



**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

The Standard Bearer

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**Vol. 74, No. 9
February 1, 1998**

Enoch Walked With God

And Enoch walked with God: and he was not, for God took him.

Genesis 5:24.

Enoch walked with God. And he was not.

This is likely the shortest, yet the most notable biography that was ever written. What better eulogy could be offered?

Enoch was not. After he had departed, his family likely thought back on his life and said, My husband, or my father, or my grandfather lived in close fellowship with God. It may even be that his friends and acquaintances said of him that he lived a godly life. His enemies may have admitted the same.

But what is far more important is the fact that God says this of His servant Enoch. And not only does God *say* this of him, He has also *recorded* it in the infallible Scriptures for our benefit and instruction.

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

We rarely think of Enoch as living a normal life like ours. But he also had been conceived and born in sin. As a sinner he was incapable of any good and inclined to all evil, just as you and I. He also needed the daily forgiveness of his sins, justification, and cleansing from sin.

Yet he was a child of God, and by the grace of God the chief characteristic of his life was that he lived in intimate fellowship with the living God, reflecting the blessed covenant life within the divine Trinity. And God informs us of this.



Enoch walked with God.

I like to think of Enoch as being like a small lad, looking up with admiration to his strong, manly daddy. No father can quite compare with his father. Enoch looked to God with worshipful admiration, for He is God and He alone, exalted far above all that is

creature, the Most High, the Holy One of His people, the God of all grace, ever blessed, ever adorable! The longer he walked with God the better he knew and adored Him as God above all, blessed forever!

God had taken Enoch's hand in His, and Enoch gripped firmly that strong hand with his puny little hand. Strength flowed forth from that mighty arm of the Most High into the very being of His child, His friend. It was in God's compassion and love that He had reached out to Enoch, had drawn him to Him, pressed him to His heart in loving kindness, and taught him to love Him and be devoted to Him.

There was that bond of perfection, the bond of love between God as sovereign Friend and Enoch as His friend-servant. God had spread His love into His servant's heart, whereby he grew in true knowledge of God, was devoted to Him, and served Him in love. They were drawn to each other in covenant fellowship.

Enoch felt dependent, very de-

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

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SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

ADVERTISING POLICY

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16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

pendent, upon his Father. Actually he would never know how dependent he really was. For this was more than a human father-son relationship. This was the eternal God, the Creator and Sustainer of the whole universe, giving life and breath and being to one of His many creatures. This was the heavenly Father who had chosen him individually, even as He chooses each of His children in sovereign love and wisdom to have a place among the assembly of the elect forever.

In the providence of God Enoch had his own place and would serve his own purpose here on earth, even as every one of us. Therefore he could say with the psalmist: "I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Ps. 73:23, 24).

Never would he venture forth alone. When dangers threatened, Enoch pressed a bit closer to God, took a still firmer grip of His hand, and rested assured that nothing could harm him. With the psalmist he could sing: "When troubles round me swell, when fears and dangers throng, securely I will dwell in His pavilion strong. Within the covert of His tent He hides me till the storm is spent."

This son of Jared and father of Methuselah was certain that not a hair could fall from his head apart from his Father's will. He knew that even this "fear and danger," these swelling troubles, were sent upon him from the hand of his Almighty Provider to teach him to rely more fully upon Him.

It was not as if they walked together in silence. God spoke as a Father to His son by His indwelling Spirit. Since Enoch was a prophet, God also likely spoke directly to him, revealing the things still to come. And there was also a communion of saints in some form of public worship (Gen. 4:26b).

Even as God has opened a channel of communication for us

to the throne of grace, more wonderful and more efficient than the modern e-mail, so also Enoch could pour out his soul in his great need, in worship and in thanksgiving, assured that he was heard and would surely be blessed. God was for him, nothing could be against him.

It may be said of this son of the Most High God that he walked, talked, and even acted like his Father. He was eager to know Him ever more intimately. He had in his heart the testimony that he pleased Him (Heb. 11:6). He strove for a more holy life, like Father's. In one word, he was an imitator of God as His dear child (Eph. 5:1).



Enoch lived in an evil time, not too different from the time in which we now live.

He is referred to as "the seventh after Adam." In his day Lamech and his sons lived upon the earth, by whom we learn to know something of the city that Cain built and the life of the world of that evil day.

Lamech was an adulterer who despised the holy bond of marriage by taking to himself two wives. Judging by their names, Adah "the pretty one," and Zillah "the lustful one," we obtain an accurate picture of the carnality of the world of that day.

Lamech, who boasts of his prowess and his cold-blooded murders, and his wicked sons were prime examples of their time. Jabal brought his fortunes to the city. Jubal supplied the music that gave expression to their sinful lusts and debauchery. Tubal-cain introduced tools and weapons of metal.

This was but representative of the thousands, and perhaps millions, who lived in that day. The world grew and prospered. The church was small and despised, persecuted by a world that hated and tried to destroy her. True, Adam was still living, and so were his spiritual descendants, but they

were like pilgrims and strangers, living their antithetical life as a testimony against the world round about them.

By the grace of God and with the courage that his nearness to God gave him, Enoch boldly testified against that whole wicked world, saying: "The Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment upon all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14, 15).

We cannot help but pause here a moment to reflect on the fact that there is a marked similarity between Enoch's time and ours. The New Testament Scriptures speak of the wicked of the last days as being characterized by ungodliness. This pre-diluvian prophet characterized the world of his day with the same term. Enoch spoke of the coming of the Lord with ten thousands of His saints to punish ungodly sinners for their ungodly deeds and hard speeches. This sounds very much like the promise and the expectation that we cherish in our day.

This prophecy of "the seventh after Adam" was also fulfilled in the destruction of the first world by the flood, which is a prefiguration of the day of the Lord that "will come as a thief in the night? in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the element shall melt with fervent heat., the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.... Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (II Pet. 3:10, 13).



And he was not, for God took him.

His enemies sought Enoch, but God embraced him, saying, "You shall not touch my child." The en-

emy had grown weary of his constant ranting and raving, his nonsensical talk of the judgment of a living God. While their hearts condemned them, they silenced the voice of conscience by striving to get rid of him. They would kill him with a sword and thereby give warning to any others, so that every voice of God would be silenced!

But Enoch was not, for God translated him. In a moment of time he was snatched from this earth and entered into glory, even without tasting the anguish of death.

The fact that God took up the cause of His friend was just another testimony to the world of wickedness that they would certainly go

down in defeat before the face of the one, only, true God. This was for the saints of that day, and is likewise also for us, an encouragement and incentive to be faithful unto death, for the crown of righteousness awaits us. More than conquerors are we!

And for the saints who enter heaven with tear-stained faces this is also significant. Enoch is there in his glorified body, along with Moses. Elijah is there, having been taken up in a chariot of fire with horses of fire in a whirlwind. Besides them, there are those whose bodies were raised from their graves at the time of Christ's death on the cross, and who appeared in

Jerusalem on the day of Christ's resurrection. They all share glorified bodies with Christ as an assurance to the souls in heaven that they also will soon be like Him in complete perfection.



A story is told of a little girl who came home from Sunday School and was asked by her mother about the lesson. She answered that it was about Enoch, a man who walked with God. They walked and walked. And as they walked they came ever closer to heaven. One day God said to Enoch: "Why don't you come to live with me?" So he did. □

Editorial

Preaching in Worship: Voice of God, Voice of Christ

(2)

As demonstrated in the previous editorial, there is in Protestantism today a brutal attack on preaching in the worship of the church. Although vehement, the definition that someone has given of preaching as "a monstrous monologue by a moron to mutes" captures the mood of the movement for liturgical renewal.

Within Reformed and Presbyterian churches also, there is a loss of faith that the preaching of the gospel is the voice of Christ Himself. Thus, in their worship these churches break with the worship advocated and practiced by the Reformation. For the Reformation honored preaching as the voice of God in Jesus Christ.

The Reformation's Regard for Preaching

This was Luther's estimation of preaching. In a sermon on John 20:19-31, he remarked: "Every honest pastor's and preacher's mouth is Christ's mouth." On another occasion, he declared, "I am certain that when I enter the pulpit to preach or stand at the lectern to read, it is not my word, but my tongue is the pen of a ready writer."

Calvin agreed. In a sermon, significantly on Ephesians 4:11, 12 (Christ "gave ... some, pastors and teachers ..."), Calvin taught his congregation:

If our Lord gives us this blessing of His gospel being preached to us, we have a sure and infallible

mark that He is near us and procures our salvation, and that He calls us to Him, as if He had His mouth open and we saw Him there in person.

Therefore, for Calvin the pulpit was "the throne of God."

This conception of preaching, common to all the Reformers, is found throughout the Reformed creeds. It received explicit formulation in Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession of 1566:

The Preaching of the Word of God Is the Word of God. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any other Word of

God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good (Chapter I).

This high view of preaching continued in the history of the Reformed churches until recently. In his work on liturgics, William Heyns called the minister *de mond Gods* ("the mouth of God"). In a rich and profound treatment of preaching as the primary means of grace in the church, explaining Q. and A. 65 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Herman Hoeksema described a preacher as one who does not merely speak concerning Christ, "but one through whom it pleases Christ Himself to speak, to cause His own voice to be heard by His people" (*Triple Knowledge*, vol. 2, pp. 409, 410).

James Hastings Nichols put it well when he described the Reformation's view of preaching, and, therefore, of the preacher, this way: "the preacher ... is ... God's instrument in a terrifyingly direct way" (*Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition*, Westminster Press, 1968, p. 31).

In the life-and-death battle for biblical, Reformed worship today, all that we are called to do, if only we can, is to defend and preserve our Reformation and Reformed heritage. But then we must ourselves see, and be convinced, that this is the biblical view of preaching. The Reformation's conception of preaching was not cultural, was not an accident of history, although this is how those who are reviving and renewing worship in our day like to present the matter. Fact is, the Reformers knew all about drama and music in worship. They had firsthand knowledge of the most impressive ceremony and ritual in the history of Christendom: the sacerdotalism and ritual of the Roman Catholic

Church. All of this they rejected. Instead, they demanded preaching. The reason for their rejection of ceremony and their insistence on preaching was the testimony of Holy Scripture that preaching is the voice of God.

Scripture's Regard for Preaching

For the Reformers, this testimony was, first of all, the teaching of the Bible everywhere that everything depends upon the Word of God, that is, upon the living voice of God speaking peace to His people. We live by every Word that proceeds from God's mouth (Deut. 8:3). The sheep of Jesus Christ hear (present tense!) His voice, and only thus do they follow Him (John 10:27). From the beginning of the history of redemption, God has spoken, and now in the end of the ages He does not shut His mouth, to try some other methods, but has spoken—and continues to speak—by His Son, Jesus the Christ, our chief prophet and teacher (Heb. 1:1, 2; Heid. Cat., Questions 19 and 31).

The Reformers had their specific texts: I Thessalonians 2:13 ("when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God"); Rom. 10:14 ("how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard?" Greek text); John 20:21-23 ("whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them"); Luke 10:16 ("he that heareth you heareth me").

Clear and powerful as these passages are, none is more clear and compelling than Ephesians 4:20, 21: "But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus." Writing to the Ephesians who had not heard about Christ and been converted to Him until some 20 years after He ascended into heaven, the apostle says, matter-of-factly, as something both true and he knew to be the case,

that those Ephesian Christians *heard Christ and were taught by Christ*. The only, and obvious, explanation is that the preaching of the gospel by the apostle and his co-workers was *the voice of Jesus Christ*. The preaching of the Word was for the Ephesians *vox Christi*.

That this "terrifyingly direct" instrumentality of the minister as the mouthpiece of Christ applies, and is intended by the Holy Spirit to apply, to preachers, and not only to apostles, is evident in two ways. First, the preceding context mentions the office of pastor and teacher with those of apostle, prophet, and evangelist (v. 11). The office of pastor and teacher is the only permanent office in the church, to carry on the edifying of the body of Christ that was begun by the apostolic office. The hearing of Christ and the being taught by Christ that once took place through the office of the apostle now takes place through the office of pastor and teacher.

Second, it is the teaching of Ephesians 4:20, 21 that hearing Christ and being taught by Christ are necessary if we are to learn Christ in the saving manner described in verses 17-19 and in verses 22-24, namely, not walking as other Gentiles, but putting off the old man and putting on the new man. Salvation requires hearing Christ Himself! Salvation requires being taught by Christ Himself! The voice of God in Christ, and only the voice of God in Christ, calls the things that are not as though they were and brings the light of spiritual life out of the darkness of our natural, total depravity! This voice sounds in every age, to the world's end, through the preaching of the gospel by the pastors and teachers whom the ascended Christ gives to His church.

Fundamental Qualifications of True Preaching

Two things qualify the preaching that is this living voice of the

risen Christ, the personal Word of God. First, it is preaching that has as its content, and, therefore, preaching that is faithful to, the message of the apostles, that is, Holy Scripture. The Second Helvetic Confession gives this qualification when it says, "when this Word of God is now preached," etc. The reference is to Scripture, which the Second Helvetic has just confessed to be "the true Word of God."

Second, only that preaching is the voice of God which is done by a man who has been given to the church as a pastor and teacher by the ascended Christ, that is, one who is called to this labor by Christ, one who is in office. The Second Helvetic Confession indicates this qualification when it says, "when this Word of God is

now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called," etc.

Preaching as the voice of Christ is necessarily connected with, and dependent upon, preaching's being the exercise of *office*, and not merely the exercise of *gifts*. The assault on preaching today begins with the rejection of office. Modern Reformed church members and contemporary synods first disparage and then deny positions of authority in the congregations. Usually they do this in a pious manner, as though they would exalt "service." The implication is that authority and service in the church are mutually exclusive. A man with authority to bring the Word of God would be a tyrant, lording it over the cowed members. Whatever the approach, the churches repudiate office. This is the end of

preaching.

It is also the muzzling of the voice of Christ in those churches. Fundamental to the entire ministry of the Son of God in human flesh is *office*. He may glorify God in the world, redeem the church, fulfill the covenant, and establish the kingdom of God, not simply because He is gifted but because He is ordained and qualified by God as God's authoritative Servant. He is the Messiah. He has been called of God.

Still today, when He functions by means of men, particularly as prophet and teacher of the church, he calls and sends these men, so that His labor through them is official. Other than officially, Christ will not work. Other than officially, He will not speak. □

(to be cont.)—DJE

Letters

According to Rev. Cammenga's informative article on communion (*SB*, Nov. 15, 1997), John Calvin suggested having communion once every week. In our churches we have it once every three or four months. That's no small difference. Do you know what Calvin's reasons were for wanting communion so often? He was a lover of God and a dedicated student of His Word, so I am interested in what he had to say and would respect it.

Randy Vaalburg, Byron Center, MI

Response:

Calvin's desire for frequent—even weekly—administrations of the Lord's Supper is easily documented.

Now, to get rid of this great pile of (Romish, RC) ceremonies, the Supper could have been administered most becomingly if it were set before the church very often, and at least once a week (*Institutes* IV, xvii. p. 43).

Calvin goes on in the same passage to object to the practice being ad-

vocated by some that the sacrament be administered only once a year or infrequently. Instead he calls for a return to what he considers the apostolic model so that "... no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving" (*Institutes* IV, xvii, p. 44).

The reason for Calvin's desire for frequent administrations of the Lord's Supper is simply his high view of the sacrament. Although rejecting the Romish position that the sacraments confer grace, Calvin was equally vehement in repudiating the position that the sacraments are empty signs. On the contrary, the sacraments, and now specifically the Lord's Supper, are means of grace. Because of Christ's purpose in the Lord's Supper and the benefits of the Supper for the believer, the sacrament ought to be administered frequently.

...it (the Lord's Supper, RC) was ordained to be frequently used among all Christians in order that

they might frequently return in memory to Christ's Passion, by such remembrance to sustain and strengthen their faith, and urge themselves to sing thanksgiving to God and to proclaim his goodness... (*Institutes* IV, xvii, p. 44).

In a "Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper" Calvin writes:

However, if we duly consider the end which our Lord has in view, we shall perceive that the use should be more frequent than many make it: for the more infirmity presses, the more necessary is it frequently to have recourse to what may and will serve to confirm our faith, and advance us in purity of life; and, therefore, the practice of all well ordered churches should be to celebrate the Supper frequently, so far as the capacity of the people will admit (*Calvin's Tracts*, Vol. II, p. 179).

Although in favor of frequent administrations of the sacrament, Calvin recognized that there was no express command in Scripture regarding frequency. The fre-

quency of administration must be determined by the eldership, taking into consideration the importance of the sacrament as well as "... the capacity of the people...." Even Calvin was ready to concede a monthly, and even a quarterly administration of the Lord's Supper lest frequency of administration lead to thoughtless participation. Thus Calvin could put his imprimatur on the rule established for the church of Geneva in the "Ecclesiastical Ordinances" of 1541.

Since the supper was instituted by our Lord for our frequent use, and since also it was so observed in the ancient Church until the devil overturned everything, setting up the mass in its place, to celebrate it so seldom is a fault requiring correction. For the present, however, we have decided and ordered that it should be administered four times a year, namely, at Christmas, Easter, Whitsun, and on the first Sunday of September in the autumn (*The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*, p. 44).

Thanks for your question—a

good one. And thanks also for reading the rubric.

—Rev. Ron Cammenga

■ An Editorial in the Christmas Cards

Your article, "The Birth of Jesus: Particular Grace" (*Standard Bearer*, Dec. 15, 1997), is a much needed, clear, and important message for all who name the name of Christ.

I hope, God willing, next Christmas, to include a copy of it in my Christmas cards. I have discovered, since myself hearing the true gospel of God's particular grace for the first time, that it is unknown to most of my Arminian friends, as it was to me. And to those who say they did "know" it, I've seen an attitude that says it "doesn't matter" enough to press it. This is grievous.

Christmas and all its hoopla can be used as an opportunity to present the gospel of God's particular grace to ears that might be in a listening mode, by God's grace.

Please keep on shining the light of God's grace on every aspect of our Lord's life. We need to hear the gospel all the time.

Pat Buysse, Gettysburg, PA

■ On Whose Side is Billy Graham?

In the December 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer* is an interesting article on the "Different Paths of Salvation." The contents remind of an old saying, "If the fox preaches passion, farmer, look after your geese."

I suggest to read Revelation 12:17. The text speaks of a woman, commandments of God, testimonies of Christ, and a remnant. The woman represents the church of the Old and New Testament. The law and testimonies happen to be the only way of salvation through Christ our Lord. Now, Mr. Graham has discovered a second way of salvation, namely, "there are people that have never seen the Bible, never heard of Jesus, but believe in God." By implication, they are part of the remnant.

How grateful we ought to be for all these globe-trotting missionaries. Perhaps, it may leave us wondering on which side is Mr. Graham.

Bart VanderWal, Ripon, CA

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Steven Key

Christ, the Anointed of God

In I Peter 2:9, the apostle writes to the church: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Hence, you are a people that

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shall be prophets, priests, and kings unto God.

The only possibility for that is that God ordains and sends His own Officebearer to reconcile us unto Himself. That Officebearer of God is Christ. And that Christ of God is JESUS, Jesus for us, Jesus in us, and Jesus through us.

We now turn to Scripture and consider the name Christ from the viewpoint of its significance for us, for our salvation.

Our Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 12 nicely summarizes Scripture's teaching concerning this name of our Savior, when it tells us that the name Christ signifies that Jesus is our chief Prophet, who reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption. Furthermore, the name Christ signifies that Jesus is our High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body has redeemed us and makes continual intercession

with the Father for us; and also that He is our eternal King, who governs us, and defends and preserves us in that salvation He has obtained for us.

The Scriptures emphasize the importance of the confession that Jesus is the Christ. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (I John 5:1a). To Simon Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus answered and said unto him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:16-18).

To say "I believe in Christ" implies not only that I believe there is a Christ, but that I believe in the Christ of God for me. And more: I believe that I partake of His anointing!

The question Jesus asked of His disciples comes also to you and to me today: "Whom say ye that I am?"

The Anointed of God

The name "Christ," which in Hebrew is "Messiah," means "the Anointed."

We have seen that Jesus, or Jehovah-salvation, is His personal name, which He received of God by means of the angel even before His conception in the womb of the virgin Mary. "Jesus" is the personal name which teaches us who He is. "Christ," on the other hand, is the Mediator's official name, His title, which teaches us what He is, namely, the anointed Prophet, Priest, and King of God.

The name Christ speaks of the Servant of Jehovah, as He is officially called, ordained and qualified to be the Officebearer of God, the Mediator and Head of the covenant.

It was only gradually during His earthly ministry that Jesus be-

came known as the Christ. Gradually He became known as the Christ to His disciples—not right at first. Gradually He became known as Christ to others, to His disciples in general, and even to such as the Samaritan woman. And finally, in the strength of faith, they confessed that JESUS is the CHRIST. That was the strength of their faith, even though at that time they did not understand everything that that name implied.

From their earthly viewpoint, before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they did not understand what the calling and office of the Messiah was. But they confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ of God. And the Lord said, Upon that confession I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Without that confession there can be no church.

For that same reason the enemies of Jesus hated Him, not so much because He was called Jesus, but because Jesus is the Christ. When Jesus claimed to be the Christ, they hated Him. When, finally, the high priest asked the Lord whether He was the Christ, the Son of God, and Jesus answered in the affirmative, they cried out, Crucify Him! They did not want a Christ like that.

And so it is today.

Christ is the Anointed sent from God. That is the fundamental significance of His name. When we say that Christ was the Anointed, we mean that Christ, according to Scripture, is the One who occupies the central position in the kingdom of God.

Old Testament Anointing

In Old Testament times, when a chosen one was called to an important office He was anointed. Thus Scripture mentions anointing to the office of prophet, priest, and king.

At God's command, Elijah had to anoint Elisha to be prophet in his place. In Exodus 30:30, we read

the charge God gave to Moses: "And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office." We read often of kings being anointed to their office. That anointing showed, in the first place, that the man who was anointed was ordained by God to his office.

Anointing had so great significance that David dared not to raise his hand against Saul, even after David himself had been anointed in Saul's place. He would wait for God to remove Saul from the throne, saying, "The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing that he is the anointed of the LORD."

When the oil was poured upon the head of him who had been chosen by God to serve as an officebearer in God's kingdom, that man received the seal of ordination. The officebearer did not occupy that position in the kingdom of God independently. He *received* that position. He received the place and the authority and the power from God, and as the anointed he remains forever under God. The anointed one is always a servant. God is supreme.

In the second place, that anointing signified that the anointed one is also qualified. One that is servant in the kingdom of God cannot stand alone. He cannot possibly have the power from himself to exercise that office. Therefore, the essence of the anointing was that by that ceremony God pointed out that the man so anointed had been called and qualified to function in that particular office to which he was anointed.

That is the significance of the oil in anointing. Oil, as you know, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. That is evident from many passages. That is seen in the vision of the candlestick in Zechariah 4. That same is indicated in Isaiah 61:1, where the word of the prophet is this: "The

Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek," and so on.

As the oil was poured out in a generous amount, so the Holy Spirit would rest upon the anointed one to qualify him for the office to which he was ordained.

Now Christ is the Anointed One.

There were many anointed ones in the Old Testament. There were many who partook of Christ's anointing. You ask, How is that possible, when Christ had not even come yet? All those kings and prophets and priests, all those anointed ones in the old dispensation were simply figures. They all were dependent upon Him that was to come in the fullness of time. If the Christ, if the Anointed One, did not come, there could have been no anointed ones in the Old Testament. They were all types, figures of Him that was to come. And as such they partook of His anointing. That also is evident from many passages in God's Word. Let me point out only a couple.

Psalms 89 speaks of the anointing of David. "I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him. And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him:

and in my name shall his horn be exalted. I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation" (Ps. 89:20-26).

That is David, oh yes. But centrally that is *Christ*. Read on (vv. 27-29): "Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven." That is Christ!

Such is also the case in the text to which I have already referred, Isaiah 61:1. That is the prophet Isaiah, yes. But that is centrally the Christ, as is evident in Luke 4, when Jesus sat down and said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." Isaiah speaks as in Christ. Christ speaks in Isaiah 61.

That is true of all Scripture.

Christ the Fulfillment

Christ is the Anointed One, the Servant of Jehovah, the Prophet, the Priest, the King.

Christ is the Anointed One. He was ordained by God to His office and qualified by the Holy Spirit to function in His office.

All His authority came from God alone. It was because Christ was ordained that He had authority to speak and to teach. It was because Christ was ordained and qualified by God that He had authority to sacrifice. It was because Christ was ordained and qualified,

anointed by God, that He had the authority to rule over all things.

And He was anointed from eternity and without measure. The anointing of officebearers in the Old Testament was only a shadow of the anointing of Christ in eternity. However generously the Holy Spirit was given to a man, no matter how freely flowed the oil, as even down the beard of Aaron and all the way down his skirts according to Psalm 133, there was always a limit. The full horn or vial was soon emptied and the flowing stopped.

But Christ was anointed with more than mere oil. His anointing could not be limited by the cessation of the flow of oil. He received the Spirit without measure. So David could say in Psalm 45, as quoted by the writer to the Hebrews, "Therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Thus Christ is the Servant of the Father, the Triune God, to complete the work of salvation, to build God's eternal house, realizing God's covenant by saving the elect chosen in Him from eternity.

Jesus, God in the flesh, our salvation, became the Servant of the Lord, to preach, to sacrifice, to reign forever.

Truly the salvation of His people lies immovable and sure, above all the attacks of God's enemies which rage below. The work of God is placed in the hands of Him whose work cannot fail.

He is Jesus, the Christ, precious to all you who believe. □

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ **A Major Embarrassment for the CRC**

What clearly proved to be a major embarrassment to the

Christian Reformed Church took place on November 19, 1997 at NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council). This organization, co-founded by the CRC 23 years ago, voted 6-1 to suspend the CRC from this fellowship of conservative denominations. The one vote against sus-

pension was cast by the CRC. This means that if the vote is ratified by 2/3 of the denominations within three years, the CRC will lose its voting rights.

The *United Reformed News Service* presented an extended report on the debate which preceded the vote.

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

The Rev. Ric Perrin, interchurch relations committee chairman for the Presbyterian Church in America, said the 1995 CRC vote to ordain women forced his denomination to propose suspension. "In our opinion they are saying that Scripture no longer governs the CRC on that issue," said Perrin. "We think that is a fundamental shift away from the historic position."

Perrin—who was originally ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and previously urged admission of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church to NAPARC despite its decision to allow the ordination of women—emphasized that women's ordination wasn't the only problem in the Christian Reformed Church.

"We have been greatly disturbed by the actions which the CRC has taken and which are a matter of public record," said Perrin. "We feel this has set a precedent that they can suspend their own constitution on any issue in the future in response to social pressure."

"We are not suggesting that the Christian Reformed Church has suddenly ceased to be an evangelical body, nor are we saying its people are second-rate Christians," continued Perrin, who noted that denominations which were moving toward aberrant views do so slowly and with subtle rather than dramatic changes. "Those of you who deal with the insidious nature of a creeping away from the Reformed faith will know exactly what I'm talking about."

The debate did not go over well with the CRC delegates. First, the delegates presented a strong repudiation of the proposal, followed later by an attempt to derail the motion. First, Rev. Leonard Hofman, interchurch relations administrative secretary of the CRC and former CRC General Secretary stated:

"This is not a court. What are you hoping to achieve in a vote to suspend us? Are you trying to discipline us? Do you have that

right? We do not want to be accused or even described as giving in to a subtle cancer of an insidious nature that is pulling us away from the Word of God.

...Do we differ? Of course we do. I go back to the days when we had some real questions about the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and its view on the lodge. Tables have been shifted in these days."

Then followed an attempt to derail the process. Rev. Ed Van Baak, CRC delegate proposed:

"I don't know if we're prepared in this forum, at this date, to discuss these details, but these details are essential to coming to an understanding of the issues," said Van Baak. In response, Van Baak moved that NAPARC "establish an ad hoc committee of member churches of NAPARC to examine the PCA statements concerning the CRC for its position on the ordination of women in the offices of minister, elder, and evangelist, and develop a position regarding the consistency of varying positions with NAPARC's criteria for membership, to report to NAPARC 1999."

The proposed delay was defeated by voice vote. A tactic that had worked successfully at many CRC synods failed on this assembly. NAPARC vice-president Rev. Ron Potter told the CRC that :

"NAPARC had no choice because NAPARC membership is limited to denominations affirming the Westminster Standards of Presbyterianism or the Three Forms of Unity of the Dutch Reformed tradition, and the CRC had changed its position on a matter addressed in the confessions." Potter read Article 30 of the Belgic Confession and noted that the confession specified that "men" are to be elected to office.

That brought an extended debate on the meaning of the confession. CRC General Secretary Dr. David Engelhard said the RCUS delegate was quoting a bad translation of the Belgic Confes-

sion and that the underlying word in the original language didn't refer to "men" but rather "people." Orthodox Presbyterian delegate Elder Mark Bube noted that another confessional reference with a different underlying word in the original languages also referred to male officebearers, quoted CRC synodical decisions on the matter, and asked the current status of Christian Reformed confessional language.

The Christian Reformed Church has had a very close working relationship with most of those six denominations over the years. These denominations have, in years past, set forth what is to be considered Reformed and Presbyterian. They have agreed on the confessions which give expression to their "Calvinism." To have six of the denominations tell the seventh, "You no longer belong in the camp of those who are 'Reformed,' must not only prove to be an embarrassment, but represents especially a very strong testimony. The CRC has, in the past years, seen many thousands of its members leaving. Now six of its closest friends are saying, "You are not Reformed according to our confessions." All this should send a strong message. Will it change the course of the CRC? I doubt it. There are none so blind as those who *will not* see. One can expect that the CRC will now be making overtures for closer union with the Reformed Church in America and those who are co-operating with them.

■ "UnVriendly precedent"

Such was the title of an article appearing in *World* magazine, November 15, 1997. Its sub-title emphasizes: "High Court homosexuality case threatens religious freedom."

The magazine presents a brief summary of the case:

In 1991 Delwin Vriend wore a pink triangle lapel pin to work, a

proud badge of his homosexuality. But the triangle was too much for the long-suffering administration at The King's University College, the small Christian Reformed liberal arts college in Edmonton, Alberta, where Mr. Vriend worked as a laboratory coordinator. When Mr. Vriend "came out," school administrators, who had known about his homosexuality for more than a year, felt they had to fire him. Mr. Vriend went to court, and on Nov. 4 and 5, his case was finally heard by Canada's Supreme Court.

Instead of attacking the college for treating him unfairly, Mr. Vriend sued the Alberta provincial government. Alberta is one of only four jurisdictions in Canada (Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and the Northwest Territories are the other three) that do not include homosexuals as a protected category in their human-rights code. Mr. Vriend wants the courts to force the Alberta Human Rights Commission to accept his complaint that he has been discriminated against because of his sexual preference.

The importance of Mr. Vriend's case goes far beyond the immediate issue of religious freedom. "We think this is a watershed case," says Gerry Chipeur, the Calgary constitutional lawyer who represents intervenors Focus on the Family—Canada and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. "If [Mr. Vriend] wins it will mean that judges have completely taken over the mantle of legislators in Canada. They will have begun to write entire phrases into the laws passed by our legislators."

Mr. Vriend won the first round of the court case in April of 1994 when the judge ruled that "sexual orientation" should be read into Alberta's Individual Rights Protection Act (IRPA) as a protected category. This judge, Ms. Russell, was subsequently promoted to the Alberta Court of Appeal—the court to which her own decision was appealed. This three-person court unexpectedly overturned her decision.

Now it has been appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada. A decision is expected in the fall of next year. Many fear that this court will side with Vriend.

There are at least two basic issues at stake. The article emphasizes that the courts appear to be ready not only to *interpret* the law, but to *make* it. But the serious issue of religious freedom also arises. Is a church or a Christian educational institution *required* to hire or to retain those whose "life-style" is in violation of Scripture's teaching? If the court's decision ultimately means that, the state will be in a position to shut down every faithful church and school.

■ "Diversity Diversion"

In another issue of *World Magazine*, December 6, 1997, the syndicated columnist Cal Thomas has an article which reminds again of the inroads of government into the educational system.

First there was phys-ed. Then came driver's-ed. Next it was sex-ed and then drug-ed, followed by environment-ed. Now, President Clinton was to add "diversity education" to the long list of nonacademic subjects, even though surveys show the government schools are failing to achieve minimal standards in such critical areas as reading, science, and geography.

At a White House conference on "hate crimes" held at George Washington University, the president and several Cabinet officers endorsed a K-12 plan to teach children to be tolerant of racial minorities, homosexuals, and the disabled. What makes anyone think the government will be more successful at directing young people's behavior in this area than it has been with drugs, sexual activity, and driving?

Thomas continues:

Yes, it takes a village, doesn't it? You parents are a bunch of bigoted imbeciles who probably

tell racist jokes and make fun of gays and the disabled. Your kids pick this up and that's why they grow up to be just like you. Only the government, through its re-education camps...uh...schools, can straighten out this mess. Give them your poor, tired children and they will set them free from their homophobia, racism, sexism, and disability-ism.

To the Clinton Administration, diversity means there is no right or wrong and that no lifestyle, nation, belief, economic, or political system is to be preferred over any other. If that is true, why do so many want to immigrate to America?

This latest, but probably not last, effort by the government to reprogram the minds of our children must be resisted. Concerned parents are wasting their time trying to reform a corrupt system....

Thomas concludes, and we would wholeheartedly agree:

The education monopoly should be ended. Parents are not the enemies of education. Most do not promote hate. We'd be better off if we stopped trying to change the system and, instead, withdrew the raw material the government schools need in order to impose a left-wing, pagan agenda on a new generation.

So we have sought, by God's grace, to instill into our children within our own schools those scriptural principles which are essential for God's people to know in order to live on this earth to His glory. And though our schools and pupils are hardly perfect, we have seen the good fruits of this sort of education in godly living. These pupils are not only better prepared academically (at far, far lower cost) than the public school students, they are above all taught proper morals and scriptural requirements for the godly life. Christian parents ought, thankfully, to continue their sacrifices to provide an education that no government can or will. □

The Revelation of the Wonder of Grace in Paradise

Chapter 7

The Lord Coming to Seek His Own

We have already seen that Adam and Eve vainly attempted to cover the nakedness of their sin with their self-made aprons of fig leaves. We should note yet, in that connection, that the origin of clothing dates from the time of the fall. For although Adam and Eve vainly tried to cover their nakedness, we know that, according to verse 21 of Genesis 3, the Lord Himself provided them with clothing in the form of coats of skins. We must remember, however, that the proper idea of clothing resides in the fact that it is a gift of God's grace to His people. It is provided to cover the nakedness and the ugliness of our sin and death before the Lord and before one another. As such, it remains necessary as long as we are not finally delivered from sin and death, as long as we remain in the body of this death.

Further, we may say that for the child of God his clothing is symbolic also of his covering in Christ. When in eternity we shall be perfectly and completely clothed in Christ's righteousness, then we shall be naked with our eyes open and shall not be ashamed any longer.

By the same token, we must re-

member that although our clothing is universal and shared also by the wicked, nevertheless grace is not universal, neither is clothing a gift of so-called common grace. The wicked have clothes, but they have no grace of God with their clothes. That they do not become plainly manifest in the fact that they pervert even the gift of clothing and subject it to the service of sin. Not only do they change clothing into an item of vainglory, as though the essential ugliness of sin and death can be covered up by clothes, but they also make of clothing an instrument of the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. Instead of using it to cover the body, they use it to expose the body, and that for the very purpose of exciting and satisfying the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. This depraved inclination simply comes to one of its grossest manifestations in the pornography and the exaltation of nudity that increasingly plagues modern society, but which the world is nevertheless unable to combat for the simple reason that these grosser manifestations are but the outgrowth and the fruit of its own lust.

The child of God, on the other hand, will surely understand that he can have no part with these unfruitful works of darkness, and that all the world's fornication and uncleanness should not be so much as named among God's people, as become saints. They realize that there is no solution to and no real

power to fight against all these manifestations of lust, except in Christ Jesus our Lord and through the real spiritual covering of sin that there is in His blood and by His Spirit, the Spirit of holiness.

But now let us return to the account in Genesis 3. We note, first, that Adam and Eve tried to hide from the Lord: "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (v. 8).

Notice, first of all, that the text here presupposes that there was a revelation of Jehovah God in some perceptible form in Paradise. It must have been some appearance of God, a theophany, some visible and audible manifestation of the Lord God such as later appeared in the Angel of Jehovah. For Adam and Eve "heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden." Besides, their very attempt to hide from the presence of the Lord also presupposes this.

Moreover, the text seems to suggest that God's coming to the garden was not in itself unusual, that He may have come to Adam and Eve daily, especially when we take note of Adam's answer to the Lord's question, "Where art thou?" In verse 10 Adam does not answer this question directly, but seems to answer the real intent of the question, as if God asked for the reason for his hiding himself: "And he

The late Homer Hoeksema was professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." One gets the impression that it was a regular occurrence for the Lord God to come to the garden and that previously Adam would go to meet his God, while now he hides himself and the Lord must call him. This would also be in harmony with the whole idea of Paradise the First in the state of perfection: it was Adam's house with God. However this may be, here it is evident that Jehovah God makes Himself manifest in the garden, and Adam and Eve hear His approach.

It was in the cool of the day that the Lord approached Adam and Eve. Literally, the text speaks of the Lord's coming "in the wind of the day." According to some, this refers to the morning breeze, while others explain that it is the evening breeze. There is no way of telling which is meant; but if the reference is to the time of day, then I would suggest that it must have been the evening of the same day. My reason is that I do not think that the Lord would wait even overnight either to curse the devil or to seek His children.

But what we must pay attention to at this point is God's marvelous lovingkindness. Notice, first of all, that the Lord comes to seek Adam and Eve. He does not wait for them to seek Him, for as they had fallen into sin and death they would never seek Him again. They had rejected His Word. They had forsaken the Lord their God. They had turned to the devil's service. His word they had heeded. They were alienated from Jehovah God through their own willful disobedience. But the Lord comes to them. Such is the wonder of grace! God's grace is always first and sovereign. The sinner, unless and until he has been touched by the power of that grace, will never seek Him. He must needs flee from God. But God in His grace, and for reasons that He does not find in us but in Himself, comes first to

seek and to save His own. And remember, it requires exactly such grace—pure, sovereign grace, grace that is first—in order to save a hopelessly lost and totally corrupt sinner.

That God indeed came in His grace to Adam and Eve cannot be doubted. For the Lord comes in the gentle breeze, not in the howling storm or in the roaring thunder or in the consuming fire. He comes in the way in which Adam had heard Him come before, in the wind of the day. He comes announcing His coming, for Adam, even before the Lord appears, hears the *voice of the Lord God* walking in the garden. Indeed, had not the Lord God come in His grace, He must needs have destroyed Adam and Eve finally and forever in His consuming wrath.

But this is grace. To be sure, Jehovah God comes to make Adam look like the fool that he was with his fig-leaf apron tied around him. To be sure, He comes to expose and to reprove the sinner. For God's grace does not and cannot function apart from His perfect righteousness and spotless holiness. His grace is a holy and righteous grace. Therefore, God's grace does not and cannot ignore Adam's sin, but it purposes to rescue him from that sin. For the same reason, when the Lord seeks Adam and Eve in His grace, the Lord in His dealings with them does and cannot simply pass by their sin, but calls them to account. Nevertheless, the very manner of Jehovah's coming to our first parents bespeaks His grace. It announced peace, love, reconciliation, salvation, communion.

Indeed, Adam and his wife did not know this grace of God as yet, nor had its power made itself felt in their consciousness. How could they know it? All they knew was the stark and horrible fact of their own sin. Of a Savior and of the promise of a Savior, or even of the possibility of a Savior, they could not and they did not yet know. For no gospel had been announced as

yet. Therefore, of the forgiveness of sins and of the way of forgiveness they also could not know as yet. Therefore, also, the way of repentance and confession of sin was not yet open unto them.

This will also explain the fact that while the motif of the Lord's coming to them is grace, Adam and his wife nevertheless hide among the trees of the garden. They do not yet realize and taste the Lord's grace.

Notice that when the Lord comes, they immediately sense that their aprons of fig leaves are no protection. The Lord is coming, and it is His approach that causes them to realize that their self-made covering is of no avail. That this is true is plain from Adam's own explanation of his hiding in verse 10: "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." At the same time, let us note that there is a further discovery here on the part of Adam and Eve: they have been made to realize the futility of their fig-leaf aprons before the eyes of the Lord.

But to their sin they add yet more sin and folly when they hide. Their hiding is sin because they still attempt to cover up, rather than to acknowledge their sin and to confess it before the Lord who is approaching; they attempt to cover up this time by hiding completely among the trees of the garden. Their hiding is folly because there is no cure in fleeing from Jehovah in the cool of the day. When He comes in the thunder of His justice to execute judgment, then the cry, but still the futile cry, of the sinner must needs be, "Mountains, fall on us; hills, cover us! Hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." But when He approaches in the gentle zephyr of the gospel, His Word is: "Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts. Rather, meet Him! Meet Him naked, but on your knees!"

Notice next, however, that the

Lord does not allow Adam to remain in hiding. He approaches him with the searching question, "Adam, where art thou?" The Lord does not discover him in his hiding place. This does not mean, of course, that God did not know where Adam was, nor even that He left this impression upon Adam. The contrary is true. But the Lord acts as if they are actually in hiding from Him. Instead of going and appearing in their hiding place, the Lord calls Adam, "Where art thou?" He leaves it to Adam to appear. That Adam does appear and not flee still farther, that Adam does not continue his hiding but responds to the Lord's question, is due to the fact that God caused His voice to enter into Adam's inmost heart. Adam *must* answer the summons. For remember: the Lord is dealing pedagogically with Adam. He purposes not only to draw Adam from his hiding place, but also to induce him to give account of himself as to the real reason for his hiding. Hence, the Lord's question as it were, evinces surprise: "Adam, where art thou? I used to meet you here in the garden in the cool of the day. Why not now?"

Moreover, as is plain from Adam's answer, the Lord's question purposes to discover Adam's condition. It means, and Adam understood it thus: "Adam, where art thou—not only as to your place, but as to your condition?" And yet remember that the question of the Lord was one of love, basically. For the Lord purposes to save Adam. From this point of view, the question as to its intent means: "Adam, where art thou? I am seeking. Come thou to Me."

Adam then answers the question according to its real meaning, as if Jehovah God had asked for the reason of his hiding. He replies that he was naked and on that account was afraid. The Lord had made him realize that before the presence of God sin became manifest through his very body; even

his outward appearance now condemned him. But the Lord continues to question him. He purposes that Adam give account of this sudden knowledge of his nakedness and of his fear on account of it: "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" The Lord Himself suggests the answer: "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded that thou shouldest not eat?" The Lord inquires as to the cause of Adam's fear and his knowledge of his own nakedness. Naked Adam had always been, but not afraid. Why then is he afraid now?

Adam admits, but does not confess his sin. There is indeed an important difference. To confess the guilt of one's sin is much more than the mere admission of the act of one's sin. Confession implies the assumption of the full responsibility for the sin, and it implies true sorrow over sin. Of these there is no evidence in Adam's reply to God: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." The fact of the matter is that Adam attempts to shift the responsibility and the guilt of his sin to his wife, and from his wife even to God Himself, suggesting that if God had not given him this woman, then he would not have violated the command.

But the Lord, because He is dealing pedagogically with His children, and because He purposes to reveal His own promise of salvation, and because He is setting the stage for that revelation of the promise, allows Himself, as it were, to be turned from Adam to the woman. When the woman is confronted by the Lord's question, "What is this that thou hast done?" she, in turn, blames the serpent, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." Also she, therefore, attempts to shift the responsibility from herself, while she admits the act as such.

The stage is now set for the first revelation of the promise of the gospel.

In conclusion, we must first note the following, however:

1. This entire narrative reveals that for fallen man as he is in himself there is absolutely no way out. Adam and Eve must confess their sins, but they cannot confess because they know nothing of the forgiveness of sins as yet. Where there is no confidence of forgiveness and reception, there the sinner does not dare to appear before the face of the Judge of heaven and earth. Adam and Eve must have a covering for their sin, but they can find none of themselves. In their self-made aprons they know that they are naked before God, and they blame their nakedness, rather than their corruption, because they have no covering for the latter. They must have garments indeed, but not outward garments of their own making; inward, spiritual garments they must have. Such garments the sinner does not have and cannot procure of himself.

2. Clearly the narrative reveals that salvation is altogether of the Lord. If the narrative of Genesis 3 had ended with Eve's words, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat," how hopeless the situation would be, how utterly hopeless. But the narrative does not end there. God is the God of our salvation. He exposes the sinner in the depth of the corruption of his sin. He exposes him as utterly helpless and hopeless in himself, with no covering for his nakedness because he has no covering for his sin and corruption. But He also provides those inward, spiritual garments, coverings for his sins in Christ Jesus our Lord, garments that enable him to walk before Him in the light, naked to the bottom of his soul, with the confidence that there is forgiveness with Him, the confidence that through the blood of Jesus Christ He will receive him and consider him as though he never had had nor committed any sin. □

to be continued...

"To Believe or Not To Believe..."

John 12: 34-50

That is the question.

Some may think other questions and matters are more or at least equally important. "To invest in stocks, or not to invest in stocks." "To marry or not to marry." "To change jobs or not to change jobs." "To go to church on December 25 or not to."

But to believe in Jesus or not to believe in Jesus is *the* question one must answer. It is *the* issue one must address. It is *the* decision one must make—now, and every day.

To believe or not to believe in Jesus, in all that we do or say, think or desire...this is the most important thing.

The reason believing or not believing is *the* question, *the* issue, *the* decision of life is that believing or not believing is *the way* to the Father or *the way* to the fire. Believing in Jesus is the way to the Father and to eternal life. Not believing in Jesus is the way to the fire of hell and to eternal death.

To believe or not to believe ... is to be or not to be ... saved!

◆◆◆ ◆◆◆ ◆◆◆

In the passage before us, John 12:34-50, we see plainly how "to believe or not to believe" is the question. We see here some not willing to believe, but instead to be sermon critics and Scripture-twisters. We listen to Jesus admon-

ish them to believe (vv. 34-36). There is an explanation of the reason why so many believed not Jesus (vv. 37-41). Then there is mention of the fact that to some "to believe or not to believe" was not the question. They chose instead to believe "sort of" (vv. 42, 43). Finally we have recorded in

this passage a summary statement of what it is to believe or not to believe (vv. 44-50).

To believe or not to believe Jesus. That is the question always, and also here in this portion of sacred writ. That is the subject. See for yourself. Search the Scriptures. *And believe!*

For Study, Meditation, & Discussion

1. Denying...departing (vv. 34-36).

What is *believing* on Jesus?
What is *not believing* on Jesus?

The people who heard Jesus speak of the glorification of the Father and the Son and the church were unbelievers.

The people show their unbelief in two ways.

The people show this unbelief first in their misinterpretation of the voice from heaven. The voice was God's voice. It was plainly God's voice. John the believer evidently knew it to be God's voice. But some said the voice was thunder. Others said it was an angel's voice (v. 28, 29). In unbelief the people could not rise above the level of creature. They could believe in thunder. They might be fascinated with the thought of angels. But they refuse to hear and to acknowledge God. How is this sort of unbelief manifest today?

Second, this unbelief shows itself in the people's refusing to acknowledge the Messiah who is revealed in Scripture. It is especially

over the truth Jesus had just proclaimed about His dying (vv. 23ff., and especially v. 32) that the people stumble. They will have none of this: their Messiah, dying?! God forbid! "We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, the son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man" (v. 34)?!

To what law might the people be referring as proof that Christ abideth for ever (might it be in the Pentateuch, e.g., Genesis 17, 49, or in the rest of the Old Testament, here referred to as "the law," e.g., II Samuel 7; Psalm 2, etc.)?

Why do these people, and so many also today, refuse to accept the necessity of Christ's death for His people?

This claim of the people is a classic example of what we see so often today: picking and choosing certain texts in Scripture which seem to support one's position, and overlooking, even twisting those which seem to deny one's position. What texts in the Old Testament do in fact teach the (necessity of the) *death* of the Christ?

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The people's unbelief prompts an exhortation from Jesus to believe in the light while the light (Jesus Himself, cf. John 8:12) is still with them (vv. 35, 36). What is the spiritual significance of all these truths: the light, the darkness, walking in the light, being children of the light? How do we show we are children of the light, walking in the light?

Jesus, the all-wise preacher, recognizing the unbelief of His audience, warns the people that the light will be with them only a little while longer. After this brief, yet sharp, warning, Jesus departs, and hides Himself from them (v. 36)! His departing is judgment. For His departure is the departure of the Word and gospel of God, the only hope of life eternal, from a people which had rejected God and Messiah. Elijah and the prophetic word had been taken away from Israel under the idolatrous Ahab. Jesus, the true Word from heaven, departs from the Jews under the self-righteous reign of the Pharisees.

God in Christ *hiding* Himself from the church! How is this evident today?

2. The explanation of unbelief (vv. 37-41).

Jesus spoke convincing sermons. Jesus worked convincing miracles. No one who heard Jesus, no one who saw or heard of Jesus' miracles might deny that Jesus is the Christ.

The passage in John 12:37-41 tells us that though no one might deny Jesus (it is wrong to do so!), yet many *did* deny Him and believe not on Him.

From the passage and from the passages referred to in Isaiah 6 and 53, and in the light of the entire Word of God, cite three or four explanations for the *cause* of unbelief. Diligent study of the causes of unbelief leads to our consideration of other related matters. Discuss also these:

1) The sovereignty of God/the responsibility of man. Is this

true, as some minister has said: "God is 100% sovereign; man is 100% responsible"? How do we refute the charges that the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God makes God the author of sin and makes man a mere puppet of God?

2) The free offer of the gospel. Some say that God sincerely desires to save all who hear the preaching of the gospel. He wants all, He urges all, He begs all, in ardent love, to believe, and, therefore, to be saved. Others, including the Protestant Reformed Churches, deny that there can be such a passion and love of God for all to be saved who hear the preaching. Think on this and discuss this in light of the various causes of unbelief (e.g., Can God "harden" someone He at the same time desires to save? Can the sovereignty of God be maintained if the desires of God with respect to many are ultimately not fulfilled? Can there be a *desire* in God for all to be saved if there is no *cross* for all?)

3) How is the gospel always "triumphant" if many who hear it do not believe it (cf. II Cor. 2:14-17)? How is this an encouragement to us when in the preaching of the true gospel the multitudes continue to resist our preaching, and instead flock to the mega-church down the street?

3. Some believe... sort of (vv. 42, 43).

Many of the chief rulers believed on Jesus. However, they were afraid of being put out of the synagogue, and therefore they did not confess Jesus.

Was the faith of these rulers fake? Is it ever *possible* to believe on Jesus, and yet not to confess Him publicly (cf. Matt. 10:32, 33; Rom. 10:9, 10)? Is it ever *wise* to be silent about our faith?

How do we confess Jesus? How do we "walk the talk"?

4. To believe, or not to believe (vv. 44-50).

This passage is a summary and review of the authority and ministry of Jesus. We cannot be sure when Jesus said these words. Perhaps John, under the inspiration of the Spirit, compiled various statements Jesus had made all along regarding His ministry and authority, and was led to include them here in his account where is recorded the close of Jesus' public ministry. Certainly this remarkable summary of Jesus' credentials is to state very plainly just what it is to believe, or not to believe, on this the Son and Messiah of God!

Arthur Pink, in his commentary on John, notes how each verse of this passage has a reference to what Jesus had said earlier. Look these up for yourself:

| | |
|----------|-------------------------|
| John 12: | Other passages in John: |
| v. 44 | 5:24 |
| v. 45 | 8:19; 10:38 |
| v. 46 | 8:12; 9:5 |
| v. 47 | 5:45; 3:17 |
| v. 48 | 3:18 |
| v. 49 | 5:30; 7:16; 8:26-28 |
| v. 50 | 3:11; 5:32; 8:55 |

How in this passage does Jesus once more affirm that His authority and ministry are of God? Why is not believing on such a One condemnation, and why is believing on such a One life everlasting?

In this passage Jesus equates believing on Him with "seeing" Him and "receiving" His words. Unbelief is equated with "not seeing" Jesus and "not receiving" His words, but instead "rejecting" Jesus and His words. What do these equations say of faith and unbelief?

John 12:47 states that Jesus did not come to judge the world, but to save it (cf. 3:17). Other places speak of judgment being appointed to the Son: 5:22, 27; 8:16, 26. And Jesus says in John 9:39: "For judgment I have come into this world." How do these statements harmonize?

5. Perspective (John 20:31).

In referring to Isaiah 6 as evi-

dence of the kind of judicial hardening which was going on through Jesus' own ministry, John 12:41 tells us that Isaiah saw "his glory." The reference is clearly to Jesus. When Isaiah saw the Lord, Jehovah, sitting in all His glory on the throne, high and lifted up (Isaiah 6:1-4), Isaiah saw Jesus! What does this say of Jesus?

What do you say of Jesus? How

do we *show* we believe in Him, God of glory revealed, God of our salvation?

Dear reader: *believe!* Believe entirely in Jesus. Rejoice and be glad through faith in Him. He is salvation and everlasting life!

Believe *just* in Jesus!

At the time of my writing this (December 25, 1997) there is talk on the radio and in the press, and also among the clerics and

churches, of acceptance of all kinds of religion. There is truly "no room in the inn" for the Jesus who declares that to believe in Him is to be saved, and to believe not in Him is to be damned.... Here them soliloquize, and then pontificate: "To be or not to be ... tolerant. That is the question."

Enter Antichrist. Exit Truth. □

Contending for the Faith

Rev. B. Woudenberg

A Brief Declaration of Principles

And be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

I Peter 3:15

On looking at the *Brief Declaration of Principles*, which was drawn up by the Protestant Reformed synod in 1950, one might wonder at its claim to be "brief." In its original form it appeared as a full pamphlet by itself, and one reading it today goes through a full 24 pages of very solid material as it appears in our present book of church order. But this is misleading; for the actual *Declaration* is in itself quite brief, with its appearance of length being due to the fact that all its supporting references to the confessions are printed out in full. That, after all, was its purpose. The *Declaration* was intended simply to point out certain confessional principles which must be observed in setting forth any acceptable view of the covenant. And in doing so

it designated—if we may go back and pick up a rather ancient term—our *loci communes*, or what might more loosely be called our "places of communion."

The expression *loci communes* is Latin, and translates literally, "common places." It was, in Reformation days, used to indicate what was considered to be a basic element in the practice of "dialectics." Dialectics was a form of reasoning or study through which understanding of a subject was developed through the exchange of ideas, or dialogue. Few have expressed its basic idea more distinctly than did Rev. Hoeksema once, many years ago, while preaching about the men on the road to Emmaus. He brought out how, after Jesus had joined them on the way, they made mention of the things which had happened at Jerusalem, to which Jesus replied, Luke 24:18, "What things?" At that point Rev. Hoeksema remarked: "That is the basic principle of pedagogy (sound teaching method —

BW): Listen! Take my advice. When talking with others, whether they agree with you or disagree, let them talk! This is the fundamental principle of all good pedagogy." And he did that himself. When teaching, whether in the seminary classroom or in the adult catechism class which he taught throughout his ministry, he was always distinctly interested in what those he was teaching had to ask or say. In fact, even in his preaching, he always spoke as one closely attuned to the minds and understanding of those to whom he spoke. He always expressed himself in such a way that the ordinary hearer could understand and benefit from what he had to say. And that was the idea of *loci communes*. They were the ideas or places which were held in common, and thus, from which deeper understanding could be developed.

In such unity, as we saw in our last article, is found the essence of a Christian church and a true denomination. These are not just so-

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cial institutions which serve to bring people together. A church is a spiritual body joined together in a common faith with a united conviction, founded on the teachings of the Word of God.

Thus our origin as Protestant Reformed Churches had been in a common conviction as to the importance of the doctrine of predestination as set forth and defended in our confessions, and particularly in the Canons of Dordt. Through the years this doctrine had often been under attack; and in 1924 a major compromise of it was set forth in the Three Points of common grace. And, because of his refusal to accept this compromise, Rev. Hoeksema was deposed from his office in the CRC, and with his followers formed the Protestant Reformed Churches, joined together in their common commitment to the distinctively Reformed doctrines of grace. It was thus in a very real, practical way that our commitment to these doctrines constituted our *loci communes*, without which there would have been no valid grounds for leaving our mother church; and it had continued to be so through the early years of our existence.

But then Schilder came a second time, and through the course of events had an opportunity to visit almost individually with each of our pastors; and things began to change. For the first dissonant sounds of objection were heard against our past insistence on these doctrines, together with a growing cry for more "practical" preaching. Quietly at first, but with growing insistence, it was claimed that, as long as one voiced agreement with the confessions, he should be free to pursue his own thoughts wherever they might lead. And the result was there to be felt: that unity which had before bound our churches was crumbling, and the tension of diverse and conflicting ideas pulled at the hearts of our people. Clearly something had to be done; and the occasion arose of

itself when the request came from the mission field for a declaration as to where our churches actually stood. And so our *Brief Declaration of Principles* was born, a clear and concise statement, not so much of a covenant doctrine, but of the limitation which our confessions require of us, briefly set forth in three concise statements—to which a fourth was added relating to a matter of church government.

The first of these looked to our origin, pointing out the familiar principles upon which our churches were founded—together with ample supporting quotations from the confessions. Briefly it said of the Protestant Reformed Churches:

I. They repudiate the errors of the Three Points adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, 1924, which maintain:

A. That there is a grace of God to all men, including the reprobate, manifest in the common gifts to all men.

B. That the preaching of the gospel is a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all that externally hear the gospel.

C. That the natural man through the influence of common grace can do good in this world.

D. Over against this they maintain:

1. That the grace of God is always particular, i.e., only for the elect, never for the reprobate.

2. That the preaching of the gospel is not a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all men, nor a conditional offer to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, to all that are baptized, but an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith.

3. That the unregenerate man is totally incapable of doing any good, wholly depraved, and therefore can only sin.

Here, in few words, the *Declaration* outlined the faults of the Three

Points of common grace, and over against them those principles of the Reformed faith to which we had held from our origin. There was no question about them. Everyone knew what they said; but there was reason to point them out once more with their confessional base. No one should be left free to forget them, or to conclude that these principles are simply a matter of individual eccentricity. In fact, so convincingly had they been set forth that Dr. Schilder himself had come to acknowledge the validity of what they expressed—although whether in the same way we did has never been clearly established. And the reiteration of this all once again laid the foundation for what was to follow.

From there, the *Declaration* went on to point out an even more basic foundation which required us to take the position we did. It brought to the fore the theme of the Canons of Dordt, upon which all who are Reformed are expected to stand:

II. They teach on the basis of the same confessions:

A. That election, which is the unconditional and unchangeable decree of God to redeem in Christ a certain number of persons, is the sole cause and fountain of all our salvation, whence flow all the gifts of grace, including faith.

B. That Christ died only for the elect and that the saving efficacy of the death of Christ extends to them only.

C. That faith is not a prerequisite or condition unto salvation, but a gift of God, and a God-given instrument whereby we appropriate the salvation in Christ.

These were the truths we had fought for from our beginning; and the point of them was to prove particularly disturbing to Dr. Schilder, as well as to those among us who were drawn to follow him. A common resentment was growing against the idea "that election ... is the sole cause and fountain of all

our salvation." This lies, of course, at the heart of the Canons, as the supporting confessional quotations brought out; but it had never been an easily accepted truth, and efforts had always been there to hedge it in. There was another factor brought here to the fore that was even more irritating. It pointed to the insistence of the confessions that as election is unconditional, so must be the salvation which comes from it; and the use of that term *unconditional* had become increasingly the point of the whole debate.

And so the *Declaration* drove its point home:

III. Seeing then that this is the clear teaching of our confession,

A. We repudiate:

1. The teaching:

a. That the promise of the covenant is conditional and for all that are baptized.

b. That we may presuppose that all the children that are baptized are regenerated, for we know on the basis of Scripture, as well as in the light of all history and experience, that the contrary is true.

2. The teaching that the promise of the covenant is an objective bequest on the part of God, giving to every baptized child the right to Christ and all the blessings of salvation.

B. And we maintain:

1. That God surely and infallibly fulfills His promise to the elect.

2. The sure promise of God which He realizes in us as rational and moral creatures not only makes it impossible that we should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness but also confronts us with the obligation of love, to walk in a new and holy life, and constantly to watch unto prayer. All those who are not thus disposed, who do not repent but walk in sin, are the objects of His just wrath and excluded from the kingdom of heaven. That the preaching comes to all; and that God seriously commands to faith and repentance; and that to all those who come and believe He promises life and peace.

3. That the ground of infant

baptism is the command of God and the fact that according to Scripture He established His covenant in the line of continued generations.

Here, so quickly, and with a clear and concise logic, the *Declaration* makes application of the Reformed doctrine that God has from eternity appointed His salvation for a particularly chosen people to the doctrine of the covenant. Neither through the means of conditionality or presupposition can this be generalized to all, even when applied to those baptized into the church. The decision as to who are finally to enter into the life of the covenant is only God's. Nevertheless, at the same time it made clear that this never comes to be without the living of a godly life and fulfillment of covenant responsibilities. God is not mocked, and only those who live a godly life shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.

And then, finally, almost in passing, the *Declaration* laid down one last point:

IV. Besides, the Protestant Reformed Churches: Believe and maintain the autonomy of the local church.

This was not in itself a problem; it was just that it formed the one area between us of real agreement. It was that point of church government, the misuse of which had affected us both. In the same way that we had been cast out in 1924, the Liberated had been cast out in 1944; and thus it was the area in which, more than any other, we were drawn together. It was that starting point at which we had hoped to start an enduring relationship; and it was to be remembered as the common ground upon which future relationships would have to be built if there was to be any hope of still working together as time went on.

That was it. Not by any means a spelling out of a doctrine of the covenant — although we did have

a very distinct one with which we had worked for many years, and of which we were very fond — but simply *A Brief Declaration of Principles* which we believed were clearly spelled out in our confessions, and which should be observed by all who sought to teach and influence within the Protestant Reformed Churches.

And yet, there were two other things, by way of introduction and application, which should be considered.

One was the paragraph with which the *Declaration* was introduced, reading:

To be used only by the Mission Committee and the missionaries for the organization of prospective churches on the basis of Scripture and the confessions as these have always been maintained in the Protestant Reformed Churches and as these are now further explained in regard to certain principles.

This *Declaration* arose out of a particular mission situation, and it was not intended to be used more broadly than that. It was on the mission field that we had been asked repeatedly as to whether the Protestant Reformed Churches had a position on the covenant; and its answer was only, in effect, that these principles laid down by our confessions must be observed. But it had become more than that, for it touched upon the very thing that was causing deep division within our churches. It immediately implied that the covenant could not be for every child baptized in the church, and could not be conditional. This the *Declaration* very clearly was designed to underline.

The other was that this *Declaration* was not to be finally adopted until it had been passed on for consideration to all of the churches. Nothing was to be imposed on the churches without their having an opportunity to speak to it. But even more, the time had come when it had to be determined whether our own Protestant Re-

formed Churches were all still willing to meet this criteria; for it would be of no use to require of others what we were not willing

to meet ourselves. And it was at this point that the *Declaration* was to serve its greatest purpose, for it would bring out how great the fragmentation had become through

our contact with Dr. Schilder and those that followed him. The way was to be hard and difficult, but one that had to be undertaken. □

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Jason Kortering

Mission Enthusiasm, A Self-Analysis

The *Standard Bearer* staff invited me to contribute three more articles. Rather than busy ourselves, in these articles, with happenings here in Southeast Asia, which we try to cover in our regular newsletters, I will venture into the important subject of zeal for missions. The spirit of this article is not careless and sweeping criticism of our churches' attitude toward missions, but rather a somewhat careful examination of where we stand in this important subject of true enthusiasm for missions. I would like to follow up this article with another two, the next one on the importance of viewing missions not as a luxury but a duty which we have from none other than our Lord Himself, and the final one on how to stimulate our zeal by seizing upon the opportunities we have and working at it as the Lord allows.

All during the years of our churches' existence, we have been accused, in one way or another, of lacking in missions. Generally this criticism has come in two forms. There are those who look at our record of missions and say that we do very little in missions. And there are those who add, no wonder the

PRC does not do much in missions, their theology hinders them from doing mission work. Missionary Tom Miersma is busy addressing the latter in the *Standard Bearer*. I will try to focus on the former.

My conclusion is that there is some justification for the criticism that the PRC have failed in this area in the past. The root cause for this is lack of mission enthusiasm.

These words are not intended in any way to be public criticism of our pastors, professors, and missionaries. They are not written to find fault with our past synodical decisions. They are written more as an opportunity for self-examination. In writing these words, I focus first of all upon myself. My involvement as a pastor for some 37 years in local congregations, serving on denominational mission committees, functioning as delegate to classis and synod, means that I was no better than anyone else who reads this article. I call on my fellow church leaders to join me in examining ourselves in this regards.

Is it true that we lacked mission zeal in the past and struggle with it today?

Mission is the Gospel for the Lost

With this heading we focus immediately on the difficulty. In bringing the gospel to anyone out-

side of the confines of our established local congregations, we cannot ourselves determine to whom we will direct it. Mission work, outreach ministry, church extension, call it what you will, is bringing the gospel to those outside of our congregation. Ultimately, it is God who determines where He will send it in His good pleasure. But even though we cannot choose for ourselves the audience, our methods will be influenced by our intention as to who it is that we are trying to reach with the gospel. The most obvious example of this is the way in which the message is prepared. This applies both to the content of the message and to the language which is used in delivering that message. If we have in mind to include the lost (non-Christians), the message will focus on basics and will be written in simple style, including details as to the proper response to the good news of the gospel.

Objectively speaking, and I admit this subject is fraught with emotional reactions, we can certainly conclude that our churches have done very little toward bringing the gospel to the lost. All we need do is survey the material available and learn how unsuitable it is for reaching the non-Christian. We have many pamphlets and books on important subjects con-

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cerning Christian faithfulness, but nothing to my knowledge on how one may become a Christian in the first place. I have reflected upon our work in Isabel, South Dakota. I was involved to some degree in that work from the very start. While we were in Hull, Iowa we were involved as a near church. I sat on the Mission Committee dealing with Isabel. It is interesting to me now, that to my knowledge no work was directed to the native American Indians right there. There may have been some local effort, but as a denomination we did not discuss *how* we might reach them with the gospel. Did any of us pastors bring the gospel to Amos-Walks-Quietly who lived next door to the parsonage?

The point I want to raise is that it was not an issue of opportunity, it was a lack of mission consciousness and a burden for the lost. I am ashamed before God that I personally did not carry in my heart a burden for that man. Am I the exception, or was this common among us. If this is true among us as pastors, what do we expect of our people? I look back at some of the congregations in which I have served. Almost every one had a member with a burden for reaching out to the lost. Some suggested that we ought to have a Vacation Bible School and invite unchurched neighbors. Others said we ought to have a prison ministry. Some expressed a desire for a pamphlet they could use to hand to non-Christian workers around them. In every one of these instances, I did nothing to help. Again, I am ashamed before God. Yes, I said then, I am a pastor, I have enough work to do with my sheep, and it was painfully true. But when I examine myself now, I see that it also was a convenient excuse not to deal with an area that I felt terribly unprepared to face and for which I could get precious little help.

Mission work is bringing the gospel to the lost. That is the heart of all mission work. I trust I don't

have to press this point for now. We can examine this a bit more in our next article. We must agree that this after all is what missions is all about. The lost are everywhere, and they present themselves in many ways. It is most dramatic in our Singapore situation, where we live in the midst of obvious idolatry and heathen religions. The American scene is changing as well. Some of the lost are the generations who have been removed from the gospel by the actions of unfaithful parents or grandparents. They are just as lost as the Buddhist or Hindu. Some are lost when they think they are Christians but are not, something even more deceitful. Add to that mixture the great influx into America of people from almost every country who take with them their own native religions, and we can say we are surrounded with all sorts of people who are lost in sin and have not Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. They are here in Singapore and by you in America, Europe, Australia, and every country under the sun.

Our problem is not opportunity, it is rather the lack of zeal and burden for the lost. If we have a true burden, we will also find a way to do missions and have the necessary funds and manpower as well. Godly zeal will move us to cry to God to meet this need.

Understanding Vs. Excuses

In writing these words, I am not attempting to belittle the history of our churches or ignore the contrast between Singapore and America. If I should do this, I would be very unfair to myself and our churches. I have a desire that someone make a careful study of our history regarding missions. I am sure it would be a worthwhile contribution to our self-analysis. Obviously, I cannot do this in this brief article. Neither can I do it with my work responsibilities now. Herein lies the danger as well: over-simplification of issues can do

more harm than good. I do not want that to happen, for my love for our churches and the cause of the gospel among us is deeply written in my heart.

Yes, there are many factors which contribute to our present status regarding missions. The most obvious is that in our history we have had to focus on church reformation. This was true in the beginning of our churches' existence, it continued when we had to defend it from those who would take it away in the 1950s. Our special place in the general church world was to defend and develop the truth of God's sovereignty, especially as it related to the preaching of the gospel. This continues to this day and serves as an important focus of our attention.

As we ourselves mature and develop as a Reformed church (and I do not use the word mature in a derogatory way), we should see that what at one time required much attention and to some degree continues to demand attention must not cause us to lose our balance as to the main purpose of our existence. We must not only preserve the gospel preaching in its proper form (deny the well-meant offer of the gospel and teach the proper call of the gospel), we must actually do the preaching. This relates both to the local congregation and to the mission field. We must demonstrate to the church world at large that we are able not only to articulate the call of the gospel in our understanding and teaching, but in our practice as well. I fear that our focus on defense may sometimes inhibit our actual practice. If we can be objective enough to take a look at ourselves, we might understand why so many over all these years continue to accuse our churches of not doing mission work. It is a fact that we have done little and are doing little to bring this precious gospel to the lost.

I thank God that our understanding of the covenant has de-

veloped as it has in our churches, homes, and schools. This has demanded huge amounts of energy, money, and manpower. Our churches have untold blessings in this area, and we can properly say to the world, look at us, we practice what we believe in the area of God's covenant. This is unique, and in this way we surely stand forth as a wonderful example to the church world. It is the envy of the Singaporeans who visit our churches in America. Again, as we mature and develop, we must not be so self-focused and covenant orientated that it becomes an obsession for *all* our efforts. It is time now for us to reach out and take others into our churches so that they can enjoy firsthand the blessings God has given to us as we put into practice what we believe. By the grace of God there is much now that makes the gospel which we preach attractive even as it is practiced among us.

The efforts to defend and advance the true understanding of the gospel and to put into practice the covenant implications have taken much of our time, money, and manpower. We are a small number of churches and cannot do everything. It is amazing that interspersed in all these past activities was mission effort as God gave us opportunity to do it. Almost all of it was directed to other Christians and churches with the urgent call to embrace the truth as we professed it. God used this as a mighty testimony and, thanks be to Him, He continues to do this more and more throughout the world.

These explanations must not serve as an excuse not to do mission work. I firmly believe that God has a purpose for our churches including, besides all this important activity, mission outreach to the lost. We must honestly examine ourselves to determine whether these considerations have been in the past and are now serving as excuses that we do not need to do mission work. Do we include in our

priority of work which Christ has given us as churches to do, mission work among the lost? Unless we say yes to this, we fail our Lord in this important area.

The Need for Leadership

Enthusiasm is very subjective and almost impossible to measure. It might be more useful to ask ourselves, do our priorities indicate lack of enthusiasm for missions. Could we be doing more work in missions without jeopardizing the important work we are now doing already. I do not propose answers to these important questions. I only ask that we think about them and discuss them among ourselves. I do know that we need leadership in this important area.

1. Our seminary is lacking in teaching missions. This is no reflection upon our present professors. It reflects upon our circumstances. We do not have the advantage of a special department of missions with a detailed curriculum or a professor who is experienced in mission work, something which is almost required. If we cannot provide thorough training in missions, where do we go for it? Besides this, what generates enthusiasm for missions among our clergy? It will come from a seminary which stimulates them and challenges them to consider reaching out to the lost, whether in the local congregation or the mission field. I never had this, and it hurt my ministry. I wish that all our students could have what I have now in my old age. Can we do something about this on the seminary level? I am aware of the activity of inviting guest lecturers in the area of missions, assigning the reading of mission books, even internships in mission fields. This is going in the right direction. I just encourage more of it so that our seminary may serve as a catalyst for this important work as it does in the other areas of ministry.

2. Unless we *do* mission work among the lost, we will never learn

how to do it. It is just because of this that we do not have a professor who can teach missions from experience. Generally, seminaries use men who have served in the mission field for some 15-20 years and then engage in further specialized study in order to teach missions. The missionaries we have had in the past served only a few years in any given field. And some were already near retirement. We need to get some young man (family) involved in missions so that he can be considered for leadership responsibilities later on. We must think of missions as a calling for life, not just another pastorate. We must look at fields as lifelong places of labor, or we will continue to make mistakes. From my perspective, just when we were making some progress in Jamaica (our synod decided to focus on the cities and not limit our work to the hill people, something which never took place), we lost the will to continue. We must get over the frustration of missions and get to work. Our churches will never make progress unless we practice doing it. Too often, our sincere efforts and shortcomings are used as excuses not to work at all.

3. We could improve on the financing of missions. Often, if any program gets chopped from the synodical budget, it is a mission program. Rather than bemoaning that fact, it seems to me we would do well to allow our people voluntarily to contribute to more mission projects and raise funds for some missions other than through the so-called "budget." We could, for example, adopt at synod a mission project in the Philippines and have the Foreign Mission Committee supervise the work there. We could approve various stages of work and approve their activity but condition some of them upon the FMC raising the necessary funds from the people. This will keep the synodical budget down to manageable levels and allow our people to contribute voluntarily to mission work

as they are able. Synod could even set some guidelines how these funds can be raised.

4. We can work harder in our churches, homes, and schools to stimulate mission work. Parents, teachers, as well as preachers, have a wonderful opportunity to encourage our children and youth to consider the lost. I am impressed with the willingness of the youth of the church here to reach out to their lost friends. We pray about this at catechism class and youth meetings. They are sensitive to this. PRC children have the advantage of covenant protection. But the

limitation of this for missions is that the next generation of youth will be as introverted as we are if we do not help them. We must address this lack and sensitize them to have a burden for the lost. Mission programs and reading of mission books will help. I am glad to see that some of our schools are working on this. My wife and I receive letters from some of the students. This is good, and we must think of more ways to help them learn how to have a burden for the lost and how to witness to them when they have opportunity.

In conclusion, I want to ask you

to think of an inconsistency which creeps in among us. We correctly say, Arminianism is "another gospel." We say that the gospel has been preached to almost all nations under heaven. We thank God that the Reformed churches have been part of this wonderful work. More has been done by Arminian churches. As believers, convicted of the Reformed faith, may God stir us up that we increase in our labors of bringing the gospel to the lost.

How enthused are you? In your opinion, are we doing enough for them? □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

School Activities

During this past Christmas season many of our schools took up special collections for various important and worthwhile outside causes. The Student Council of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI decided again to have a food drive for needy families in their churches. The staff of Hope PR Christian School in Grand Rapids took up a collection for the Books for Needy Servants Fund. This fund has been set up for the Singapore/Myanmar Missionary cause. The students at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI were encouraged to give to a collection taken for the science programs of the Hull PR Christian School and Northwest Iowa PR Christian School. And profits from a hot lunch at Thanksgiving at Loveland Christian School in Loveland, CO were sent to Faith Christian School in Randolph, WI for use in their library.

Of course, not all gifts around the holidays have to be monetary. The students of two classes of Covenant Christian School in Lynden, WA spent some time in December visiting the residents of the Christian Health Care Center. This practice of bringing students to the Rest Home began in 1996 and will continue throughout this school year as well. It seems that each

classroom takes part of one day each month and goes to the Rest Home to sing songs of praise to God for the elderly residents, as well as do a hands-on activity with them, such as cookie decorating or an old-fashioned spelling bee.

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of our Kalamazoo, MI PRC plans to host a number of fund-raisers in the next several months in order to help pay for a trip which they are planning to take at a future date to the mission field in Pittsburgh, PA. The first of these fund-raisers was scheduled to be a night of praise and fellowship at church on December 12. The young people were looking for volunteers from their congregation who would be willing to present a sacred song, an instrumental number, poem, or something of that nature at that program.

A special word of commendation has to go out to the Senior Young People's Society of our Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. This group of young people hosted, and were the driving force behind a program on November 21 which featured the special needs children of our West Michigan churches. I was unable to attend that program, but what I have heard about it makes me envy those who were there. From all accounts it was a very spiritual program and well worth the time and effort of parents and young people alike.

The Young People of the Edgerton, MN PRC hosted a Christ-

mas Singapiration for their congregation and the members of our Hull and Doon, IA congregations on December 21.

Congregational Activities

At a December 10 Congregational Meeting, the members of our Trinity PRC in Houston, TX adopted the motion to disband in the year 1998 unless there is a significant change in their membership in the coming year. Their consistory presented this motion and now plans to bring the results to Classis West in March for their approval. If indeed Trinity does disband, it would be at the latest by December 31 of this year. Again your prayers are requested and needed as Trinity faces this difficult prospect.

The deacons and Helping Hands Committee of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI coordinated a food drive this past holiday season for needy families in their church.

The congregation of the First PRC in Holland, MI has given their council the go-ahead to investigate the building of a parsonage along with the building of their new church sanctuary.

In a new church building update from our Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL, we find that their council approved a perk test if needed on their new church property, and they also directed their building committee to secure the services of an architect.

Minister Activities

The consistory of the South Holland, IL PRC announced a new trio con-

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

sisting of Revs. A. Brummel and G. VanBaren and Candidate D. Kleyn. On January 7, they called Rev. VanBaren.

Rev. Heys, one of our churches' emeriti ministers, remains in the Christian Rest Home in Hudsonville, MI. As I write this, he is stable but still sick with pneumonia and very weak. Pray for him, his family, and all our emeriti ministers. □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On February 5, 1998, the Lord willing, our parents,

MINARD and CORA VANDEN TOP, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. There is no greater blessing for a covenant child than to have parents who love, instruct, and admonish them in the fear of God's name. We are grateful that God has given such parents to us, and has spared them for us these many years. They truly have been an example of faithful perseverance in the truth to their children and grandchildren. May God bless and keep them safe in the time He has yet to give them together.

"The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:5, 6).

- * Jerry and Karen VanDenTop
 - * John and Judy Bouma
 - * Duane and Beverly Netten
 - * Henry and Marlene VanDenTop
- 17 Grandchildren
7 Great Grandchildren

Doon, Iowa

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary-Martha Society of Hope PRC in Redlands express their sincere sympathy to fellow member Betty Ekema and her family in the loss of her husband, and to Audrey VanVoorthuysen and family in the loss of her brother-in-law,

MR. JOHN EKEMA.

May they find comfort in these words: "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait I say, on the Lord" (Psalm 27:14).

Pastor A. denHartog, Pres.
JoAnn Pastoor, Sec.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On February 12, 1998

MR. and MRS. MILO DEWALD

will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary, D.V.

We thank God for them, and the instruction they have given us. We thank God for preserving them these many years and pray He will give them many more together.

"O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever" (Psalm 136:1).

- * Randy and Julie Huizinga
Jared
- * Steven and Carla Hunt
Jeffrey and Michelle

Jenison, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On February 13, 1998

PETER and EUNICE BOER

will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary.

We thank our heavenly Father for them, and for the guidance and instruction we received from them. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." We also thank our parents for their love for each other and their Christian marriage.

- * Ken and Myrna Boer
- * Lewis and Janet DeJong
- * Gary and Beth Visscher
- * Dennis and Joan Boer
- * Bruce and Kim Boer
- * Kel and Lisa TenBrooke
- * Geoff and Sherri Penna
- * Jason Boer

18 grandchildren

Barculo, Michigan

NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee Secretary, Mr. Larry Meulenberg (Phone: 616-453-8466). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 16, 1998, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Larry Meulenberg, Secretary

SB INDEX!!

Reminder: Deadline for ordering the 2-volume subject/title/textual index to the 73 bound volumes of the SB is the end of February. (See January 1 issue for details.)

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Loveland PRC extend their sympathy to Elder Robert Brands and his family in the death of his mother,

MRS. DOROTHY BRANDS.

May God graciously comfort and encourage in the knowledge that death is itself the entrance to everlasting glory and life. "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15).

Rev. G. VanBaren, Pres.

Warren Bonzelaar, General Adjunct

NOTICE!!!

Classis West of the PRC will be hosted by the Trinity PRC in Houston, TX on Wednesday, March 4, 1998 at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. An officebearers' conference is also planned for Tuesday, March 3. All meetings will be held at the J-Bar-J Guest Ranch in Sealy, Texas. All delegates or visitors in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Trinity's consistory, Mr. Ben Hopkins, 5368 Franz Rd., Katy, TX 77493, phone: (281) 391-2368.

Rev. Steven Key, Stated Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to William and Alice Joostens and family in the death of her father,

MR. HERMAN HOLWERDA.

We pray that they may find comfort in God's Word, "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them" (Psalm 145:17-19).

Rev. A. Spriensma, Pres.

Cornelius R. Jonker, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Ladies Society of Hull PRC express their deepest Christian sympathy to our fellow member, Mrs. Egbert Gritters, in the death of her mother,

MRS. DOROTHY BRANDS.

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13b).

Rev. R. Moore, President

Karen Andringa, Sec'y.