Likewise, the apostle John distinguishes those who for a time are merely formal members of the New Testament church from "us" who are the true church. Some go out "from us" who, nevertheless, never were "of us" (I John 2:19).

The entire defense of God's effectual Word of promise and, with this, of the grace of the work of salvation in the family of father Abraham, rests, in Romans 9, on the validity of the distinction between certain children's being "Israel" and other children's merely being "of Israel" (v. 6). To be "Israel" is to be living members of Christ and the family of God according to election. To be merely "of Israel" is to be members of the institution only formally and by outward profession; it is to be merely "in the sphere of the covenant."

That God does not love and desire the salvation of all who are merely "of Israel" is the plain teaching of the apostle in Romans 9:13-15. God did not love circumcised Esau, but hated him. He never had mercy on him, nor did He wish to have mercy on him. Nor, I may add, was it unjust of

God that He did not have mercy on Esau. Neither may any of us puny humans dare to call the electing and reprobating God into question: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" (v. 20)

It is the intention of the apostle that what he says in Romans 9 specifically of Esau applies also to all those physical descendants of Abraham who perished in unbelief and disobedience, as well as to those physical children of believing parents who similarly perish down through the ages.

#### **A Desire to Save All Men?**

3. *And in this connection does God not desire the salvation of all men?*

Answer: No, God does not desire the salvation of all men, that is, "all men" in the sense intended by Rev. Cecil Tuininga, namely, every human who ever lived, lives, and will live.

Scripture is against it. Did God desire the salvation of all those who perished in the flood, adults and children alike? Did God desire the salvation of all who perished in the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah? Did God desire the salvation of all the Canaanites whom He commanded Israel to kill to the last infant? Did God desire the salvation of all the heathens who lived and died without the gospel before Pentecost? God saves only by the Word, and He Himself announces that in the time of the old covenant "He sheweth His Word unto Jacob.... He hath not dealt so with any nation" (Ps. 147:19, 20).

The New Testament agrees. A divine desire to save is God's purposeful will. But He wills to have mercy on some only and, thus, to save them; others, He wills to harden and, thus, to damn them (Rom. 9:18).

This is the clear, powerful, and (to many) offensive testimony of the Canons of Dordt, which confession binds Rev. Tuininga as it

binds me. This is also the clear testimony, incidentally, of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF). There is not so much as a hint in the Reformed confessions of a universal love of God and of a universal desire for salvation. This is why, when Reformed and Presbyterian churches begin to fall away, they must *add* such a statement to the creeds. The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) did this in 1903 by adding a section on God's universal love and desire for the salvation of all men to the WCF. The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) did the same thing in 1924 by appending an official, binding, qualifying, doctrinal statement to the "Three Forms of Unity."

#### **Candor and Clarity**

I have now answered Rev. Tuininga's questions.

I have answered them as candidly as he answered mine. As frankly as he opened up the character of the conditional covenant, so frankly have I opened up the character of the unconditional covenant. No one — not Rev. Tuininga, not I, not a single reader of the *SB* — can now be ignorant or confused regarding the differences between the doctrine of a conditional covenant and the doctrine of the unconditional covenant.

No one can fail to see that the differences are fundamental. The conditional covenant teaches a universal covenant love of God in Jesus Christ, not necessarily for every human (although the texts that Tuininga raises and the arguments that he uses to support his covenant view are ominous in this respect) but certainly within the sphere of the natural family of believing parents. God loved every physical descendant of Abraham and Sarah, including Esau. God loves every physical child of believing parents in the time of the new covenant. This covenant love of God fails to save many toward



whom it is directed. Whether a child is saved by this love of God depends upon his performance of a condition, although it is usually added that the child can perform this condition only with the help of divine grace.

The unconditional covenant teaches that the salvation of the children of believers is due only to God's love for these children in His covenant with them in Christ. This love, having its source in the eternal election of grace, is efficacious: it infallibly saves every child who is its object. It is gracious: God owes it to none of our children. It is sovereign: No parent may contend with God because it may please God not to love ev-

ery one of his physical children.

#### Yet Again: Hyper-Calvinist!

One thing I have not yet done: I have not explained those passages of Holy Scripture that Rev. Tuininga raised in connection with his questions. In his question, whether God loves and desires to save all the physical, baptized children, he appealed to Matthew 23:37. In his question, whether God desires the salvation of all humans without exception, he appealed to I Timothy 2:3, 4 and to II Peter 3:9.

He obliges me to explain these texts in a concluding editorial on his candid confession.

Perhaps my explanation, in addition to showing that there is no conflict between these texts and the doctrine of an unconditional covenant of particular grace, can prove that in holding the unconditional covenant the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) are not hyper-Calvinist.

There was, the reader may recall, at the end of Rev. Tuininga's letter this familiar, but still hurtful, dismissal of the PRC: "I would be very happy to see our Protestant Reformed brothers come to recognize and correct their hyper-Calvinism and become truly Reformed."

Is it so? □

— DJE

### *Go Ye Into All the World*

## Encouraging Fruit on PRC Missions

*Rev. James Slopsema*

**S**ome very wonderful things have been taking place in the United Kingdom (UK), better known perhaps to those of us who live in the United States as Great Britain or the British Isles.

In 1992 Rev. Ron Hanko and his family moved to Ballymena, Northern Ireland to take up work as missionary to the UK. His labors have concentrated in the Ballymena area, where there was a dedicated group of believers known as the Covenant Reformed Fellowship (CRF). Rev. Hanko has also had contacts throughout the UK that have taken him on many

travels and busied him with a great deal of work.

The faithful labors of Rev. Hanko were blessed by our Lord last summer with the organization of the CRF into the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland (CPRC). This newly organized congregation, although not strong in numbers, is strong in the Christian faith. Rev. Hanko remains in the UK, serving as missionary-pastor to the CPRC and developing the contacts he has throughout the UK.

The organization of the CPRC took place in connection with a conference sponsored by the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF). The BRF is an organization comprised of Reformed believers throughout the UK. Its purpose is to promote the Reformed faith in

the British Isles. The men of the newly organized CPRC are also members of the BRF.

Mr. Allister Pattison, a member of the newly organized CPRC, submitted a report of the organization of the CPRC. The *British Reformed Journal*, in its July-September 1996 issue, carried a report of the BRF Conference. The *British Reformed Journal* is a publication of the BRF. Its editor is Mr. Lindsay Williams, who also authored the report on the BRF conference and has given his permission to reprint it in the *SB*. The Mission Committee submits these reports for publication in the hope that they will serve the glory of the Son of God, who gathers His church out of all nations from the beginning to the end of the world. ■

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*Rev. Slopsema is president of the Domestic Mission Committee.*



# Organization of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland

*Mr. Allister Pattison*

On Wednesday, July 24th 1996, the Covenant Reformed Fellowship met in the Town Hall, Ballymena, to organize as the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland. Without doubt, this was an event of the greatest significance for those of God's people who have persevered with such patience in the struggle to begin the work of establishing a soundly Reformed denomination in Northern Ireland and the British Isles. Of great encouragement to the members on this happy and solemn occasion was the attendance of witnesses and friends from the Republic of Ireland, England, and Wales. Significant also was the presence of a large contingent from the Protestant Reformed Churches in the United States of America, including representatives from the eldership of the Hudsonville congregation and a representative from the Mission Committee. This combined presence serves to underline the strength and closeness of the bond which had developed between the people of the Covenant Reformed Fellowship in Ballymena and the PRC in the past number of years.

As a small group of believers, the Covenant Reformed Fellowship first met in Larne in January 1988. After a six month visit from Pastor Ken Hanks, the Fellowship eventually acquired official status as a mission field of the PRC in June of 1990, with Hudsonville be-

ing appointed as the calling congregation. Tangible support was given to the Fellowship in the form of a series of visiting ministers, culminating in the acceptance by Pastor Ron Hanks of a call to come to Northern Ireland as a Protestant Reformed missionary.

Pastor Hanks's transition was smoothed by the presence of the Rev. Gise VanBaren, then engaged in a pastoral visit which had begun in October 1992. Pastor VanBaren remained in Northern Ireland while the new family settled in. He had by this time begun the fortnightly Covenant Reformed Newsletter, a work which has been one of the Fellowship's central tools of contact, and one which the Lord has blessed in Pastor Hanks's hands with growth in stature and geographical extent: the distribution list is currently in excess of four hundred, with recipients based throughout the British Isles.

In response to an invitation by

the fellowship, Prof. David Engelsma, of the PR theological seminary, led the organization service, an invitation made as a gesture of thankfulness for the support which Prof. Engelsma has extended to the fellowship since its inception. After a call to worship, singing of Psalms, and prayer, Prof. Engelsma read from Holy Scripture Matthew 19:13-28.

Choosing verse 18 as his text, Prof. Engelsma then preached a sermon centered on Christ's words, "I will build my church." Beginning with the foundational conception of the church as the invisible body of the elect and bride of Christ, Prof. Engelsma spoke of three marks of this body: its catholicity, its holiness, and its apostolicity. He went on to show that, though the passage speaks of the invisible body of the elect, yet the mention of the keys of discipline in verse 19 demonstrates that Christ also had in mind the visible form of the church as it mani-



*Missionary-pastor Ron Hanks (center) with newly-elected officebearers (l-r): Messrs. John Clarke, Jonathan McAuley, Desmond Callendar, and Ivan Reid*

*Mr. Pattison, a Telecommunications Engineer for Nortel, is a member of CPRC in Northern Ireland.*



feasts itself on earth in the local congregation.

Notable burdens of Prof. Engelsma's sermon were his refutation of both the Roman Church's doctrine of apostolic descent through Peter and the Arminian conception of the church as self-building through the will of man. Drawing conclusions from the words "I will build" and "my church," Prof. Engelsma demonstrated the safety of the church in her belonging to Christ, and the inevitability of the completion of her construction and final triumph against the opposition of the kingdom of Satan and Antichrist.

After the sermon there followed public confession of faith by those in the fellowship who had applied to be received into membership of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church. Man-and-wife representatives from seven families as well as eight individuals were asked to confess their faith publicly by answering four questions:

1) Do you acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the articles of the Christian faith and taught here in this Christian Church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

2) Have you resolved by the grace of God to adhere to the doctrine, to reject all heresies repugnant thereto, and to lead a new, godly life?

3) Will you submit to church government, and in the case you should become delinquent (which may God graciously forbid) to church discipline?

4) Insofar as you are able do you testify to the faith and godly walk of the brothers and sisters gathered here this evening purposing to be instituted together as a church of Jesus Christ?

After formal reception into

membership, the male members then took part in the election of church officebearers, with ballot counting being undertaken by Mr. Henry Boer and Mr. Pete Miedema of Hudsonville. As a result, Mr. John Clarke and Mr. Desmond Callendar were elected to the office of elder and Mr. Jonathan McAuley and Mr. Ivan Reid to the office of deacon. After the reading of the Form for Ordination, the officebearers were ordained by laying on of hands; and after prayer, each read and signed the Formula of Subscription. Prof. Engelsma then read the declaration of Institution: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I declare that the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland is now instituted as a true church of Jesus Christ on earth."

In closing, letters of greeting were read by various representatives from the PRC; Mr. Henry Boer for Hudsonville PRC; Mr. Al Rau for the Mission Committee of the PRC; and finally, Prof. Engelsma for both the Synod of the

PRC and for Prof. and Mrs. Herman Hanko. The service was closed by Pastor Ron Hanko in the pronouncement of the benediction found in Numbers 6:24-26.

The people of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church are thankful to their God for His dealings with them over the past eight years. He has led them further into a knowledge of His precious Word. He has preserved them through difficulty and disappointment, and he has given them a faithful and gifted pastor whose ministry and labour of love have been used of God to teach, strengthen, and admonish both themselves and others. The Lord has been good. May He bless us yet by using our tiny and flawed witness for the building of His church and the establishment of a strong and courageous Reformed and biblical denomination in the UK. Truly we are at best but unprofitable servants. We are small, weak, sinful, and despised, but our help is in the name of Jehovah who made heaven and earth. ■

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## BRF Family Holiday Conference

**27th July-3rd August 1996**

***Mr. Lindsay Williams***

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Nearly 130 people, comprised of adults, teenagers, and children, from all quarters of the United Kingdom, plus some from abroad, converged on a target just some four miles west of the historic town of Battle, in East Sussex, during the course of the last Saturday of July, 1996. The "target" was the beautiful Christian Conference Centre at Ashburnham Place, once the

country seat of a landed lord, but now fulfilling a vastly different role.

Hidden from the main highways by a thick belt of trees, and girt around with a swathe of green meadows and a beautiful lake, Ashburnham lay there like a jewel,

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*Mr. Williams is editor of the British Reformed Journal.*





*Grounds of Ashburnam Place*

resplendent in the summer sun. That its situation in the far south-eastern corner of England made it difficult for most BRF members and supporters to reach it did not ultimately attenuate the numbers in attendance, which were slightly higher than that of the last Conference in Galashiels two years ago.

Anyone who was present at that last BRF conference in 1994 will know that it would be an enormous task to have a conference more successful than that. Such, however, were the sentiments current after the 1992 Conference in Bangor, Northern Ireland, and after the first BRF Conference in Wales in 1990. But each time, the next Conference seems to be even better than the previous one! Bearing in mind that the two main speakers at every one of these conferences have been the same two Protestant Reformed theological professors, Prof. Hanko and Prof. Engelsma, it gives some indication of the dedication, effort, and prayerful study which the two professors must be putting into this work. The standard of their lectures, and of their preaching on the Sabbath day, was of the highest order. Both these men preach and teach with the mien of lions, and have intense convictions about intense Word-of-God truths which

they deliver intensely, faithfully, with lucidity, and with an orthodoxy riveted to the Word of God detail by detail. The vitally important feature of their ministry was that one tended to forget the preacher, and view the Saviour, as the Lord Christ gloriously shone through the truth of His Word so faithfully expounded. In another age, before the onset of modern "ameliorated Calvinism," these two would have been regarded as being among the premier preachers in the church worldwide and it would have been next to nothing impossible to secure their services for one conference after another such as we have enjoyed in the BRF since 1990! We give thanks to God for their ministry, we praise Him who gives gifts of grace to His church, for the upbuilding of the saints!

At first sight, the theme of the 1996 Conference seemed not so stirring as the theme for 1994. "The Doctrine of the Church" did not seem so inspiring as the "Doctrine of Sovereign Grace!" But we were in for a surprise, and your editor was also in for a shock! Amazing what faithful preaching will do! In my case it uncovered an erroneous view of what the church actually was, a view which I had of course been "brain-washed" into by a lifetime of ex-

isting in the situation of modern, and apostate, evangelicalism. It was a view which I had just never thought to review critically, but the first Monday lecture of the Conference brought me up with a severe jolt! The church of Christ, I learned, did not exist for the benefit of the human race! It existed, like everything else in creation, for the glory of God! It is Christ's bride, predestinated from all eternity, the very body of Christ, and He is her Head. And she is His elect, she existed in Him from before time. Just like Eve existed in Adam before she was created, and was then formed to be his bride! Now to one such as myself, it was not entirely new to hear this, but it was something new to have it impressed on my soul powerfully such that it threw into sharp relief the other erroneous perspective I had carried in me like a virus for most of my life. After all, our generation had been brought up on Archbishop William Temple's famous dictum, that "the Church of Jesus Christ is the one institution that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members." Uttered by the learned and venerable prelate, I believe, just before the second World War, it conditioned the life and attitude of millions of church-goers within these shores for a generation and more. And millions got the message, and voting with their feet left the churches! And those who were left, were largely the "soft left" who have turned Christian churches either into some kind of amateur and quasi Department of Health and Social Security ... or into some kind of "evangelical lifeboat" culling the high seas of life searching to "rescue the perishing." Noble enough causes, but when they become the "*raison d'être*" of the church's existence, then it is a sign of apostasy. "God is everything" we were exhorted, time and again at the Conference, and "man is nothing." God's glory is the "*raison d'être*" for the



church's existence, all else is subordinate.

The implications of this ecclesiastically and theologically are extensive and important. The ministry of the Word emerges, under this God-centered perspective, as being the God-ordained mode of "gathering and building up His church." The worship of God engaged in by the church, we were told, is not some pleasant by-product of the fellowship of the saints, but is the highest function of that elect body, in that it is Christ's bride adoring her heavenly Spouse, glorifying Him, reflecting back to Him His own image, now being recreated in her by the regenerative powers of the Holy Ghost. And such worship must concord with the Divine protocols, must not be the "will-worship" of human devising, as if any Tom, Dick, or Harry can "feel moved of the spirit" so-say to compose and sing any little ditty or import their own ideas into this Holy sanctuary. Only God's Word is satisfactory for the regulation of God's worship. The bride of Christ must reflect His likeness back to Him, even as Adam saw in Eve "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh."

Thus, then, we immediately found the subject of "the Church" come alive for us, right from Professor Engelsma's first address on the Monday morning. Not a few of those with whom I spoke after this first address testified to the same "lesson-learning" which had been my own experience.

Right from the start, the tone of the Conference was set for us profoundly by Mr. David Blunt of the Free Church of Scotland, speaking at the welcoming service on the Saturday evening. He conducted worship and preached on

Song of Solomon, chapter 6:10: "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" His exposition of this text was effectively and efficiently a repudiation of the modern view, found, not only in

liberal theological circles, but even amongst evangelical

circles as well (indeed, sad to say, I have even met it in modern "Calvinist" circles), that the Song of Solomon speaks only of earthly marriage. The marriage figured in this book is that of the King of Israel, who of course was the Lord's anointed, thereby typifying Christ, and his bride, who must therefore typify the church, the bride of Christ, as all the old-time Puritans and Re-

formers insisted! A heavenly marriage then, and a heavenly, spiritual bride are in view under the aegis of the Old Testament types and shadows here. Mr. Blunt expounded the text ably and succinctly, drawing attention to each facet therein, namely the "looking forth as the morning," and "fair as the moon," the "clear as the sun," and finally, as "terrible as an army with banners." Each facet was unfolded explicating its typical signification as applied to the church. Each point was not only profound, but apposite to the themes of the discourses to be followed by the professors in the ensuing week.

The worship on the Sabbath day of the Conference was, for me, unforgettable. The Psalm singing, *a capella* from the Scottish Psalter, was a tremendous experience. The more I use the Scottish Psalter, the more I love it. Thin and banal are the lyrics of the hymn-writers compared to the genius of the Holy Ghost! What a joy it was to unite

one's voice with over a hundred others in reflecting God's very words back to Him in praise. And what need for organs or pianos when God provides precentors. Once again we appreciated Desmond Callendar's sturdy tones, and also the sedate tones of David Blunt, and the melodic Irish tones of a new precentor, Mr. Allister Pattison from the new church at Ballymena. To these native precentors a new friend, Mr. Harry Klomp of Melbourne, added his melodious Australian voice as precentor for several of our meetings.

The two professors delivered the sermons on the Sabbath. Each exposition was profound and stirring, a foretaste of the delights that were to come in the following days. It is impossible to give here, in this restricted space, a proper appreciation of it all. Mr. John McAuley faithfully taped the whole proceedings, and copies of the tapes are a must for all of us, I should think, and most certainly to be recommended for those not able to attend the Conference.

Monday came, with an air of expectancy. The bookstalls were laid out with an abundance of high quality productions indeed! It was good to see the James Begg Society represented in this respect, and to welcome several of their members amongst us for the Conference. In the ensuing four and a half days during which the bookstalls were open, some £500 worth of books were sold! Sure, there must have been some enthusiastic and avid readers with us!

On Monday Professor Engelsma's theme was "The Church: Elected in Christ." Professor Hanko followed in the evening with "The Church: Gathered by the Gospel."

The Tuesday following these stirring addresses was most appropriately punctuated by an organized Coach tour, guided by Mr. Mark Kateley, around the Sussex countryside stopping off at the

*The worship  
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is not some pleasant  
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the highest function  
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in that it is  
Christ's bride  
adoring her  
heavenly  
Spouse....*



various martyrs memorials that are to be found in that area. Mr. Kateley, a local man, and an expert on the history of the local martyrs of the Reformation period, was able to present an informative commentary on all matters of interest during the proceedings. We noted how some of the monuments had had certain telling inscriptions defaced (now who would have done that, we wonder?).

The Coach tour took in Jireh Chapel at Lewes, which lies at the foot of the hill on which a large memorial to the Sussex martyrs overlooks the town lying in the valley below. This 1,000-seater, 191 year-old Chapel was open to us, and we were able to walk right through these delightful premises, explore the galleries, the vestry, and even stand in the famous chalice-shaped pulpit, from where the stentorian voices of Jenkin Jenkins and William Huntington had thundered forth the Reformed and biblical gospel in days of yore. Now resurrected, as it were, from its former decrepitude, under the good offices of Pastor James North, the Trustees, and English Heritage (it is a listed building) it is good to know that the congregation, though small, is worshiping God therein again after a gap of about ten years, and that the same Cal-

vinistic preaching still resounds within those precincts that characterized it from the first. An unusual timber-frame structured building, it cost £1,754..10s..10d (that's 1,754 pounds and about 54 pence to you younger generation who can't remember the old fashioned money!) to build in 1805! What it has cost to restore, well Jim North can tell you! What it costs in other terms to maintain the preaching of the truth in that locality is something else Jim can tell you about.

Following the Coach tour, in the evening Mr. Kateley delivered an able lecture on the martyrs of Sussex that fitted appositely into the Conference theme of the "Church," and was an indication of how the saints of a by-gone glorious age valued the glorification of God as being more important than anything else in life ... they died in that cause. They refused to compromise on matters of worship, on matters of belief and behaviour, and they sealed their testimonies with their own life's blood, some 36 of them, ordinary folk with names like Carver, Iveson, Read, Wood, Morris, etc., but whose faith was more than ordinary, as they endured the fires of the Marian persecution without faltering.

Wednesday saw Professor Engelsma looking into the "Nature of the Church," to be followed by Professor Hanko in the evening expounding on the "Institutional Form of the Church." We were reminded at this juncture how "institutional form" is a vital facet of Ecclesiology. Too many modern evangelicals and even Calvinists today eschew any formal ecclesiastical institution, with the result that the churches of today are characterized by disorganization, weakness, and lack of vision. Prof. Hanko left us in no uncertainty that the time has come to remedy this deplorable nonsense.

Thursday was another day of feasting on the manna sent from heaven! Prof. Hanko discussed "The Marks of the Church," and rammed home the truth that the church in order to be a true church has to be much more than an Institution, important as institution may be. The effects of his address on this theme were to make several in the audience initiate serious reconsiderations concerning their present position! The Thursday evening address from Prof. Engelsma was one of the most stirring expositions of the Word I have ever heard. Taking as his theme "The Sacraments of the Church," he showed us how the two sacraments are centred around the preaching of the Word, and that without this preaching of the Word the sacraments are essentially useless ... and thus the error of Romish and Anglican ritualistic liturgies was thrown into sharp relief, and the primacy of preaching put in its proper place. The professor went on to emphasize Paedobaptism as a matter of strategic importance in the revival of the Reformed Faith, and urged that the BRF initiate an aggressive polemic against the errors of the baptist-immersionist movement, the theology of which was essentially a denial of the continuity of God's one Covenant of Grace through the family.



*BRF Family Conference 1996*



No conference, I suppose, is ever complete without its "unofficial" meetings! The time after the lectures was spent by many, especially the younger element, in extended private debates centred in small gatherings. Sometimes the debates went on well beyond midnight ... but amazingly the participants were invariably up in time for breakfast at 8:30 a.m., if not for the well-attended morning worship at 8:15 a.m.!

It was good to meet again friends, many not seen since 1994, and to make the acquaintance of newcomers. Your editor can now call to mind real faces that go with many of the address labels he has to stick on the envelopes that carry this journal, people who prior to meeting them at our Conferences were just names. Now fellowship in Christ has brought them to life, as it were, and that, not just for the period of the Conference, but it is something which one can carry home and treasure in one's memory.

The Conference drew to a close on Friday with a day-long coach trip to London, during which Mr. Blunt took a party on a conducted tour of some of London's salient and monumental features, including first the British Museum, with its amazing catena of exhibits from ancient Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Israel (many of which are relevant to the study of the Bible), and then the famous buildings at Westminster.

Friday evening, with everyone sensing that it was all coming to an end for another two years, nevertheless carried some events that will remain impressed on many a memory. Five young catechumens from the newly inaugurated Covenant Protestant Reformed Church at Ballymena were presented with certificates indicating their proficiency in completing all 107 questions of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, answering to those questions with "accuracy, understanding, and Christian conviction."

We praise God that the new Irish congregation bears fruit already within days of its inauguration. Professor Hanko was able to present one of these certificates to his granddaughter Sarah, who had also memorized over 150 verses of the Scripture proof texts which go with the answers! Grandson Herman Hanko (junior) was also recipient of a certificate, as also were a trio from John and Marlene Clarke's family of Larne, namely Andrew, Joanna, and Sarah. We understand that there are more catechumens following in their footsteps, truly we give thanks that the Lord adds to His church such that shall be saved.

I saw some tears shed at the end of Friday evening, as farewells were being said. Many of our friends from America would be up right early on Saturday morning to make their way to the airports. On Friday night they bade us goodbye. This was a re-run of some farewells said earlier in the week to Lamm and MaryBeth Lubbers, and the elders from Hudsonville, who had to leave on Tuesday. It was good of them to come over and support us, and more, much more than that, to make friends with us. As we stand here in these islands today, many of us alone, many of us misrepresented, slandered, vilified, even persecuted, some of us indeed experiencing poverty, it is a comfort to have their friendship in Christ, their understanding, and their prayers. The British Reformed Fellowship has been enriched abundantly by the kindness and help we have received from our friends in the U.S.A. We give thanks to God for His manifold grace to us in all these things.

The Conference was an eminent success again. One conferee told me that it was like a "foretaste of Heaven" to be there. We appreciate therefore all the hard, behind the scenes, work put in by our secretary, Mr. Tony Horne, over the last two years in bringing

this event to such abundant fruition. To those too who assisted in other ways behind the scenes, such as our treasurer, Mr. Desmond Callendar, to all those who contributed in so many ways, to the staff at Ashburnham, we express our thanks and appreciation. To God above all we return our thanks for His prospering of His people, and feeding His flock.

Two years ... to 1998, if it please God, and many of us might meet again, at the fifth BRF Conference. Yes! We are well on the way with the planning stage of the next one. The venue has been decided in the committee stage ... it is Castle Wallan at the foot of the mountains of Mourne in Northern Ireland! With 1,200 acres of parkland and woods, a beautiful lake, pony-trekking, canoeing, all at hand! And the sea not far away down the road! The theme? "Eschatology! The doctrine of the Last Things!" Dynamite! Start saving now, you just cannot miss this one! May God be pleased to be with us, and prosper His church. May He lead us and restore His church as an institution amongst us, and prepare us for His Coming! His Name be exalted above all! His glorious person in Christ be magnified above all! □





## **A Parable to Warn the Young Man About the Power of the Enticement of the Sin of Immorality (2)**

**I**t would be good if the reader of this article would open his Bible to Proverbs 7 and read it again. The harlot portrayed in Proverbs 7 could not possibly more accurately picture the impudent immoral women that are so common in our modern day world. These women are glamorized by the world. They are the heroines of our modern day hedonistic society. They have made an "art" out of the business of enticing men into sin. Their dress, their whole demeanor, is geared for this. They are the women featured in popular pornographic magazines and seen on highway billboards. They are the movie stars of the cinema, produced to entertain sinful men of the world.

Their ever more daring display of immorality is calculated to captivate the attention of men and arouse their sinful passions in more and more powerful ways. Images of these women are constantly being flashed across the television screen to seduce the unwary viewer. They display their bodies in outrageous swim wear on American beaches to be gawked at by lustful men, many of whom have their wives and families with them. Men's clubs where these women perform are called "gentlemen's clubs." Images of these women in suggestive poses

are used to advertise almost every product under the sun. The women who practice this evil profession are some of the highest paid "professionals" in our day. They are also among the common people. They are everywhere in our society. To our godless society these are respectable and popular women. How shockingly prevalent all of this is in our modern day society.

But these women are the total opposites of the holy beauty and modesty which the Lord requires of godly women. God has given the beautiful sexual aspect of the nature of both men and women to be used in the holy bond of marriage for the expression of exclusive, intimate love and faithfulness of husband and wife for one another. The wife is to devote herself completely to pleasing her husband and living faithfully with him. The harlot described in Proverbs 7 does the very opposite. She violates her marriage vows. She corrupts the God-given gift of her feminine nature for lust and enticement, for selfish glory and aggrandizement. She is after every attractive man she may meet in society, even though she is already married. She uses her womanly nature to bring about destruction of those who fall prey to her temptation.

We have considered already much of the vivid description of Proverbs 7 which tells us how these women laden with lust entice young, foolish men. We are

warned by all of this description to avoid the adulterous woman at all cost. When the foolish young man in the parable follows the dangerous path warned against in Proverbs 7, he will come to a situation in which the temptation to gross sin will become so powerful and overwhelming that no one would be able to resist. The fault lies with the foolish young man who went to the place of temptation in the world. He allowed himself to be overcome by the powerful sin of lust that resides in every man's nature.

The harlot has described the pleasure of sin in an irresistibly graphic way. She has invited the young man to her marriage bed in her own home. There seems to be a bit of hesitation yet on the part of the young man in the parable. The evil woman of the parable works to allay any fears that the young man she is trying to entice might still have.

"For the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey. He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed" (Prov. 7:19, 20). The one last thing that might still deter some from falling into gross sin is the fear of being "caught in the act." Should the woman's husband come home unexpectedly, his fury may be dangerous and have disastrous consequences. Even the world will sometimes be deterred by the fear and shame of being found out. So the adulteress must by all means allay this fear. She

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



must give the young man the assurance that "it is safe" to commit sin with her.

For the Christian, however, this is the lowest form of deterrent. The fear of God in our heart must be the mighty deterrent that keeps us from great sin. Our greatest concern must be that God sees and knows all that we do. The holy God of heaven hates the sin of fornication and adultery. If we love this God, we will strive against every temptation to this sin.

One final powerful form of enticement by the adulterous woman will persuade the foolish young man to engage in sin with her. "With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him" (Prov. 7:21). The most powerful of all appeals to this sin is the appeal to man's pride. The world and the devil know this very well. Tell the young man that he is strong and handsome, tell him that he is so manly, tell him that he is so very desirable. Women find him attractive. Sexual prowess and adventurism are considered by the world to be the marks of the real man. The appeal to this proud, sinful passion will be the final temptation that the foolish young man will not be able to resist. There can be no more vivid spiritual and psychological description of the power of this sin than the description of this parable. It is true to life in our world today.

What the world, however, always tries to hide is the inevitable consequences of this sin for the life of man. Our society has reaped the bitter consequences of it already in this life. Much of the wretchedness of betrayal in marriage and broken homes and abandoned children comes from this sin. This sin brings in its wake psychological misery and hurt that is incalculable for men and women who are married and violate the trust that marriage requires. Children of marriages caught in the

caldron of wickedness created by this great evil in our society are scarred for life and often in later life perpetuate the sins of their fathers and mothers and reap ever increasing misery and wretchedness. The spiritual and psychological hurt this evil causes has led some even to suicide. But Proverbs 7 tells us of even worse consequences.

"He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare and knoweth not that it is for his life" (Prov. 7:22 and 23). The Bible does not call the young man who follows after this sin a "playboy." Adultery is not the proof of manhood but the proof of one's great foolishness and shameful weakness. Proverbs 7 does not glamorize the prowess of the foolish young man. It does not glory over his ability to conquer many women and "score" with one after the other. It says concerning this young man that he is as an ox going to the slaughter. That is what he truly is in spite of all the world's esteem of him. The ox is one of the most stupid of all animals. Sometimes the ox is stubborn and will not move. But when he is prodded he will suddenly run headlong to his own destruction. A fitting symbol it is, in this passage of Scripture.

The consequences of this sin will follow not merely for those who get caught at it. It is undoubtedly true that there are many who do not get caught. Some seem to be able to escape the consequences of this sin in this life even though they live openly and brazenly in it. For others the consequence of their evil life is obvious. As much as the world vehemently denies the association between a life of immorality and AIDS, the connection is obvious. Proverbs 7 does not speak merely about the natural consequences that will follow for some from engaging in this

great evil, while others will be able to avoid them. Proverbs 7 speaks of the fearful judgment of God. God's Word gives this final warning: "Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell going down to the chambers of death." There is no doubt about this consequence because it comes as the sure judgment of God. None will be able finally to escape it. God's judgment on this sin is death and hell.

There can be no stronger warning uttered than this. It is not a warning given only to the world in general. This is a warning addressed particularly to covenant youth. In the world in which we live, covenant young men are in great danger of being enticed by the adulterous woman. This warning is charged with the love of a father for his children: "O ye children!" This loving warning must be earnestly and repeatedly sounded by parents to their young people and by the church to the covenant youth growing up in her midst.

There is forgiveness for this vile sin at the cross of Jesus Christ. Those who have fallen into it are urged to flee to the cross in sorrow and shame and repentance to find the mercy of God and His forgiveness. This is the only way of escape from the sure and dreadful and final consequences of this sin. Let none hesitate for even one moment. Let none continue in this vile sin that is so abominable to the Lord. Let the sinner flee to the cross of Christ Jesus for deliverance from the awful judgment of this sin. The mercy of God is greater even than this terrible sin. The blood of Christ can and does wash away this sin also. The penitent adulterer finds forgiveness and mercy with God — but only



the penitent one, not those who continue in this sin.

There is deliverance through the power of the grace and Holy Spirit of God from the great evil of the enticement of this sin and from the deep falls that result from it. Those who have gone in the way of this sin and become a slave and captive to it must realize that there is no other power than the power of God's grace that can deliver us from this sin that has destroyed so "many strong men." Without the grace of God the young men will only be led deeper and deeper into a sin that will end in death. The truly strong man who is pleasing to God and brings glory to His name is the one who steadfastly resists the many temptations to this sin. The wise, godly young man does not flirt with temptation in the imagination that he is strong enough to avoid a fall into sin. The truly strong young man, spiritually strong by the grace of God,

steadfastly avoids every temptation to this sin in his life. The Word of God extols such a man. Great strength is needed. God alone can and does give it.

God's Word sets before covenant youth and all of us the wisdom of God. The law of God teaches us the perfect wisdom of God. The law of God has been given to us to guard us and to keep us from every evil way, also the evil way of this sin. The commandments of the Lord are good. Keeping the law of God and resisting the temptations of sin with God's grace and Spirit in our hearts is the greatest wisdom and will bring the great reward of God's favor and blessing on our life. There is great wisdom in avoiding even the beginning of the temptation to this sin in our life. We must do this for the salvation of our souls. This means that we must shun and flee from the many enticements of our modern media,

and the world of entertainment. We must not allow the spirit of the age in which we live to desensitize us to the seriousness of this sin. We must know our own sinful nature and the power of the temptation of the world to appeal to this sinful nature and the great danger for all of us that we might fall into this sin.

How greatly God has blessed us with His Word in the church and by giving us His holy law. How blessed are those who have the grace and Spirit of God in their hearts to follow this law and keep its perfect wisdom. The book of Proverbs calls the Christian young man to rejoice in the wife of his youth, living in sexual love exclusively with her. Those who are not married are to keep themselves pure and holy because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Doing this by God's grace will bring lasting joy and happiness that the world does not know. □

## Contribution

Mr. Phillip Climer

# Archaeology and the Bible

**T**he December 18, 1995 issue of *Time* magazine had as its cover story, "IS THE BIBLE FACT OR FICTION? Archaeologists in the Holy Land are shedding new light on what did—and didn't occur in the greatest stories ever told." The article describes recent archaeological finds in Israel and surrounding areas, and then categorizes public and scholarly reaction to these finds in three main groupings: "Jewish and Christian Ultraconservatives," who do not believe any part of the Bible is fiction; "Atheists," who want to debunk the whole Bible; and "the

moderate majority," who want to be sure that the Bible is scientifically "grounded in truth."

As Reformed believers we fall into what *Time* calls the "Ultraconservative" group. We believe that the Bible is infallible not only in spiritual matters, but also in accounts with historical and geographical content. So when archaeologists excavate biblical lands and, based on their findings, reach conclusions that differ with the historical account of Scripture, how should a Reformed believer respond?

It is correct to say that we accept the Word of God by faith, whatever the claims of archaeology or any other branch of science. However, making that statement without any further explanation

sounds as if we are pitting blind faith against scientific reason. I intend to demonstrate in this article that while the science of archaeology may be reasonable, it is not truthful; and a faith that provides truth is much to be preferred over a reason that does not.

Of the other two groups mentioned in the magazine article, we can easily understand the "Atheists." We accept the Bible as true, they reject it. As *Time* points out, even when archaeology supports a biblical narrative, the atheists are likely to reject both Scripture and science. Their position is one of faith, as much as is ours. It is just that the object of their faith is their own vanity.

But what is one to make of the third category, the "moderate ma-

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majority." Many Evangelicals fall into this category, for they are delighted whenever an archaeological find supports a part of Scripture, or, as *Time* says, "strengthens the Bible's claim to historical accuracy." But if a supportive archaeologist enhances Scripture's claim to accuracy, does a scientific detractor weaken the Bible's claim to truth? And if Christians only accept those archaeological findings that they agree with, can they not be justly accused of being positively childish in their refusal to face up to disagreeable facts?

The whole unfortunate enterprise of trying to verify the claims of Scripture with the findings of archaeology rests on a real misunderstanding of how the science of archaeology and the Christian faith view the concept of truth. To focus on this misunderstanding let us confront the claims of archaeology with the simple question, "How do you know?" The answer to this one little question reveals the principles upon which are based all claims to knowledge and truth by any science, philosophy, or religion.

To begin with, we must know what the science of archaeology is, and the type of claims it makes. Secondly, we must compare and contrast archaeological truth and biblical truth. Finally, against this background, let us review again the conflict that *Time* calls "fact vs. faith."

### Archaeological Truth

Archaeology is "the scientific study of extinct peoples through skeletal remains, fossils, and objects of human workmanship (as implements, artifacts, monuments, or inscriptions) found in the earth" (*Webster's 3rd International Dictionary of the English Language*, 1981). Archaeologists excavate and sift through the remains of ancient civilizations and then try to piece together their findings into a coherent picture of how the people of that society lived, and

how its institutions functioned.

Perhaps the most important artifact that any civilization leaves behind is its body of literature. Many societies in the ancient Middle East left their writings in stone (the hieroglyphs of Egypt), or on soft clay tablets that hardened into stone over time (the Babylonians and Assyrians). The ancient Hebrews apparently used paper, or possibly animal skins. Since these materials decompose, documents written on them had to be recopied time and again. Archaeologists generally accept hieroglyphs and clay tablets as being more accurate than paper manuscripts, since the former are more likely to be the original writings. There is obviously much less room for error or editing in a document carved on stone than on a manuscript copy several times removed from the original. The *Time* article gives several examples of archaeologists rejecting biblical manuscripts in favor of their own theories based on other artifacts.

The book of Joshua, chapter 6, records the destruction of the walls of Jericho, allowing the Israelites under the leadership of Joshua to conquer the city. *Time* tells us that after extensive excavations at the site of ancient Jericho, archaeologists have determined that the location was abandoned between about 1500-1100 BC. According to them no walled cities existed during this time in this area of Canaan. Conservative biblical scholars and archaeologists disagree on the date of the Israelite entrance into Canaan, but they both agree that it falls well within the time-range mentioned above. Given this chronology, modern archaeology concludes that the Hebrews moved onto vacant or sparsely populated land. This thinking allows no walls to come tumbling down, and no city to be conquered. The skeptics also doubt that Joshua even existed. Without a battle, who needs a general?

Now let us ask the test question: How do they know that Jericho and its walls did not exist during this time period?

Just as our society paves over old streets and erects new buildings over the remains of old foundations, so ancient civilizations built towns and cities over the debris of earlier structures. When archaeologists excavate a site, they divide it into different levels, each level or layer corresponding to a defined era of human habitation or abandonment. The methods by which a date for a particular level is determined are quite involved, and a detailed explanation of them is beyond the scope of this article.

To gain some idea of what is involved, consider a future archaeologist excavating our civilization. He digs down through layer after layer of debris, and among this debris he finds fragments of both ceramic and plastic plates and other kitchenware. But at a certain level the plastic disappears, and below that he finds only shards of ceramic plates and pots. Suppose that at this transition level he also finds some sort of preserved calendar dated "1950." He now has his dating "key": the calendar and the plastic dishes. This key tells him that at this initial site plastic dishes were not in use before 1950. If he encounters plastic dishes at any other site, in the absence of any conflicting finds, he can assume that the level he finds them in was inhabited in 1950 or later.

At Jericho, the scientists found some sort of artifacts (probably pottery) at a certain level that allowed them to date that level at 1500-1100 BC, based upon their "key" with similar artifacts at other excavations. This particular level did not contain the foundations or remains of any city walls, buildings, or other structures that would indicate a city. How to explain this discrepancy with the biblical account? The earliest extant manuscript of the book of Joshua dates from a period hundreds of



years after the events described in the book. Skeptics theorize that such a manuscript, in being recopied from a decaying original, could have been altered by a careless or zealous scribe, seeking to glorify his God and the history of his nation by inventing a battle that never occurred and a leader who never existed.

The archaeologists who excavated Jericho published their theory. These findings were debated and ultimately accepted by most of the archaeological community. Unless and until some new evidence comes along, the modern science of archaeology has determined that the Israelite conquest of Canaan as described in the book of Joshua is not factual. Specifically, Joshua did not fight the battle of Jericho. This is an archaeological truth, or, more accurately, a testing by archaeological research methods of a biblical story, and the biblical passage in question fails the test.

Conservative biblical scholars disagree, but their objections are tainted because they are trying to prove the Bible, instead of looking at it objectively, or so the scientists say. Now if religion is the problem, it seems to me that we could easily demonstrate the objectivity of archaeology in the reconstruction of ancient civilizations by examining a site that has no religious significance for today, but one that has been widely excavated, by numerous scientists. In such a case, there would be no believers to muddy the waters for the clear thinking scientists. There are many such sites; the most famous is Troy.

A number of works of ancient Greek literature are based on an oral tradition, passed down by generations of bards, of a great war between the city-states of Greece and the rich and powerful city of Troy, located in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). The most famous of these works is *The Illiad*, a poem composed in ap-

proximately 800 BC, some 400 years after the events, by a blind Greek named Homer. This epic work does not give an account of the entire war, but it does give a great deal of information about the Greek expedition, the layout of Troy, and the leaders and warriors on both sides of the conflict. In other words, *The Illiad* lists many specifics that archaeologists should be able to check.

Perhaps the reader recalls the general outline of the Trojan War: Helen, queen of Sparta, was carried off to Troy by Paris, a prince of the Trojan royal family. Outraged, a number of Greek cities combined forces, sailed to Troy, and besieged the city for ten long years. They were not able to breach the massive walls of Troy, so finally they resorted to subterfuge. By means of a giant hollow wooden idol, the famed Trojan horse, the Greeks infiltrated Troy. The gates were thrown open, and the city was lost. Those Trojans not killed were enslaved, and Troy itself was burned and demolished. The victorious Greeks sailed home with the beautiful Helen, the cause of it all, "the face that launched a thousand ships."

Since Roman times, scholars have debated the veracity of *The Illiad* and other works on the Trojan War. Do they describe a real war, or a myth? If there was such a war, how accurate is Homer's telling of it? In the 1850s, modern archeology took up the debate. For the last 140 years, team after team of scientists has excavated a now deserted site on the coast of Turkey. Their very impressive and voluminous findings were reviewed in a recent documentary series on public television, *In Search of the Trojan War*. It is now believed that the site suspected to contain the ruins of Troy was continuously occupied by humans for over 5000 years. It contains 50 separate levels. Nine of these levels show the characteristics of true cities, i.e., walls, palaces, etc. Nine

of the levels also show signs of violent destruction, either by warfare or natural disaster, such as earthquakes.

What of Homer's Troy? Which level, if any, matches the magnificent city of *The Illiad*? Did the Trojan War really happen? Almost a century and a half of modern scientific investigation, without any religious interference or bias, has yielded a new answer for each new investigator. The archaeological truth about Troy changes with each generation of archaeologists. The original excavator "proved" that *The Illiad* was as accurate as Christians believe the Bible to be. A later archaeological team threw out most of his conclusions and "proved" that Homer exaggerated greatly, if he told the truth at all. A subsequent generation of diggers "proved" that an earthquake largely destroyed Troy, and that pirates finished the job. And so on.... The only points that all the experts agree on are that the site was inhabited for thousands of years, and it is now abandoned.

But what of the sophisticated techniques for dating artifacts and levels of occupation? Each individual artifact was precisely catalogued by the team that found it. Each highly trained archaeologist looked at those catalogued findings, maybe did some excavations of his own, and then came up with a different interpretation to explain how all those relics got there.

The narrator of the documentary series takes us through these diverse theories in six hours of analysis. At the end, he makes this startling observation on the archaeological search for the truth about the Trojan war: "*There can never be a final word, only a new interpretation by each generation in terms of its own dreams and needs*" (emphasis added). This is the proof, the knowledge, and the truth that modern archaeology gives us: "... never a final word, only a new interpretation...." □

... to be continued.



## ■ United Reformed Churches in North America

On October 1 and 2, 1996, at Lynwood Christian Reformed Church (Independent) in Lynwood, Illinois, another denomination was formed. Representatives from 36 churches, formerly associated with the Christian Reformed Church, dealt with matters pertaining to the establishment of a new denomination. Rev. E. Knott (formerly of the Protestant Reformed Churches) was chosen as president of the meeting, Rev. Ralph Pontier as vice-president, and Rev. Jerome Julien as clerk.

One of the first items on the order of business was the choice of name. Among four possibilities, the name of "United Reformed Churches in North America" (URCNA) was chosen.

Most of the business dealt with church polity, especially the adoption of a Church Order. That Church Order follows the pattern of the Church Order of Dordt, with changes deemed necessary for their present situation. A motion was defeated to refer their adopted Church Order to the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches, the Protestant Reformed Churches, and the Reformed Church in the United States for evaluation and recommendations.

The churches were divided into three Classes: East, Midwest, and West. A church in each grouping was appointed as calling church for the first classical meeting. The body also decided that their Article 32 be suspended "for one year and refer it to the next synodical meeting so that like-minded churches and their ministers may be received during that year as charter members of the federation without sponsorship and additional examination."

The body also decided to send "a communication to the November meeting of the C.R.C. Inter-classical conference. This communication shall include a brief history of who we are and express:

"1. that we share in their sorrow and grief over the spiritual decline of the Christian Reformed denomination;

"2. that if they are to secede from that denomination, we encourage them to look to us and join us;

"3. that whether this occurs or not, we will pray for God's blessing upon them as they contend for the faith."

The body also decided to adopt as their own the liturgical forms and Form of Subscription as included in the *Psalter Hymnal*, Centennial Edition (1976) for use in their churches.

The next synodical gathering was scheduled for October, 1997 at the Trinity Orthodox Reformed church, St. Catharines, ON Canada.

One cannot help but notice in their adopted name the emphasis upon "churches" (plural) in distinction from the official name of the Christian Reformed Church (singular). Obviously the URCNA has come to recognize what the Protestant Reformed Churches (plural) pointed out early on after 1924: the *denomination* is not the "church," but it is the union of like-minded "churches." The singular used in the name of the CRC lends itself to the developing hierarchy seen within its own midst and because of which the URCNA ultimately had to leave.

While one cannot help but wish this newly established denomination well, and pray that God may use them also mightily in the spread of the gospel, purely proclaimed, still one can do so also with a large measure of concern for the difficult path that this newly organized denomination must walk. They are to be commended, of course, for following the Reformed practice of federation rather than holding to the Congregational approach of independentism. Surely, however, they must be deeply conscious of the difficulties which lie before them.

First, it is obvious that this new denomination does not agree at some point(s) with existing denominations, such as the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (which also came out of the CRC), or the Canadian Reformed Churches, or the Protestant Reformed Churches, or the Reformed Church US, or others. Otherwise, surely, they would be obliged to be-

come part of one of these — rather than begin another Reformed body of believers.

Secondly, one cannot help but wonder which of the decisions of the CRC, adopted before they left that denomination, will now be regarded as theirs. Are they going to debate anew all of the questions which were resolved by the CRC synods of the past? Are they going to agree among themselves to regard as their own those decisions taken before a specific date? Obviously, they are not going to adopt as their own the CRC decisions on women in church office. But are they going to adopt as their own the decisions of the CRC on the movie and dance (which had completely reversed earlier stands against "worldly amusements")? Are they going to maintain strictly the stand of the CRC on union membership or follow the current practice of ignoring that? Which song book of praise will they adopt? Will they go back to the time when the CRC used exclusive Psalmody? Then we ourselves have the question: will they refuse the decisions taken in 1924 on the "Three Points of Common Grace"? Will they declare this to be an optional matter for their members? Or will they continue to maintain those points? Will they declare them to be an *interpretation* of the creeds as the CRC did in 1924? That they have come to recognize that a denomination consists of "churches" and is not itself the "church" is an encouraging development. So, the question remains: what will this denomination consider as part of its own heritage from the CRC, and what will it reject?

Obviously, they will be walking through a "mine-field." The potential for disaster is there. What will be considered as essential for unity — and what optional? We will be watching and listening.

## ■ Meanwhile....

Darrell Todd Maurina, in the United Reformed News Service, reports that a number of non-federated (former) Christian Reformed churches decided to hold the meetings of the Alliance of Reformed Churches as planned, on November 12 and 13, 1996. This group of churches appears

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to fear federation, lest once again there develop a hierarchical structure from which they were forced to escape by leaving the Christian Reformed denomination.

### ■ The Pope Speaks out on Evolution

A number of readers have called attention to many press reports of the declaration of the Pope stating that evolution is now to be considered as irrefutable. I quote from the *Denver Post* (though all major papers in the US and the world contained the same information):

Pope John Paul II issued a statement this week saying new research shows that physical evolution is "more than just a theory," a significant step beyond the Catholic Church's pronouncement nearly 50 years ago that evolution was worthy of discussion but still an open question.

The pope nevertheless said the human soul is divinely created anew in each person, and not subject to the evolutionary process. Any other teaching, he said, is "incompatible with the truth about man."

His statement is not likely to shake many in his own church, which has long assumed the credibility of evolution and taught it in Catholic schools. But it may rattle some non-Catholic Biblical fundamentalists who believe in

creationism and have respected this pope for his traditionalist reputation and his emphatic teaching against abortion.

...In his message, which was written in French, John Paul refers to Pope Pius XII's 1950 Encyclical "Humani Generis." That encyclical considered evolution a "serious hypothesis," John Paul wrote, "worthy of a more deeply studied investigation and reflection on a par with the opposite hypothesis."

"Today, more than a half century after this encyclical, new knowledge leads us to recognize in the theory of evolution more than a hypothesis," Pope John Paul II wrote. "The convergence, neither sought nor induced, of results of work done independently one from the other, constitutes in itself a significant argument in favor of this theory."

David Beyers, executive director of the committee on science and human values for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, said of the pope's message, "There is an advance there. The church went from saying you could either accept evolution or some form of creationism, to saying that now we'll accept evolution, which is the de facto situation anyway. Who questions evolution now in the Catholic church? I can't really think of anybody."

So the number of those who maintain the literal creation account of Genesis 1 becomes ever smaller. What the pope declares can now be used by many outside of the churches as proof that the church no longer is so foolish as to believe the teachings of creationism.

The mighty attacks of Satan against the very "foundations" appear to be meeting with great success. He began his attack in Paradise as he approached Eve with the question, "Yea, hath God said...?" It's been the heart of his battle-plan against the Almighty and His church ever since. If he can destroy confidence in God's Word, he has won the battle. If Genesis 1-3 is not a literal, reliable account, if these chapters are mythical or some sort of literary device upon which the teaching of evolution can hang, then all of Scripture can be considered suspect. Ultimately one must reach the point of the "modernist" in the churches who denies the truth of "blood atonement."

By grace we must continue to maintain steadfastly the truth of Hebrews 11:3, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." It is a matter of *faith*. And all of the declarations of the pope cannot change the scriptural assertion that the things seen were *not made of things which do appear*.

□

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

# "The Son of God and Sons of the Devil" (1)

John 8:37-59

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

Jesus establishes two things in this passage. The first is: He is the eternal and natural Son of God come in the flesh. The second is: the unbelieving Jews are sons of the devil.

In our study today we consider the first truth established: the sonship of Jesus.

Many things could be said of the Sonship of God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Dutch theo-



logian Herman Bavinck says this:

He (Jesus) is the Son of God ... by nature and from eternity. He is exalted high above angels and prophets, Matt. 13:32; 21:27; 22:2; and sustains a very special relation to God, Matt. 11:27. He is the beloved Son in whom the Father is well-pleased, Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22;

9:35; the only begotten Son, John 1:18; 3:16; I John 4:9ff.; God's *own* Son, Rom. 8:32; the eternal Son, John 17:5, 24; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; to whom the Father gave "to have life in himself," John 5:26; equal to the Father in knowledge, Matt. 11:27; in honor, John 5:23; in creative and redemptive power, John 1:3; 5:21, 27; in work, John 10:30; in dominion, Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; 22:29; John 16:15; 17:10; and

because of this Sonship he was condemned to death, John 10:33; Matt. 26:63ff. (*The Doctrine of God*, Wm. Hendriksen, trans., p. 270).

Of course we do not propose to dwell on *all* the riches of this subject of the Sonship of Jesus. But let us now consider just a few things the Savior says of His Sonship in this passage.

### For Study, Meditation, and Discussion

#### Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God

☛ John 8:37-59 is remarkable for its teaching of the unique, divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus. Jesus teaches that as the Son of God He has seen things with His Father (v. 38), and *heard* things from His Father (v. 40). As Son, Jesus *knows* the Father (v. 55). And as Son He has *proceeded from* the Father, being *sent* from the Father (v. 42). What does all this tell us of the relationship of the Son and the Father in the Trinity? Is the procession of Jesus from the Father the same as His being *begotten* of the Father? Just *when* did the Son proceed from the Father: in eternity? In time? Both? (Cf. passages such as Ps. 2:7; Micah 5:2; Heb. 1:5; 5:5.) Discuss this question: Was the Son in His humiliation on earth able to "see" and speak of all He had seen before when He enjoyed the glory with the Father (John 17:5)?

☛ As the Son of God, Jesus is *sinless*. The Jews knew that if they could pin sin on Jesus they would lessen His credibility and hinder His ministry. So they did things like suggest that Jesus was born of fornication (v. 41, which is a possible interpretation of the Jews' claiming that *they* were not born of fornication); label Jesus "Samaritan" (v. 48); and claim that Jesus had a devil (vv. 48, 52). But Jesus, when He asks the question: "Which of you convinceth (that is:

"convicts") me of sin?" is implying that it is impossible to "pin sin" on Him. And this, because He is sinless! Prove from Scripture the sinlessness of Christ. Why is the manner of Jesus' birth (through the conception of the Holy Spirit in a virgin) important for establishing the sinlessness of Christ?

☛ The Lord Jesus is the *perfectly obedient* Son. He has come only because Father sent Him (v. 42). He speaks and does just what Father wills Him to speak and do (vv. 38, 47). [Note: in verse 47 Jesus claims that His words are God's words (cf. vv. 43, 45)!] He seeks not His own glory but that of the Father (vv. 49, 50). And the Father honors the Son for the Son's obedience (vv. 50, 54). Cite other passages (for example, John 5:19ff.) where Jesus teaches this harmony between Himself and His mission and the Father's; and where the Father honors (glorifies) the Son for the Son's obedience (for example: John 11:4; 12:16; 13:31; 17:1, 2, 5). How can it be that though Jesus is the Son, and the perfect Son, yet He *learned* obedience by the things which He suffered (Heb. 5:8)?

☛ God's Son is ordained to be *Messiah, the Christ, the Mediator of the covenant of redemption*. As such He is the promised *seed* who would crush the head of the devil (Gen.

3:15). He is the man-child brought forth of the woman in order to rule all nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 12:5). He is revealed to Abraham as the seed who would come forth from his loins and as the One in and through whom all nations would be blessed (Gen. 17:7; cf. Gal. 3:16, 17; II Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 89:3, 4).

Most commentators would agree that it is with reference to the Christ being the promised seed of Abraham that Jesus speaks in John 8:56 when He says: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad...." The question is: just what was "the day," which Jesus says is *His* day that Abraham saw, and when did he see it, and how? Some think that when Jesus speaks of "my day" He is referring to when Abraham was offering up Isaac on Mt. Moriah. "Jesus' day," according to this view, was when the lamb was given in the place of Isaac (Gen. 22) — a type of Messiah being offered in our stead. Others think that "Jesus' day" is reference to the *birth* of Isaac. When Isaac was given to Abraham in his old age Abraham rejoiced, such is the view, for Abraham was then assured that God would fulfill His promises and that from his own loins the Messiah would come. Discuss this concept of "Jesus' day." Just how did Abraham rejoice in it, and even see it thousands of years before Christ



was even born (cf. passages such as Rom. 4; Heb. 11:1-19)?

☛ In John 8:58 Jesus declares to the Jews: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." Astounding statement! Jesus by it claims equality with God! What words in the text prove this? Compare this with other Scriptures where God says the same things

of Himself. How does the reaction of the Jews (v. 59) show that *they* believed that Jesus was claiming to be divine? How does this text (John 8:58) ground the Heidelberg Catechism's instruction on the Sonship of Jesus (L.D. 13)?

☛ The Jews were focusing on Abraham. They thought that being his (natural) sons was every-

thing. But Jesus proves them wrong. He points to His unique, divine Sonship. He teaches His superiority to Abraham. Jesus: seed of Abraham! Jesus: *God of Abraham!* *Our God*, and Savior for ever! Let us continue to search the Scriptures to confirm our faith in Him whose day is and shall be forever our light, forever our life, forever our rejoicing! ☐

## News From Our Churches

## Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Minister Activities

Rev. B. Gritters, pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, declined the call he had received from the South Holland, IL PRC.

Rev. Dale Kuiper, pastor of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, declined the call he had received to serve as pastor of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI.

Rev. R. VanOverloop, pastor of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, received the call to serve as our churches' missionary to Ghana.

### Denominational Activities

Rev. R. VanOverloop and Prof. H. Hanko, two members of our denomination's Committee for Contact with Other Churches, planned to spend, the Lord willing, two weeks in mid-January in Australia, meeting with representatives of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), exploring the possibilities of our forming sister church relations with them. This was done to fulfill a mandate of our churches' Synod of 1995. If interested, you can read more about this conference on page 77 of our 1996 Acts of Synod.

The seminary internships have now concluded and the three students (Daniel Kleyn, Jim Laning, and Martin VanderWal) have re-

turned to the seminary. May the Lord continue to be with them as they conclude the last year of study at our seminary, and may He also provide for them in His time a place of labor in the midst of our churches.

Speaking of our seminary, an interim course entitled "Pastoral Counseling" was taught for a week and a half in January by Prof. R. Decker.

### Evangelism Activities

The congregation of our Grandville, MI PRC began airing their church services on WCET-TV, a public access station, on January 4. These services will be broadcast every Saturday and Sunday from 12:00-1:00 P.M. on channel 10 for Grandville and Georgetown Township and channel 5 for Hudsonville and Blendon Township.

Fourteen members of the Georgetown PRC left on January 1 for a week among the people of the Protestant Reformed churches in Jamaica. Few would consider it a challenge to leave cold Michigan to spend a week in Jamaica in January, but, looking over this group's itinerary for that week, one sees that a large portion of their trip was devoted to serving the Jamaicans. The group planned to assist pastors in special meetings by sharing their Reformed perspectives through workshops, discussions, song services, and neighborhood surveys to promote

the evening meetings. In addition to that work, other efforts went towards work on a house built during a past project/trip to Jamaica. This work will include painting, the construction of a shower, and the digging of a cistern.

The group from Georgetown was also busy with the distribution of donated clothing, shoes, vitamins, and hygiene items such as soap, shampoo, and toothbrushes. Through these efforts they hoped to share the message of the gospel with people in much different circumstances and who have a much different background, and in the process also be challenged to examine their own beliefs and their relation to the world around us.

### School Activities

The Emmanuel PR School Society Library Committee, made up of members of the First PRC in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada was happy to announce that their library was finally ready to open for members of their congregation. They had concentrated on purchasing good Christian reading, books that could not easily be found in the public library system in Edmonton. These efforts were made in the hope that some day the Lord will pave the way for our own PR grade school to open there, and these books will serve as a good basis for the library there.

First's congregation was also asked to donate Christian books,

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



if possible, now or in the future. And I would expand that request to the readers of the *Standard Bearer*. Books must be screened by the committee before being added to the library. If interested, contact Dawn DeVries at 10712 159th St., Edmonton, AB T5P 3B4 or call (403) 489-6470.

### **Congregational Activities**

Writing about good Christian

books reminds me that the Reformed Book Outlet, a Christian bookstore run with the help of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, with help coming from the membership of other PR congregations in West Michigan as well, will be closed for the first three or four months of this year due to remodeling activities in the mall where it is located in Hudsonville. You may continue to call (616) 669-6730 or

E-Mail your orders and the staff will do its best to expedite them.

### *Food for Thought*

"I am not going to dispute with the Apostle, and yet if he were here, I should be a little dubious as to his right to the title of "chief of sinners." I would ask him whether, if he were the chief, I was not the next."

— Spurgeon □

## *ANNOUNCEMENTS*

### **NOTICE!!**

Attention Teachers! Hope Christian School of Redlands, CA, is in need of an administrator/teacher or teacher for the 1997-1998 school year. Grade assignments are negotiable. For more information, interested persons should contact the school principal, Mr. Ed Karsemeyer, at the school at (909) 793-4584, or Doug Pastoor at (909) 792-9392, or Glenn Feenstra at (909) 794-5859.

### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to Mrs. Robert Harbach and family in the death of

### **REV. ROBERT C. HARBACH.**

We mourn, with the entire denomination, the loss of this faithful warrior for the truth, who labored diligently as pastor, missionary, and author.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Timothy 4:7, 8).

Rev. Audred Spriensma, Pres.  
Cornelius R. Jonker, Clerk

### **MARRIAGE SEMINAR**

The Edgerton PRC in Edgerton, MN is sponsoring a Reformed Seminar on marriage to be held in Sioux Falls, SD on February 27-March 1. The seminar will make use of speeches, workshops, and forums to help couples understand and practice God's guidelines for marriage. The seminar will be beneficial for young and old. The Lord willing, we will enjoy rich Christian fellowship and encourage one another to greater obedience to our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

**Theme:** "All Walk in Love, as Christ also hath loved us." Ephesians 5:2a.

#### **Speakers:**

Pastor Steven Key:

"Loving One Another for God's Sake."

Pastor Allen Brummel:

"Communication in a Godly Marriage."

Pastor Carl Haak:

"The Blessings of a Godly Marriage."

**Venue:** Howard Johnson Hotel & Convention Center in Sioux Falls, SD.

#### **Time and Date:**

**Registration:** 3-5 P.M., Thurs., February 27.

**Check Out:** 2 P.M., Saturday, March 1

**Registration:** \$70 to cover the meals and other costs of the conference.

**Hotel costs:** \$60 per night per couple.

**Registration deadline:** February 14, 1997.

For more information concerning the program and registration, please contact Pastor Allen Brummel at (507) 442-4441, Fax: (507) 442-3622, E-mail: 103320.2636@compuserve.com.

### **TEACHER NEEDED!**

Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School is accepting applications for a junior high teaching position for the 1997-1998 school year. Those interested should contact Ron Koole at (616) 453-9717 (school) or (616) 735-1816 (home) or send an application to the school, 1545 Wilson Avenue SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49544.

### **NOTICE!!!**

With thankfulness to God, the faculty of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary inform the churches that they have licensed seminarians Nathan Brummel and Garry Eriks to speak a word of edification in the meetings for public worship. The scheduling of their speaking in the worship services of the congregations will be done by the rector of the seminary.

For the faculty,  
Prof. David J. Engelsma,  
Rector

### **NOTICE!!**

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet at the Doon Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa, on Wednesday, March 5, 1997 at 8:30 A.M., God willing. All material for the classical agenda is to be in the hands of the Stated Clerk thirty days before the Classis convenes. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the Clerk of Doon's consistory. An officebearers' conference is also planned for Tuesday, March 4.

Rev. Steven Key, Stated Clerk