



The Standard Bearer

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

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**Vol. 74, No. 13
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The Chief of Sinners

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

I Timothy 1:18

A faithful saying.

Just as we teach our small children in their catechism lessons that "Jesus came to save His people from their sins," so the early church of the new dispensation had certain favorite expressions, such as, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." The apostle Paul puts a divine seal on this statement as a faithful, fully trustworthy saying. It is the gospel, the glad tidings of salvation revealed to us in the Scriptures. The Father sent His Son, and the Son came into our world of sin and death, to save us unto eternal life. There is no other name under heaven whereby we can be saved.

Paul adds that this glad tidings is worthy of all acceptance, to be embraced in faith, to be appropri-

ated as part and parcel of our souls. Let us take that truth to heart and live by it!

As he does so, his own soul is overwhelmed with the very thought. How very much that glorious gospel of the blessed God (I Tim. 1:11) means to the apostle personally! He adds, as if opening his heart to us: "Of whom I am chief."



I am chief.

That expression has an entirely different connotation for us, as we are by nature. We want to be chief. In fact, ever since the fall of our first parents in the garden of Eden, we want to be independent, to make a name for ourselves. We want to be as God, to decide for ourselves what is right or wrong, what is good or bad, what we may do or may not do.

Sinful pride fills the souls of mankind. Nations go to war, churches are torn by heresy and dissension, families are brought to

ruin, so that home life is at a premium, basically because of this sinful pride, the big I, everyone seeking himself in rebellion against the living God.

That characterizes the history of this world. The full manifestation of this sin appears in the man of sin, who exalts himself and sits on the throne as if he were God.

The Pharisee in us stands in the temple praying within ourselves, reminding ourselves, that we are not like other men, and we also have some person in mind. Like Cain we present God with our gifts, or we recount all our good deeds, with which we think God should be well pleased.

No, we will not admit that we are proud, but we do seek what is to our advantage. We do have big ambitions for ourselves. The world could use more people like us. When some member of the church falls into sin, the thought arises in our minds, I would not do a thing like that—little realizing that we

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have not been confronted with the same temptation or in the same measure that that person was.

It is only by the grace of God that we learn to plead, "O God, be merciful to me, *the sinner*."

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Paul, the chief of sinners?

Did he not realize what kind of people walk our streets, threaten our lives, disturb the peace of the community, and fill our jails?

Was he not aware of the Hitlers and all the others in places of power and authority that in wicked pride are striving to establish their own kingdom or to make a name for themselves?

Was he not aware of the corruption in the world that today has developed to the misuse of liquor and drugs, the murder of the unborn, rape, mass murders, suicides, robberies, and numerous other crimes?

He certainly was. For in this same chapter of his epistle to Timothy he speaks of the lawless and disobedient, the ungodly and sinners, the unholy and profane, murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, manslayers, they that defile themselves with mankind, menstealers, liars, perjured persons, and others who are contrary to sound doctrine (I Tim. 1:9, 10).

He could speak from his own experience how he suffered at the hands of wicked men for the sake of the gospel. Of the Jews five times he received forty stripes save one. Three times he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned. He was in perils of robbers, in perils of his own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils among false brethren (II Cor. 11:24-26).

Yet, in spite of all that, he maintained that of all sinners he was the worst.

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We must not misunderstand the apostle.

He does not say: Of whom I *was* the chief.

Paul is not referring only to his life before the Lord spoke to him on the way to Damascus.

It is true that years afterward Paul was still keenly aware of his past sins. Just previous to this he had said: "... who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." In I Corinthians 15:9 he says: "I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." He also refers to himself as the least of all the saints.

Yet here, fully aware of the mercies of God, he still speaks of himself as the chief of sinners. Not: I was, but rather: I am.

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Of all sinners I am the chief!

He knows himself in his sin and misery as no one else but he and God knows him.

In fact, he knows himself as he knows no one else. Certainly he is aware of all the sinful deeds of wicked men who live out their evil lives round about him. But he is keenly aware that he is "carnal, sold under sin." He goes on to say, "For I know that in me, (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I know not. For the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not that I do." And then: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

To which he adds: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" And in the next chapter follows his beautiful song of triumph over sin and death, which ends in that powerful confession: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

Yes, the same apostle who refers to himself as the chief of sinners, and means every word of it, also makes bold to say, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). Or even: "For I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." And: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

This is not a dualism, but it is the new man in Christ who triumphs over the old man of sin that wars in our flesh. The apostle knew the blessedness of the gospel message: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners!

That truth meant so much to him when he sat as a blind man in Damascus, realizing how blind he had been to his own sin. That never changed. In fact, throughout the years as he labored as an apostle of Jesus Christ he became ever more fully aware of his sin, the sin that warred in his members, his own wretchedness, and the wonder of grace that delivers him through the power of Jesus Christ, who sought and found him when he was lost. It is the grace that now preserved him unto the end.

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Paul, the worst of sinners?

When I read that I am compelled to say: Not so, but I. I myself am of all sinners the chief.

By the grace of God I still learn daily that "I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor."

I myself am depraved, corrupt, like an apple that is rotten at the core. In me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good. I am of myself incapable of any good and inclined to all evil. All my "good deeds" are nothing more than "glittering vices."

Obviously, from this follows that I am convinced that the righteous, holy God cannot possibly love me as I am in myself. How could He? That would be in conflict with His whole glorious, holy Being. I find my only comfort in the fact that God freely, sover-

eignly chose me in Christ Jesus. He loves me, not as I am in myself, but as He eternally sees me, a member of His elect family with our elder Brother Jesus Christ.

For me the particular atonement is an absolute necessity. Who or what can wash away the guilt of my sin? No one. Nothing. Only God could do that in Christ Jesus. The very God whom I so grievously offend with my sins is my only possible Redeemer! Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross not only atoned for sin, but also merited eternal life of those given to Him of the Father. God was in Christ reconciling the world (of His elect) unto Himself, not counting our sins against us.



Of no less importance to me is God's efficacious grace. Nothing else could save me, a sinner dead in trespasses and sin. God brought *renewal*, a new heart whereby He made me a new creature in Christ. He called me with an irresistible calling, dragging me, as it were, out of the darkness of my sin and death into His marvelous light. He gave me a living faith, whereby I have forgiveness and life eternal through Christ, my Lord.

How rich, how precious, is the glorious gospel that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, even such as I am.

That also means that I, of all men, should overflow with love to God and my neighbors, for he to whom much is forgiven loveth much. I can and must, by the grace of God, forgive those who trespass against me, even as I am forgiven.

My response must be: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits to me? I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord!"

What an amazing wonder of grace that I should be counted among the elect, God's saints, and have a place in His church and covenant now and forever!

Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift! □

Editorial

Where are the Theologians of the Cross?

This is the question that is unavoidably raised by the recent book, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Eerdmans, 1997).

In the book, Lutheran theologian Gerhard O. Forde gives a brief commentary on the 28 theological theses that Luther presented and defended at the Heidelberg Disputation in 1518. Forde's commentary is, with the exception of the criticism of the "third use of the law" (pp. 108, 109), faithful to the theology of Luther, indeed, remarkably so.

In addition to the commentary, the work is valuable simply in that it makes available Luther's 28 marvelous doctrinal propositions, in full.

Inasmuch as the subject of

Luther's theses was the defense of the theology of the cross against the theology of glory, this book opens up the heart of the theology of Martin Luther. Since the heart of Luther's theology was the theology of the Reformation, the book opens up the theology of the Reformation. It does so in a brief, clear, and polemical fashion.

The Heidelberg Disputation was convened on April 26, 1518, a mere six months after Luther's posting of the 95 theses. The Disputation was a direct result of the posting of the 95 theses. The pope had instructed the head of Luther's Augustinian order to silence the monk. vonStaupitz rather asked Luther to acquaint the Augustinians with his new, evangelical theology by means of a disputation on certain theses which Luther was to draw up.

Luther came to the meeting with 28 theological and 12 philosophical theses, or propositions. Each of the theological theses was followed by a brief explanation and defense. To the theses, Luther appended an "explanation" of the question, "Is the will of man outside the state of grace free or rather in bondage and captive?" This amounted to an important treatment of the fundamental theological issue of the freedom or bondage of the will of the natural man. The complete text of the theological and philosophical theses, of Luther's own explanation of the theological theses, and of the appendix on the bondage of the will is found in *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), pp. 39-70. (In this editorial, I will also be referring to Luther's own explanation

of his theses in this source, although it is not included in Forde's book, *On Being a Theologian*.)

It was at the Heidelberg Disputation that Martin Bucer was won to the cause of the Reformation, and captivated by Luther.

Gerhard Forde comments on the theological theses. These theses set forth Luther's beliefs concerning sin, the bondage of the human will, the inability of the unsaved man outside of Christ to perform any good work, and salvation by grace alone in the cross of Christ.

The theses, therefore, present the gospel.

In these theses, Luther spoke explicitly of the "theology of the cross," which he explicitly contrasted with the "theology of glory." Thesis 21 reads: "A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is." The theology of the cross is the biblical gospel of God's salvation of dead sinners out of mere grace only through the suffering and death of the cross of Jesus Christ. The theology of the cross not only rules out, but also curses all human worth, will, and working that would accomplish or account for the salvation of sinners, in whole or in part. Thesis 16 reads: "The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin so that he becomes doubly guilty."

In radical contrast and opposition, the theology of glory is the corruption of the biblical gospel, consisting of attributing to man some "little bit" (to use Forde's description) of cooperation with God in salvation. The glory that the theology of glory is concerned to preserve and promote is the natural glory of man. The theologians of glory are offended by the cross' exposure of man as utterly helpless in his own salvation and utterly hostile to the God who saves him. The theology of (man's) glory is pitted against the theology of

(God's) grace.

In an incisive analysis of the theology of glory and its workings, Forde writes:

A theology of glory ... operates on the assumption that what we need is optimistic encouragement, some flattery, some positive thinking, some support to build our self-esteem. Theologically speaking it operates on the assumption that we are not seriously addicted to sin, and that our improvement is both necessary and possible. We need a little boost in our desire to do good works. Of course our theologian of glory may well grant that we need the help of grace. The only dispute, usually, will be about the degree of grace needed. If we are a "liberal," we will opt for less grace and tend to define it as some kind of moral persuasion or spiritual encouragement. If we are more "conservative" and speak even of the depth of human sin, we will tend to escalate the degree of grace needed to the utmost. *But the hallmark of a theology of glory is that it will always consider grace as something of a supplement to whatever is left of human will and power. It will always, in the end, hold out for some free will* (p. 16; emphasis added).

Luther opposed the characteristic Roman Catholic form of the theology of glory: "Do what is in you, and God will reward you with grace and salvation." Basic to Rome's theology of glory was (and is) their doctrine of the freedom of the human will: the sinner has of himself the ability to choose God and salvation. Against the Roman Catholic theology of glory, therefore, Luther (in 1518!) laid down Thesis 13: "Free will, after the fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin."

Forde comments on Thesis 13:

This thesis was perhaps the most offensive of all to the papal party in Luther's day. That is indicated by the fact that it was the only one from this Disputation actually

attacked in the bull "*Exsurge Domine*" threatening Luther with excommunication. Luther's reply to the bull indicates how important he considered this thesis to be. He said it was "the highest and most important issue of our cause" (p. 53).

Central to Luther's theology of the cross was justification by faith alone. Luther expressed this doctrine in Thesis 25: "He is not righteous who works much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ."

Very definitely and prominently "looming in the background," as Forde puts it, "always is the troublesome question of predestination." In its repudiation of free will, Forde points out, the theology of the cross unmistakably proclaims that "we are saved by divine election." "The cross itself is the evidence that we did not choose him but that he, nevertheless, chose us (John 15:16)" (pp. 50, 51).

Against the truth of predestination, which is fundamental to the theology of the cross, Forde notes,

the protest is always raised, "We aren't puppets, are we? If everything happens by divine will, how can we be held responsible? We just can't accept such a God! There *must* be some freedom of choice!"

This is always the protest *by the theologian of glory*. Thus he identifies himself. He is flushed from his cover by the theology of the cross. As Forde observes,

the point is that this kind of protest is precisely the proof of the pudding. It is evidence of theologians of glory at work defending themselves to the end. They actually admit that they cannot and will not "will" God to be God (p. 51).

Forde calls attention to the fact that, although some translations of the theses that Luther argued at the

Heidelberg Disputation speak of the "theology of the cross" and the "theology of glory," Luther actually spoke of the "theologian of the cross" and the "theologian of glory." Luther was referring to the church's preachers and professors. He meant to stress the responsibility of the church's teachers.

In light of this, it is fitting to note that theologians of the cross are rare today, exceedingly rare. A theologian of the cross, according to Luther in Theses 9 and 10, judges all works done "without Christ" as "dead" and as "mortal sin." In his own defense of the theology of the cross, Luther condemned as sin, and nothing but sin, every work done by unbelievers:

"Every one who commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). How is it possible that a slave of the devil and a captive of the sin he serves can do anything else but sin? How can he do a work of light who is in darkness? How can he do the work of a wise man who is a fool? How can he do the work of a healthy person who is ill? ... Therefore all things which he does are works of the devil, works of sin, works of darkness, works of folly.... Everything that does not proceed from faith is a mortal and damnable sin (*Luther's Works*, vol. 31, pp. 65, 67).

This exposes the common grace theologians in Calvinist churches, who approve and laud the works of unbelievers as good and righteous. Outside of Christ, according to the flattering theory of common grace, is something, even much, that is not killed, accused, judged, and condemned by the law of God, contrary to the confession of Luther in Thesis 23.

Theologians of glory!

The vast majority of Protestant preachers, missionaries, and professors openly hold with Rome in adorning the sinner with a glorious free will and in making this free will decisive in the sinner's salvation.

"So to defend themselves," says Forde,

theologians of glory are always driven to claim at least some freedom of choice and to play theological games, bargaining for little bits. In one way or another the claim is made that the will must have at least a small part to play (pp. 49, 50).

The theological game that many play today, *exactly as in Luther's day*, is to concede that "without grace the will (can) do nothing to merit eternal salvation" and to acknowledge that we are saved by grace. But immediately they add that "the will must at least desire and prepare for grace" (p. 50).

In his appendix to the theses that he brought to Heidelberg in 1518, an appendix that proved that "the will of man outside the state of grace" is "in bondage and captive," Luther himself passed a devastating judgment upon the theology—the "gospel," the teaching, the message—of the preachers who make the grace of God depend on anything at all in the sinner, particularly the sinner's will:

Such teachers attribute nothing to the grace of God except a certain embellishment of our works, not that it may heal the sick but adorn the strong. We can do works, but without embellishment. Thus grace is the most despised thing and a gift which is not necessary for us, but exists only because of the will and the intention of the one who demands it, as they say (*Luther's Works*, vol. 31, pp. 67, 68).

Theologians of glory!

Exclaimed Luther, in the next line: "What Christian will stand for such blasphemy?"

The answer today is: any number of professing Christians! Disciples of the theology of glory number in the hundreds of millions. Those who believe and confess the theology of the cross are a mere remnant, a little flock.

In very little Protestant, or even

Reformed, preaching today is predestination "looming in the background," as, according to Gerhard Forde, will always be the case when the theology of the cross is proclaimed. On the contrary, as soon as a minister or a denomination of churches show that he or they take divine predestination seriously as the source and foundation of all salvation, the minister or the churches are buried in protests, objections, and charges: "You make men puppets! You make God the author of sin! You deny human responsibility! Hyper-Calvinists!"

Theologians of glory!

Many whose official confession is that of the theology of the cross contradict this confession by the teaching of a love of God in the gospel for all without exception and a sincere desire of God to save all without exception. This teaching, which has their hearts, is the explicit repudiation of predestination (which teaches love for some only and hatred for the others) and the implicit affirmation of free will (if saving grace in the gospel comes to all alike, the reason why some are saved and others are not saved must be the decision of the sinner).

A theology of glory!

Even among those who themselves teach an uncorrupted theology of the cross are secret admirers and allies of the theology of glory. For they never make an issue of the theology of the cross. They will not contend with the theology of glory. Never would they throw their churches and (if this were again a possibility, as in the days of the Reformation) the entire world into uproar and upheaval over the deadness and mortal sinfulness of all the works of unbelievers; the bondage of the will; justification by faith alone; and eternal predestination as the fountain and foundation of salvation. Much less would they jeopardize their positions and livelihoods over these issues. They are careful not to cast in their lot with

the despised theologian or churches that do boldly and anti-theologically proclaim the theology of the cross. Like the theologians in Jesus' day, they believe all right, but they do not confess. For they love the glory of men rather than

the glory of God (John 12:43, literal translation of the Greek).

Theologians of glory!

Where at the close of the 20th century are the theologians of the cross?

If Luther was right in the theses of the Heidelberg Disputation (and he was), this is a question that every confessing Christian must ask and pursue with all urgency. □

— DJE

Letters

Further Application of "Bert Zandstra"

I read with great interest your article in the November 1, 1997 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, titled "The Sad Case of Bert Zandstra." I truly appreciate your biblical stand on divorce.

But this leaves me with a question I hope you can help me with, as to what God's Word teaches us in the following situation.

I have an acquaintance whom I have opportunities to talk to about our great and glorious God and the work of Jesus Christ. He has been open to hearing but as of yet does not seem willing to come to Christ. After reading your article on divorce, I do not know how to counsel this man if he should want to join the church.

The problem is, he has divorced twice and is at this time married again. His present wife has also been married before. Also, there are children from each marriage.

How am I to counsel him, if he wishes to join the church? That he leave his present wife and children and try to return to his first wife (who is still unmarried)? Or, should he stay with his present family?

Please show me what the Scripture teaches us.

Ron Nyhof,
Hamilton, MI

Response:

Foolish, sinful men and women can so snarl their marital lives that a wise man or woman cannot figure out how to set things right.

The responsibility and guilt are theirs. There is no excuse. God made man good. Man corrupted himself. Even now, fallen men and women have "the work of the law written in their hearts" (Rom. 2:15).

Regardless of the complicated circumstances that sin produces, the way of salvation is always plain: repentance and faith.

By all means, call your adulterous neighbor to come to Christ. Coming to Christ includes repenting of sin (Acts 20:21). For your acquaintance, this repentance must be sorrow of heart for whatever sin he committed in his previous divorcing and for his present adulterous marriage.

The burning issue for him is not how to join a church, but repentance. Repentance is necessary! True repentance is necessary: sorrow of heart that he has offended the holy God and exposed himself to God's wrath, which will damn him eternally, except he repent (Luke 13:1-5). Only in the way of repentance can he find forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

If by the grace of God he repents, it will be impossible for him to continue living, adulterously,

with a woman who is not his wife, but the wife of another man. Repentance is such a sorrow for God's sake as turns from the sin, which one now hates, unto God with a determination to please God by a life of obedience to the law (Ezek. 18:30-32; Acts 26:20; Rom. 8:12-14).

This is the way to Christ. This is the *only* way to Christ. It is also the only way into the church—the *true* church.

Bring him these passages of Holy Scripture:

1. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14).
2. "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mark 10:11, 12).
3. "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's (neighbor's) wife" (Mark 6:18).
4. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived ... adulterers ... shall (not) inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:9, 10).
5. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us" (I John 1:9, 10).

— Ed. □

The Reader Asks

About II Peter 1:9

Our Men's Society (Hudsonville PRC) is presently discussing II

Peter. We ran into disagreement on verse 9 of chapter 1. The question revolved around whether "he that lacketh these things" could be

considered a chosen child of God.

Those who said he *was not* a child of God appealed to the rule that Scripture interprets Scripture.

They used the book of James, where James stresses that where there is no evidence of good works it must be concluded that there is no faith. Therefore "he that lacketh ... virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity" does not have good works and, therefore, does not have faith.

Those who claim he is a child of God appealed to the fact "that he was purged from his old sins." Those who are purged (washed) are always children of God, or else we must say there is a falling away of the saints. This child of God who is no doubt walking in the deep ways of sin nevertheless will in due time hear and heed the admonitions in the verses that follow.

G. Bouwkamp,
Jenison, MI

Answer:

In verse 9 of II Peter 1 the inspired apostle is describing an ungodly, carnal member of the church. This man cannot have been a child of God. This interpretation of the text is based on the following reasons:

1. Note that in the preceding verses the apostle addresses the people of God, "them that have obtained like precious faith with us"

(v. 1), "you, ye, your" (vv. 2, 4, 5, 8), "us" (vv. 3, 4). But in verse 9 the apostle describes "he that lacketh these things." In the Greek the text reads, "But to the one to whom these things are not..." In verse 10 the apostle again addresses the people of God, calling them "brethren."

2. The man described in verse 9 "lacketh these things." "These things" are the Christian virtues mentioned in verses 5 - 8, viz., faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity (love). While it is certainly true that one child of God may have a greater measure of these Christian virtues than another, no Christian lacks them. One cannot be a child of God if he lacks God's love or if he lacks faith. All of God's children have these gifts, though in differing measure.

3. The man described in verse 9 is said to be "blind" and one who "cannot see afar off." He is blind in the sense that he cannot see afar off. The things afar off are the heavenly things of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ. The things which are near are carnal, earthly, or worldly things. Those things this

man can see and only those things. The child of God has the faith enabling him to see the things afar off.

This leaves the question, what does the text mean when it says that this man "hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins"? It cannot mean that once this man was cleansed from his old sins by the blood of Jesus, but now he is no longer cleansed. Once cleansed always cleansed. This is the biblical truth of the preservation and perseverance of the saints. The meaning is that this man was cleansed but only in the outward sense of the word. He was born of believers, baptized, brought up in the fear of the Lord and in the church. He made confession of his faith. To all appearances he was a child of God. He masqueraded as a child of God. He was a hypocrite. In reality he never was a child of God. He was "barren and unfruitful" (v. 8). All the preaching and teaching of the church, his participation in the sacraments, all this is to such a hypocrite a "savor of death unto death" (cf. II Cor. 2:14-17).

— Editorial Committee



A Word Fitly Spoken

Rev. Dale Kuiper

Reaping

Scripture often speaks of seed time and harvest, sowing and reaping. When God speaks to us in these terms, He uses a figure with a deep spiritual meaning that is based on the agricultural economy of Israel and that is very familiar to us today. God is the Lord of the harvest to whom we pray for laborers (preachers) that may go forth into His harvest (Matt. 9:38). He is the Husbandman who tends His vineyard, cutting off unfruitful

branches and purging the fruitful branches that they may bring forth more fruit (John 15:1, 2). Christ is the firstfruits of them that slept (I Cor. 15:20); His resurrection marks the beginning of a great harvest that will not be completed until the last elect is born, saved, and brought to heaven. According to the parable of the Tares and the Wheat (Matt. 13:37-43), the harvest is the end of the world, and the angels are the reapers who gather the wicked that they may be destroyed and the righteous that they may shine forth as the sun.

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And finally there is the steady emphasis in Scripture that all men are busy sowing and reaping. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

The key point is that there is a strict correspondence in kind between sowing and reaping. You reap what you sow. "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8). If a man puts in the ground, as it were, sinful words and corrupt deeds, he reaps in kind: death and destruction; but if a man sows words that minister grace and deeds of love, he receives life everlasting. Another point: "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (II Cor. 9:6). That is true in agriculture, and that is true before the face of God. There are degrees of punishment, and there are degrees in heavenly glory and reward.

Scripture is replete with warnings to the unfaithful, slothful members of the church. They that plow iniquity and sow wickedness reap the same (Job 4:8). He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity (Prov. 22:8). The wicked may sow wheat, but they shall reap thorns (Jer. 12:13). They sow the wind, but shall reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). In order to excuse themselves, the wicked accuse Jesus of reaping that He didst not sow (Luke 19:22), but Jesus would have none of that. "Take from him that pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds."

It is striking that the child of God is encouraged to sow good works especially in respect to the poor and in respect to ministers of the gospel. The Israelites were instructed to leave the corners of their fields unharvested and some of their grapes ungleaned, that the poor and the stranger might have food (Lev. 19:9, 10). And Paul instructs us that continuing in well doing includes doing good unto all men, especially them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). This sowing in well doing also requires of those who are taught in the Word to communicate (give) to those who teach in all good things (Gal. 6:6). For, says Paul, "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" (I Cor. 9:11).

Sowing in the Spirit can be very difficult for us, because though the spirit is willing the flesh is

weak. How easy to sow to the flesh! How hard to sow to the Spirit! "Those that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Ps. 126:5). This difficulty is recognized by the apostle in Galatians 6:9, "Let us not be *weary* in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we *faint* not."

Why might the child of God become weary and faint? Because we shall reap when Christ returns at the end of the world, the seeming delay of His coming may cause us to grow faint. Jesus said, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12), but that promise was made two thousand years ago! Why does He not come? Life is so long. History goes on and on.

There are other reasons. Perhaps there is ingratitude on the part of those we seek to help. We try to restore a brother overtaken in a fault, but he reacts in anger. We give counsel and advice, but it is not followed. Besides, if we continue in well doing, the world does not leave us alone, but marks us for persecution. Young people in the church who sincerely desire to live a godly life might say, "What's the use? Everyone else seems to be interested in the wrong and not the right. No one notices that I do the right anyway. And are my feeble attempts at well doing really noticed by God and rewarded by God?"

In respect to all those doubts and inclinations, the promise of God is, "We shall reap, if we faint not!" The day of harvest shall surely come; in fact, it has begun with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But we shall reap in "due season." This refers to a fixed and definite time, a proper and suitable time. It would not be proper for Christ to return at some point before this time. That would be premature; that would result in a partial harvest, for He cannot come until the last elect is born and comes to repentance (II Pet. 3:9). As the farmer must exercise patience for the coming harvest, having prepared the soil and sown; as the husbandman has long patience for the early and latter rains and then the precious fruit (James 5:7); so must we be patient. So must we stablish our hearts in the Word of God. For the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:12). □

Marcion: First Bible Critic

Introduction

From the beginning of the New Testament church, God's people have been troubled by heretics. Paul warned the elders in Ephesus that grievous wolves would enter the church (Acts 20:29); he warned Timothy of corrupt men with reprobate minds who resist the truth (II Tim. 3:8); and Christ Himself warned the church at Pergamos of the wrong of keeping in the church those who held the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:14, 15). The constant presence of heretics and the struggles of the church against them speak of Satan's relentless attacks against the church, even though he knows that the gates of hell cannot prevail against her.

It is not surprising, then, that almost immediately after the last apostle died, another heretic arose in the church who attempted to bring in the worst kind of false doctrine: he launched his attack directly against the Scriptures by denying that they were the Word of God.

This was a subtle and ingenious ploy of Satan. The Scriptures are the Word of God in which is found the truth of God as God makes Himself known in Christ. The Scriptures are, therefore, the source of all the church knows of God and of His Christ. Take away the Scriptures and the church has nothing. Rob the church of the Bible, and the church ceases to exist. All of the truth that was later

to come under attack in one way or another is found only in Scripture. No individual attack has to be made against any one doctrine if the Scriptures themselves are destroyed.

This is what Marcion attempted to do; and he did it in much the same way that higher critics of Scripture still do it today. That is why I call Marcion the first Bible critic.

Marcion's Life

Although the date of Marcion's birth is not known, it seems as if he was born within 15 years of the turn of the first century. The apostle John had not been dead very long when Marcion entered the world, and Polycarp, the first martyr of the post-apostolic era and friend of John, knew Marcion. Already in A.D. 139, Marcion is found in Rome spreading heresy.

He was born in Sinope in the province of Pontus in Asia Minor some distance east of Ephesus. He was born into a Christian family, for his father was a bishop. Tertullian, a third century church father, says that Marcion was a pilot of a river boat.

Even though almost nothing is known of his early life, there is some evidence that he himself became a Christian only after long study, but that he was, soon after admission to the church, excommunicated by his own father for teaching wrong doctrines. Apparently his father remained suspicious of Marcion even when Marcion later confessed his wrong, for his father refused him re-admittance when he applied.

In about 139 Marcion went to Rome. There is some dispute among historians as to the precise order of events. Some say that he was refused admission to the church of Rome upon his arrival there. Whether this was because reports from Sinope had reached Rome, or whether it was because Marcion was quick to promote his ideas in this city, it is impossible to tell. Others say that he was a member of the church for a while, but was constantly the center of controversy and was excommunicated once more. They point to a story that Marcion gave the church in Rome 100,000 sesterii (Roman money) when he was admitted to membership, but the whole amount was returned to him when he was excommunicated.

Polycarp, who met him probably while he was still in Asia Minor, called him "the first-born of Satan," and indeed it was true that his heresies were deadly poison.

He founded a church separate from the apostolic church and had considerable influence on many who flocked to him and joined his movement. In fact, his sect spread throughout the Mediterranean world as far east as Syria and Palestine. His church survived until the 6th century, a strong testimony to his influence.

Marcion was an extremely able man, skillful in presenting his ideas in the best possible light, charismatic in his influence on others, and a sufficiently profound thinker to construct something of a system of thought. But he was extremely bold and forward and was much like many today who think that

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they alone possess the truth. He was so obviously contrary to the truth that none of the orthodox had any difficulty in detecting his heresy.

It must be remembered that the church was in her infancy and had, as a result, no systematic doctrine, no confessions, no body of truth to which to appeal in its defense of the faith. Not even the Apostolic Confession was in existence as yet. It may have been because of this that the orthodox of his day were more fearful of him and his influence on people than of almost any other enemy of the church, including those who persecuted the church.

Marcion's Heresy

The heresy with which we are interested at this point is his open and blatant attack on Holy Scripture. He made it his business to decide what books he considered to be the Word of God and what were not part of the canon of Scripture. He concluded that the entire Old Testament ought to be excluded, and everything in the New Testament which had not been written by Paul. When he had finished with the New Testament, what he had left was only the epistles of Paul and a truncated gospel of Luke, which, he thought, had been written by Paul. In fact, he did not even accept all the epistles of Paul as canonical, for he denied the Pauline authorship of I & II Timothy and Titus.

Of course, there were reasons for this position which he took. He had a certain "theology" which revealed his presuppositions, and on the basis of which he rejected huge parts of God's Word.

For one thing, Marcion held to some ideas which were Gnostic in character.¹ But it was particularly his view of God which was corrupt. He believed that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament were irreconcilable and had to be two different powers in the universe. The God of the Old

Testament was the God of the law: harsh, critical, severe in judgment, cruel in punishment. On the other hand, the God of the New Testament was the God of the gospel: kind, compassionate, filled with love, merciful to those who do not measure up to His standards.

Hence the God of the Old Testament was the author of suffering and misery in the world, while the God of the New Testament was the fountain of all that is good.

It is very striking that in some modernistic circles a similar view of God is still taught, and the Old Testament similarly rejected. But it is obvious that whether in the 2nd century or in the 20th century this view is an open attack on Scripture.

The Church's Response

God used this attack on Scripture to prod the church into an extremely important aspect of her calling, viz., to define carefully the doctrine of Scripture and set down what books belong to the Bible and what books do not. Up to the time of Marcion the church had not done this. There simply was no reason for doing it.

Because the church had not done this, different opinions were held among the churches and saints. Some held that other books, as, e.g., the epistles of Clement of Rome and Barnabas, were canonical. Others questioned whether some books in our present canon ought really to be there.

This does not mean that the church had no idea of what the canon was. Almost as soon as the gospels were written, they were considered canonical and grouped together as such. Because the book of Acts carried on the history of the gospels, it too was considered canonical. When Paul's epistles were written, a "Body of Paul's Writings" was soon circulated in the church as writings inspired by God, and they were accepted as such by the whole church from the time they were written. Very early

in the 2nd century I John and I Peter were also accepted as canonical. Revelation, because it had been written by John, was received. But questions remained among some concerning a few other books. No one was sure who wrote the epistle to the Hebrews, and its canonicity was considered doubtful by some. II Peter, II & III John, James and Jude were not universally accepted. But because the canon of Scripture was not a source of controversy, no one gave much thought to disagreements on the matter.

But then along came Marcion and his terrible heresies. He launched his attack at a vulnerable point. But it was as if, through him, God was saying to the church: "It is important that you study this question carefully and determine what books were inspired by Me and what books were not." This the church had now to do.

A consensus soon developed in the whole church. Marcion was condemned and his followers were excommunicated. By the end of the 2nd century, disagreement over the questions had ceased. In 352 Athanasius, bishop of the church in Alexandria, sent a pastoral letter to all the churches throughout the entire known world, in connection with the date on which Easter was to be celebrated, in which he listed the 66 books of the canon as we confess them today to be the Word of God. And in 393 and 397 the synods of Hippo and Carthage officially fixed the canon for the new dispensation.

Before the canon was finally fixed, the church had to settle a dispute over the question of the criteria by which a book could be judged as canonical or non-canonical. For example, some thought

¹ Gnosticism was an early heresy which appeared in the church in the third century, although early forms of it may have been present in apostolic times. We shall have opportunity to discuss this heresy in the next article.

that either an apostle or one closely connected to an apostle had to be an author for a book to be canonical. But the church in fact used the same criteria as are mentioned in our Confession of Faith (Art. 5): the objective testimony of the books themselves, and the subjective testimony of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of His people. The former refers to the fact that the canonical books carry their own evidence in themselves that they are inspired by the Spirit; and the second criterion refers to the testimony of the Spirit of truth whom Christ promised to the church (John 14, 15, 16) as the Spirit who would lead the church into all truth.

Since the 18th century the higher critics of Scripture have followed in the footsteps of Marcion and have troubled the church with similar heresies. They too have their "theology" on the basis of which they pass their own judgments on Scripture. Their theology is a denial, to a greater or lesser degree, of the inspiration of sacred Scripture as the sole work of God the Holy Spirit, and an insistence that Scripture, in whole or in part, is the word of man. If Scripture is, in whole or in part, the word of man, man can judge which parts of Scripture he accepts and which parts he rejects.

That wicked men do this is not surprising. That these views have, more or less, infiltrated almost every seminary in this land and abroad is a sad but undeniable fact.

It was important for the church to establish what books were of God because no possible development or defense of the truth could be made until this was done. God in His wisdom led the church to set down this truth first. It was to be the foundation of all the other truths the church would later confess. God's Scriptures are the rule of faith and life. Marcion's heresies were the occasion and the goad for the church's establishing of its doctrine of Scripture. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

"The Secret of the Way"

John 14:1-14

In the privacy of the upper room in Jerusalem Jesus was teaching His disciples things of the new covenant of grace. The old covenant was about to be done away. The old covenant pictures, the symbols, the types were about to be fulfilled in the *real salvation* of the cross of the Christ. There must be instruction, important instruction, on this last night before His death. Instruction in something new, something wonderful!

Listen to the Master's instruction. Jesus washes feet! An old covenant way, still, of teaching the coming reality of the cleansing blood of the Lamb. Jesus celebrates

Passover! He is, we must see, still fulfilling all righteousness, under the law until His death, but in this also pointing to Himself, the Christ, our Passover. Then, an entirely new covenant thing! A new supper. The Lord's Supper! The remembrance and celebration of the Lord's death and life, and of the communion there is with God through Christ's atoning work.

New covenant: taught in these old covenant ways and in this new covenant Supper. Covenant of God's salvation in Christ. Covenant also in which we have a part. Not a saving part, but a part of thanks, a part which becomes those who are the saved. Covenant in which we are obliged unto new obedience. Covenant of our washing each others' feet. Covenant of our showing the Lord's death till

He come, in our godly, believing participation in and celebration of Christ's death and life. New Covenant of the new commandment Christ gives: that we love one another as He has loved us.

Great instruction in the great and eternal new covenant of grace! The secret of the Lord Jehovah, now being revealed in the brightness of the dawning of the new age. The secret of the covenant. This, *this* secret of the new covenant must be with those that fear Him (Ps. 25:14)!

There needs to be more instruction. A whole discourse of it. We have it recorded for us in John 14-17. It is Jesus' final, farewell covenant discourse. For this Judas must be gone. Sometime, probably even before the institution of the Lord's Supper, Judas had indeed

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left the upper room to betray the Savior.

It is just as the Savior wanted. Now He is alone with the eleven true disciples. He has secrets just for them for now (afterward for us)! They are the loved of God. They are the lovers of God, people of the covenant, God's friends. To them, and them alone, Jesus will tell a secret. He will show them the mystery of the gospel of God with us. He will show them the mystery of God with us not only in the flesh, but in the Spirit soon to be poured out upon the church

and into the hearts of His own.

Jesus will speak this secret as only the Prophet of God can: to the heart, tenderly, making saving and enduring impressions. What He says, this secret, will be, and *must* be *with* the church. They must not lose it or forget it. It must be the consolation when Jesus is a-dying, and when He is gone to glory and the disciples are left behind. It must be with us now. Until the end of time when He comes again the church must recall the secret, and live out of it and by it.

New covenant!

There are several secrets revealed of this covenant, really, in this last discourse of John 14-17. The discourse is *filled* with divine and loving whispers to the friends of God! There is the secret of heaven. There is the secret of the Spirit, the secret of friendship, and the secret of Jesus praying in the sanctuary of the Father.

Now and in several articles to come we consider several of them. Secrets! From God to us! Listen! Hush! Shout! Sing! How shall we show that the secret of Jehovah is with us?

Questions for Study, Meditation, & Discussion

1. Heaven (vv. 1-4)

Jesus, knowing that the disciples are troubled in heart at His announcement of the betrayal and of His imminent demise, preaches heaven. A good example to follow, I am sure, for pastors today: preach heaven to God's troubled people!

What does Jesus here say of heaven? Discuss several other passages which present the truth of heaven. What phrases, words teach that heaven is a real place? A great and blessed place? A place for particular people, and not for all? A *sure* place? How does Jesus prepare this place for His disciples? Children ask lots of questions about heaven. We have questions too. What of heaven do we *not* know? What are some truths about heaven and about us which explain why we do not know certain things about heaven?

Jesus announces that He will come again (v. 3) to receive the disciples unto Himself. To what coming again does Jesus refer?

2. The Way to Heaven (vv. 6-11)

At the occasion of the question of the doubting Thomas (v. 5), Jesus preaches another of the several "I am" statements recorded in

John: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

What does Jesus mean by saying He is a "way"? A way—where? A way—how? What is "truth and "life"? How is Jesus truth and life? What is the connection between Jesus being the way, and His being the truth and the life?

Jesus says that He is the way—He Himself is the way. He does not merely show a way, or teach a certain way, but He *Himself* is the way! He Himself—not an impersonal force, but a Person, is the way, the truth, and the life! Note too: Jesus says He is *the* way, and *the* truth, and *the* life! And He qualifies this by saying *no man* cometh unto the Father, *but by me*. Very important that we understand what Jesus is saying here. He is saying: He is the *only* way, the *only* truth, the *only* life, and that there is no other way, no other truth, no other life than Jesus!

What does this revelation of Jesus as the way to the Father reveal of the new covenant salvation? Why is there *need* for such a way, truth, and life as Jesus?

What do verses 7-11 teach of

Jesus as the way to the Father?

3. Believing in the Way to Heaven (vv. 1-14)

Throughout the passage Jesus exhorts to faith.

Explain how Thomas (v. 5) and Philip (v. 8) show little faith. How can we show little faith?

Three fruits of faith are stated and/or implied in the passage.

First: hearts at peace. If our faith is weak, to the degree that it is we are "troubled" (v. 1). There is disquiet in our hearts, a commotion of soul, distress. But where faith is, there is peace and comfort. Comment on how the following passages teach this peace through faith: Psalm 42; 55:22; Romans 5:1; Philipians 4.

The second fruit of faith is good works. No: the fruit is great works! For, as Jesus says, the works believers shall do are like unto His own works, and even *greater* than Jesus' works (v. 12)! What would these works be? How, according to the text, are these works possible?

Third, the fruit of faith is effectual prayer (vv. 13, 14). "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do.... If ye shall

ask any thing in my name, I will do it." What are some principles of prayer brought out in these verses? To what end, according to the text, does God answer prayers?

4. Perspective (John 20:31)

Jesus, in this last private discourse to the disciples, begins by teaching something crucial to their continued existence as church, and to their being part of the foundation of the New Testament church. He teaches *exclusivism*. He teaches He is the way, and that there is no

other. He preaches faith in God in Him, and in Him only, revealed.

They stood. Thank God the disciples stood. They were sinful. They had little faith at times. They fled. They denied. But in their heart, and in the end, they stood for Jesus, and just for Jesus. They stood, by the grace of God, though almost all were martyred for their faith.

But the church has since departed, and fallen. There is this pluralism. There is the preaching from many pulpits across the land that there are other ways to God

than through conscious faith in Jesus. How do we stand? Individually? As churches?

Standing in these latter days will mean trouble. The world and the false church tolerate everything but intolerance. But we ought not let our hearts be troubled: Jesus is in heaven. There is a place prepared and being prepared for us there. He will come again to take us home.

Secret of Jehovah! Heaven! Fellowship forever with the Father! And Jesus the way! □

Protestant Reformed Seminary

4949 Ivanrest Avenue
Grandville, Michigan 49418

March 6, 1998

Dear Friends in Christ,

Under the blessing of God we are enjoying a profitable year at the seminary.

A total of fourteen men are currently enrolled in our school. Six of these men are full-time students. Three are in their first year of study. Mark Shand comes from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia and is preparing for ordination in that denomination. Angus Steward is from the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland. Arko denEngelse, originally from the Netherlands, attends the Heritage Netherlands Reformed congregation in Grand Rapids. The other three are members of our Protestant Reformed Churches and are preparing for the ministry in our churches. Michael Kortering is in the second year of study, Garry Eriks is in the third year, and Nathan Brummel is a senior planning to take the oral examination for candidacy before the synod in June of this year. From July 1 through the end of December, 1997 Mr. Brummel successfully completed his internship requirements in Hope PRC in Redlands, California. Seminarian Eriks, D.V., will begin his six-month internship July 1, 1998 in our Loveland, Colorado PRC. Eight men from the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Churches are enrolled part-time. In addition, two ladies are auditing one course each. Rodney Kleyn and David Overway are taking their Greek and Dutch Theological Reading courses with us and plan to enroll in the seminary next fall.

Prof. Dykstra has completed his course work for the Master of Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary and is busy working on his thesis. Prof. Dykstra is currently teaching two courses. He also filled in for Prof. Hanko while the latter was preaching and lecturing in Singapore and Myanmar. The professors keep busy teaching, writing, and preaching in the churches.

Thanks to the generous contributions of our people our library continues to grow.

Pray for us that God will enable us by His grace to continue to commit the truth of Holy Scripture to "faithful men who shall be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:2).

Cordially in Christ,
Robert D. Decker
Prof. Robert D. Decker,
for faculty and staff.

The Declaration—Unclear (?)

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

I Corinthians 14:8

There is something troubling about this little book of Dr. Schilder's entitled, *Extra-Scriptural Binding – A New Danger*. Clearly it was intended to be a response to our *Brief Declaration of Principles*; and Dr. Schilder has the reputation of having been a keen polemicist who could zero in on the heart of a problem and analyze it decisively. Here, however, we find something quite different, an almost uncertain groping about for some issue which could be met.

As we have seen, the *Declaration* was basically a very simple, straightforward document, consisting mostly of confessional quotations with a few brief conclusions as to what they teach, and what we in our churches must accordingly maintain. It was a natural approach, for one thing, in which Rev. Hoeksema and Dr. Schilder had always agreed was the need for a faithful commitment to the Reformed creeds as the common ground (the *loci communes*, or place of communion) on which Reformed churches and people everywhere should be able to meet. It was not that they were in any way thought to be superior or even equal to the Scriptures, for they were based upon them, and from them received their strength. But among

Reformed believers there should be no need always to be going back to reexamine and reestablish whether these be true. In matters of doctrinal difference the creeds should be a standard to which Reformed believers might mutually appeal. And this was what the *Declaration* sought to do.

Here in Schilder's book, however, already the very second sentence tells us that this was not to be his approach, for he writes, "Because this document, in our opinion, is not clear, our members cannot and may not bind themselves to it." Amazingly, for Hoeksema was acknowledged to be a clear and concise writer also by Schilder, the accuracy of expression in the *Declaration* was to be the point of attack. It did not give Schilder much to work with, for the non-confessional statements in the *Declaration* were very few. But this he did to the very end.

He started with this statement from the *Declaration*, "Seeing then that this is the clear teaching of our confession, we repudiate the teaching that the promise of the covenant is conditional and for all that are baptized." Now in itself it is hard to conceive of a more clear and direct statement of the problem which had been troubling the relationships between the Protestant Reformed and Liberated Churches, than this. For several years a debate had been raging over the questions of conditionality in the covenant of grace; and one might well expect that Schilder would set his pen to that; but that was not to be. His whole contention was that the *Declaration* was

unclear; and he was out to demonstrate this to be so.

Before doing this, however, he presents us with several preparatory chapters. The first contains reflections on II Timothy 2:15 and the need for *rightly dividing the word of truth*, based on a very strained illustration, supposedly taken from Theodore Beza, about a mother cutting and dividing food to various member of her family. Next he turns to a quotation from the old Dutch *Staten Bijbel*¹ which spoke of conditions in the covenant, and challenging Hoeksema to dismiss those men as not being Reformed. And then there is a chapter entitled, *Be Careful with Dictionaries*, which in itself could have led into the real issue; for he presents four possible definitions of the word *condition* in a questioning form. He writes:

- a. By *condition* do you mean something which would *bind* GOD? Then we say unconditionally: "unconditional is the password!"
- b. By *condition* do you mean something for which God has to wait before He can go on? Then we say unconditionally: "unconditional is the password."
- c. By *condition* do you mean something we have to fulfill, in order to merit something? Then we say unconditionally: "unconditional is the password!"
- d. Do you mean by *condition* something which God has joined to something else, to make clear to

¹ The Dutch "State Bible," authorized by the Synod of Dordt, contains rather extensive commentary on the meaning of the texts as well.

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

us that the *one* cannot come *without the other* and that we cannot be *sure* of the one, unless we are at the same time *assured* of the other? Then we say unconditionally: "conditional is the password!"

Now all of this sounds very good. Three of the four definitions Schilder rejects, as though agreeing with us that they are to be rejected; and the fourth is made to sound so innocuous as though to ask, how could one possibly object to that? And if there is one possible good use, should we not accept that as what the Liberated had in mind when they used that word? The problem is that this supposedly good definition, "something which God has *joined to something else*, to make clear to us that the *one* cannot come *without the other* and that we cannot be *sure* of the one, unless we are at the same time *assured* of the other," is really no definition at all. As Hoeksema was to point out, there are many things which are inseparably tied together which are nevertheless not conditions to each other, and when a definition can be applied to other things than that for which it is intended, it is not a proper definition.

But there is here a more serious matter in the fact that one definition is missing from Schilder's list, and that is the one about which the debate had been going on. In a way, the third comes close to it, when it reads, "By *condition* do you mean something *we* have to fulfill, in order to *merit* something?" And that is the problem. This definition interjects the matter of merit, and there had never been any debate about that. Even the Arminians had never claimed that the fulfillment of conditions were meritorious; and thus when he adds the element of merit into this inquiry, it is very easy to answer emphatically, "Then we say unconditionally: 'unconditional is the password!'" But the question was

and is, if that word merit is removed, and the question is asked, "By *condition* do you mean something *we* have to do in order to gain something?" then what would be the answer? With much flourish, Schilder avoided a real answer to that question.

And so Schilder moves on to his real point, his claim that it is the *Declaration* which was unclear, ambiguous, and obscure. This he starts to do with the statement of the *Declaration*, "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." This Schilder points out might be said by some in passing, but it is certainly not a clear statement of fact that "election ... is the sole cause and fountain of all our salvation." Such words as *cause* and *fountain*, he claims, are words that belong to time and are not properly used with reference to the counsel of God. The statement should be that "election is the *grounds* of our salvation," not cause and fountain as the *Declaration* says.

With this, however, there are problems. As Hoeksema was to point out, the *grounds* for our salvation are to be found in the death of Christ, an action which very really takes place in time, while the words *cause* and *fountain* are taken from the Canons of Dordt themselves [I. A.]

Art. 6. That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree ... (which, if not literally, has the same idea as that of a fountain).

Art. 9. Election is the *fountain* of every saving good ... (where the expression literally appears).

Art. 10. The good pleasure of God is the cause of this gracious election ... (where we have the idea of *cause* ascribed to the good pleasure of God, which gives rise to

election and what flows from it).

Actually, very soon after Schilder first published this claim, one of his readers in the Netherlands pointed this out to him; and it would have been far more gracious if he had acknowledged his error on this point. But he didn't. Rather he went on to claim he had not really written what he had, and continued to claim that nonetheless he was correct in claiming that this expression was not what was meant. In fact, he went on to write about the word *cause* with the claim that it was in itself a very unclear and ambiguous term which should not be used.

Next Schilder turns to another section of the *Declaration*, that which reads as follows (at least in the copy from which he worked):

- a. that all the covenant blessings are for the elect alone.
- b. that the promise of the gospel ... concerns only the believers, that is, the elect.
- c. If the promise of God is for them (the little children), then the promise has to be *infallible* and *unconditional* and can therefore only concern the elect.
- d. Hence, that promise is surely only for the elect.

To us this might seem rather simple and direct, but Schilder finds all kinds of vagaries and uncertain expressions in it.

To him, for example, the expression "are for" in the sentence, "that all the covenant blessings are for the elect alone," comes up as a very vague way of expressing oneself. One marvels. Here is a phrase consisting of the plural form of the copula *is*, certainly the most basic and common verb in all of language, and "for," a very simple and direct preposition relating a subject to its object. And the word *promise* requires that it be told to whom it is directed. But to Schilder it is not clear. Actually what comes out is that what he wishes to have is a certain legal as-

pect added to the idea of the promise—a favorite area of thought with him—and when the *Declaration* does not do this, it being completely missing from the confessions as well, he would maintain that something is wrong.

And so he goes on. With the next sentence it is the word *concerns* that he finds unclear; and in the next it is the word *infallible*. Ordinary words they are, used every day without difficulty; but Schilder finds them inadequate for coming to the conclusion, "Hence, that promise is surely only for the elect." And it is to be observed that the matters involved in these sentences are important and were worthy of discussion. In fact, there was nothing Hoeksema would have desired more than a serious, forthright discussion of them. But this? What was he to say?

In the end, Hoeksema did write very little in answer to what we find in this book, in part perhaps because of the response he received when he tried. For some time Hoeksema waited, with the intention of responding in length after Schilder was through. But Schilder was going on, and there were pressures on Hoeksema to answer, which at last he began to do. Without going into all of the condescending slurs Schilder had made regarding his supposedly hasty and poor composition, Hoeksema rather graciously simply remarked, "several points of Schilder's articles are not to the point." When, however, this was seen by Schilder, he was piqued; and, in spite of his claim not to be angry, could not resist retorting, "But in this case I feel like saying, 'All right, if that is what you think, I had better stop.'" And in effect he did. Little more was written; and soon the exchange was over.

In total, this book constitutes a strange set of documents built around the claim that the *Declaration* was too poorly written to be worthy of consideration. But it also makes one wonder at the troubled

spirit it seems to reflect. Why did a man of Schilder's brilliance and scholarly ability spend his time with such superficial criticisms as these? Why didn't he deal with the real questions at hand, and the quotations from the creeds? Why had he not long before carried out his promise to deal with our differences? And why now, when the alienation between the two sides was all but complete, did he begin at last to write? To these questions we will never really know the answers, of course, and yet there are indications as to what they might have been.

The first is already detected in the book's opening sentence, "When we mentioned the text of the *Declaration* we forthwith expressed our opinion that our members who emigrated to America or Canada cannot and may not bind themselves to the *Brief Declaration*." Clearly the *Declaration* had to be rejected at its very start. By that time Dr. Holwerda had destroyed any real possibility of a working relationship between us by posting his letter to Canada instructing his people to join our churches but to have nothing to do with the theological convictions on which they were built, and a Liberated minister was already going about in Canada encouraging those who had joined our churches to leave and form churches of their own. The result was that the *Declaration* served their purposes very well, providing something on which the division could be blamed. And so it has been used ever since.

But still there are Schilder's lingering remarks, such as, "For as long as possible we want to keep the newly developed ties from being needlessly severed. Therefore we are very careful. Wherever possible we want to avoid saying, 'This is wrong.'" One gains the impression that in certain ways he regretted making this break; and it may well have been so.

Just recently it has been brought to our attention that there

were serious differences among the followers of Schilder from the start, particularly over the doctrine of predestination. Schilder had been raised under the theology of Herman Bavinck, just as Hoeksema had, with its high regard for the teachings of Dordt; but many of the young men who followed him, including particularly Professors Holwerda and Veenhof, had gained their exposure to these doctrines in the highly philosophical and speculative form that they were given by the followers of Abraham Kuyper. Against this they had reacted, by rejecting not just the system, but the historical form of the doctrines themselves. For a time Schilder had managed to keep things together with his claim that these differences were just in terminology; but the fact was that these men had no real place for the things he shared with us. What we may well have in this book, therefore, is a last effort on Schilder's part to hold things together with this strained effort to focus not on the substance of the problem, but on the language and terms in which it is found. But it was not to be, as he sensed in bringing this book to its faltering end.

But there is more in it still to which we must return. □

The Third Day (or The Mystery of Life)

Waters lick a thirsty shore,
Echoing the silence.
Lifeless, barren land and sea!
Sarah's womb's alliance!

Barren, and yet fertile, soil
Waits to hold the Seed.
Out of death sprang forth the life!
Out of chaff the Reed!

Now the land her increase yields,
Firstfruits paid the debt.
Come into His presence for
Truth and Mercy met!

Connie J. Meyer

Christ, Our Priest (1)

Besides the prophetic aspect of Christ's office as God's Anointed, there is the priestly aspect to which we turn our attention now. We do so especially in the light of the epistle to the Hebrews. In Hebrews, chapters 7-10, there is much development concerning the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. That truth is summarized in our Heidelberg Catechism (Q & A 31) when it says that Jesus is called Christ because He is ordained by God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, "to be our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of his body, has redeemed us, and makes continual intercession with the Father for us."

His Priestly Office

Jesus, the Christ of God, is anointed to serve as our only High Priest.

That means, in the first place, that He is One who is consecrated to God in all things. He is so for our sakes.

A priest is not, first of all, one who offers bloody sacrifices. In the Old Testament a priest was one who offered the bloody sacrifices unto God. But that was only one part and the outward appearance of the priest's office in the Old Testament. That priesthood, however, is forever finished. It was only for a time.

But a priest is one who is consecrated to God with his entire being, with all his heart and soul and mind. In other words, the priest is one who asks God, "What shall I do? What is Thy will? My wholehearted desire is to do Thy will in love for Thee, O my God." That is the priest.

That was Adam too. Not only was Adam created a prophet, as we considered previously, but he was also created priest.

Man was created after the image of God. With respect to the subject at hand, that means that Adam was created a reflection of God, to do the will of God as God's servant. And as that reflection of God, Adam was a priest. He was consecrated to God in all his being. He loved to do God's will.

But sin destroyed that relationship in which Adam stood as priest of God.

In Adam we became rebellious priests. Instead of serving God in full dedication to His glory, we now consecrate ourselves and all things to the glory of the devil! We ourselves live and use all things in the service of sin and Satan!

That is our very nature as it is corrupted by sin. Our bodies are consecrated to doing Satan's will. We devote our eyes to that which pleases that great deceiver, the prince of this world as it is under the power of sin. We open our ears to his call and temptations. We use our hands to offer up sacrifices to the devil by touching those things he would have us touch and doing those things he would have us do to antagonize God.

We are rebellious priests. That is how we stand in Adam.

That is why we must have Christ. You must have Christ.

He came. He came, sent from heaven, as the only High Priest, God's Christ. He came totally dedicated to the service of His heavenly Father. "I come to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart."

And God's will was that His Christ would serve as our only High Priest, redeeming us by the one sacrifice of His body.

His One Sacrifice

The priestly function of Christ's office comes to focus in the one sacrifice He offered.

How magnificent is the priesthood of Christ! That is the whole emphasis in Hebrews, chapter 10. Jesus Christ came to do the will of God: "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:10-12).

In all the sacrifices from Adam to the coming of Christ, it was preached that there was a fearful separation between God and man wrought by man's sin. God will not let sin pass. The very nature of God as the Holy One obliges Him to punish sin. We read in Hebrews 1:13, "He is of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity."

But besides that, the word has gone out of His mouth that the soul that sinneth, it shall die. And the fire flaming on the altar, which completely consumed the sacrifice, was a lively symbol of that fiery indignation that should devour the adversaries of God. "The wages of sin is death."

The truth of that was seen in the offering of sacrifices year after year after year. Never could the priests in Aaron's line effect salvation for those who brought them the lambs and bulls and goats. Never with those sacrifices could they make the worshipers perfect. For, as we read in verse 2, "Then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshipers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." The priesthood of the Old Testament showed that the case of us sinners is helpless!

But although those sacrifices and sin offerings were not effective for the forgiveness of sins nor the redemption of those who brought the offerings to God, God had revealed a promise to His own. God had given an unchangeable promise to Adam and Eve, the promise of redemption. But that redemption would not come without great price. It would come only in the way of a bloody sacrifice. So God signified that promise of redemption by the institution of all the Old Testament sacrifices and ceremonies. They all pointed to the Messiah, who was to come.

Only in the light of the promise and God's clothing of Adam and Eve with animal skins by the shedding of blood could there be the expectation of a sacrifice.

All the priests of the Old Testament could be anointed only because of the promise of Christ's coming.

The sacrifices themselves were appointed by God to serve as the

types, the pictures, of the one sacrifice that He Himself would provide for the salvation of His people.

The whole Old Testament cries out for Christ as our Priest, who would fulfill the entire priesthood by offering up the sacrifice of Himself once for all. The law, we read in the first verse of Hebrews 10, was a shadow of good things to come.

In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, ordained and anointed the Messiah, to fulfill that Old Testament priesthood. That is the gospel of our salvation.

You and I need this Priest.

Even the holiest among men have polluted natures, poisoned in the womb with sin. Those natures have need of the bloody sacrifice of Christ to redeem them unto God.

Our actual sins show our need of this only High Priest and His one sacrifice. If He does not take those sins and our guilt by the blood of His cross, they can never be taken away. If not for Christ's sacrifice, our sins will go with us to the grave and will follow us to the judgment seat, crying, "We are your works!" All our apologies, all our tears, can never take away our sin. Even our best works are polluted, which means that even our apologies and tears before God are as filthy rags except they be cleansed by the sacrifice of Jesus' body once offered on the cross.

But Jesus Christ appeared, ordained by God the Father and anointed with the Holy Spirit, to serve as our only High Priest and to make that one sacrifice of His body for our sin. As Priest He stood in our place, the only Priest who truly could stand in our place. For He is God become flesh. He paid the price for our guilt and sin, redeeming us unto God with a redemption that shall never be removed or obliterated by our continued sinfulness.

This sacrifice reached backward and forward throughout all ages, fully cleansing all the elect

before the face of God. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. "By one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified."

Jesus Christ is our only High Priest.

When I contemplate the beauty of this priesthood of Christ, as God has revealed it to us, I cannot help but think, How blessed we are! How blessed we are as Reformed Christians who find by God's grace our salvation in Christ alone!

Think about the millions of people involved in all the religions found around the world. While other religions seek peace and a sure conscience, only the Christian can find it. Because only we have the foundation for harmony with God which is true peace. And only we have that gospel which can settle a conscience which otherwise condemns us. The Jews seek it in vain in the law. The follower of Islam seeks it in his outward, legalistic observances which are no more than a corruption of Old Testament law. The Romish seek salvation in a repeated idolatrous sacrifice and in meritorious works.

But how terrible is the state of that man or woman who feels that intolerable wrath of God burning within, and the voice of condemnation echoing through the conscience, and there is no relief.

How terrible the shame and fear and despair which are the effects of a condemning conscience! No wonder men will do anything to cover up that testimony of God's wrath within their own souls!

But how beautiful is the testimony of this precious sacrifice of Jesus Christ to all you who believe!

The believer finds that nothing less than the great sacrifice of Jesus' body once offered for sin can give peace to a distressed conscience and free him from the guilt which brings death. Scripture speaks plainly, and so we stand condemned in our own conscience, "By the deeds of law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight."

Man can never satisfy God's justice by doing, or by suffering. He needs a High Priest ordained

by God the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit, to offer up the sacrifice required by God Himself.

Our salvation is in Christ. Blessed be God for Jesus Christ our High Priest! □

Book Reviews

The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius, by John Calvin. Ed. A. N. S. Lane. Tr. G. I. Davies. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996. Pp. xxxix + 264. \$17.99 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

The second in the series of Baker publications, "Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought," is this defense by John Calvin of the Reformation's doctrine of the bondage of the will against Pighius. Surprisingly, this is the first appearance of Calvin's important work on the bound will and sovereign grace in English.

In 1542 the Dutch Roman Catholic theologian Albert Pighius responded to the 1539 edition of Calvin's *Institutes* with a violent attack on both Calvin's doctrine of the bondage of the will and Calvin's doctrine of predestination. The title of Pighius' work was *Ten Books on Human Free Choice and Divine Grace*. Whatever one may think of Pighius, he saw the issue. In 1543 Calvin responded to Pighius' attack on the bound will with *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*. Calvin did not get around to responding to Pighius' attack on predestination until 1552. Then, aroused by Jerome Bolsec, Calvin wrote his great defense of predestination, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*. In it, he refuted Pighius, by then long dead.

The manner of Calvin's treatment of his subject in *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* makes for tedious reading at times. He follows the arguments of Pighius closely, responding point by point.

Since Pighius had appealed to the church fathers, Calvin on his part draws heavily from the fathers, especially Augustine, in defense of the bound will.

But the subject is fundamental to the Reformation's confession of the gospel of salvation by grace alone. Just as Erasmus (another Dutchman!) had done earlier, against Luther, Pighius had affirmed the Roman Catholic heresy of the ability of the will of the natural man to choose the grace of God, which, according to Pighius, is offered by God to all alike. Upon this choice, for Pighius and the Roman Catholic Church, depends the salvation of the sinner.

Calvin taught a "bound will," which he sharply distinguished from a "coerced will." He defined the bound will as "one which because of its corruptness is held captive under the authority of evil desires, so that it can choose nothing but evil, even if it does so of its own accord and gladly, without being driven by any external impulse" (p. 69). The salvation of the sinner, therefore, is the work of God alone. Faith is a gift. Grace is not offered indiscriminately and ineffectually to all, but is the effectual power of God to the elect only. Both Pighius and Calvin knew well the intimate relation between the doctrine of the bound will and the doctrine of predestination.

The doctrine of free will, in the sense of man's ability by nature to choose God, Calvin rightly saw as the overthrow of the biblical gospel of grace. Significantly, Calvin appealed against Pighius to Romans 9:16. This accounts for Calvin's vehement denunciation of the false teaching. Pighius' doc-

trine is "in large part an undiluted expression of Pelagian ungodliness" (p. 104). In Pighius' teaching "giving man first place," while yielding "God second," we have "Pelagius ... vomiting his profanities to the skies at full strength" (p. 217). Luther had passed the same judgment upon the doctrine of the free will in his *Bondage of the Will*.

The publication of Calvin's fullest treatment of the bondage of the will and the related doctrines of grace serves our time well. It sets forth the basic issue between genuine Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Most "evangelicals" are exposed as lined up solidly on Rome's side of the divide. "Evangelicals and Roman Catholics Together" should surprise no one.

The book speaks powerfully to developments in the Reformed churches. Against Pighius' argument for free will in terms of good works, Calvin responded that the "worth of good works depends not on the act itself but on perfect love for God." Therefore, "a work will not be righteous and pure unless it proceeds from a perfect love for God" (p. 27). Being completely evil, the natural man can do nothing but evil:

I say that man thinks, chooses, wills, attempts, and does nothing except evil because of that corruption which has taken the whole of the human soul under its control. And it is in this sense that I say that whatever is from us needs to be destroyed and renewed (p. 213).

The apostasy of the Reformed churches widely from the orthodoxy of the Reformation, with fa-

tal consequences for the truth of the bound will and sovereign grace, is glaringly evident in the insistence that the ungodly are able to perform good works.

Calvin repeatedly criticized Pighius' doctrine that grace is "offered indiscriminately to all" (see pp. 188; 196-199; 217). Indeed, for Calvin this was the root of Pighius' errors:

What then is the reason why he rushes headlong, as if with his eyes shut, into such great absurdity? It is of course just this, that once he has conceived the idea in his mind that the grace of God is offered equally to all, provided that they show themselves to be worthy of it, he is held prisoner by this idea, so that he is incapable of further perception or judgment (p. 198).

Today the Pighian doctrine of an indiscriminate offer of grace to all alike reigns supreme in Reformed and Presbyterian churches, advertised and defended by nearly all as impeccable Reformation orthodoxy. To maintain particular, effectual grace in the preaching of the gospel is to invite summary excommunication from the fellowship of Calvinists: "hyper-Calvinist!"

May the book have wide circulation among Protestants. May God thus still use Calvin himself—the genuine Calvin—to open the eyes especially of the Reformed.

But why did Calvin dedicate the book to Melancthon? ■

By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life, by Thomas J. Nettles. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990. Pp. 442. \$14.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Herman Hanko.]

The author, professor of church history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has written an important and fascinating book about the history of Baptist thought. It

is divided into three sections: a history of Baptist thought in England and America; a theological section in which the chief issues that occupied Baptist theologians are discussed; and a practical section in which the author firmly admonishes his fellow Baptists to return to their roots. The first section is quite the longest of the three and filled with information.

Tracing the history of the Baptists in England first of all, and pointing out that the Baptists there did not have their origin in the Anabaptist movement on the continent, but in the independent movement that opposed Anglicanism, the author demonstrates that Baptists were throughout their history strongly Calvinistic, especially in their emphasis on the doctrines of grace. He deals with all the great Baptist preachers and theologians including Gill, Hussey, Brine, Crisp, and Fuller.

In examining their thought, the author deals with all the important issues that came up in the great Baptist controversies: supra- vs. infralapsarianism, election and reprobation, the extent of the atonement, the call of the gospel, the well-meant offer, eternal vs. temporal justification, antinomianism, duty-faith and duty-repentance, etc. He points out what each of the Baptist theologians taught and believed on these crucial issues.

Turning to American Baptists, and concentrating on the same issues, Nettles makes the point that the Baptists in this country, particularly the Southern Baptist Convention, were solid and orthodox all the way through the 19th and into the 20th century.

Departure began when various theologians in the church taught that the atonement of Christ was universal in some senses. Quickly liberalism took hold as, e.g., in the University of Chicago, a Baptist School established by John D. Rockefeller. The reaction to liberalism was fundamentalism, with its own weaknesses, not historic ortho-

doxy. And that is where the Baptist movement stands today.

In the second section the author discusses the theological ramifications of the doctrinal issues involved throughout Baptist history, and, generally, shows that he is solidly committed to the doctrines of sovereign grace. He firmly believes that doctrinal aberration is the death of the Baptist movement because persistence in doctrinal error is evidence of lack of true faith (p. 337).

And so, in the last section, the author calls the church to repentance. He writes:

I have affirmed historically, and I hope demonstrated, that Calvinism was the dominant theology in the most enduring areas of Baptist life for the first 275 years of modern Baptist history.... This fact raises several interesting possibilities. First, we could decide that our forefathers were right.... Or, second, if we decide that our forefathers were wrong, we must repent of our past, expose their errors, overtly reject on an institutional as well as individual basis the theological moorings established at first, and reconstitute on some other basis.... Or, third, we could conclude that no such thing as truth and error exists in theological categories.

After rejecting the last two, the author goes on:

The lesson of history then is one that screams to us, "REPENT!" We must turn from our wicked ways and recapture our vision of the glory of God before the cherubim whisk it off to another place (pp. 426, 427).

While we will disagree with some aspects of the author's analysis of the call of the gospel, what exactly constitutes a hyper-Calvinist, is duty-faith a part of the gospel call, etc., anyone reading this book will profit greatly. The profit will come, not only through a deeper understanding of Baptist

history in this country and England, but also because the issues which plagued Baptists throughout

the centuries are the same issues which have torn apart Reformed churches, and continue on the

church's agenda today.

Read the book! You will enjoy it! □

Report of Classis West

March 4, 1998 at Houston, Texas

The March meeting of Classis West was held just west of Houston, Texas on Wednesday, March 4. This classis was noteworthy not only for the business conducted, but for the unusual lodging arrangements. Because of the small size of the host congregation, Trinity PRC, the delegates stayed at the J-Bar-J Ranch, the guest ranch where Trinity PRC hosted an evangelism conference a couple years ago.

With delegates staying in close quarters, with bunk beds and common facilities, they enjoyed a great time of fellowship, and no little humor.

The customary Officebearers' Conference was held the day before. The theme of the conference was "Denominational Unity." Pastor Jai Mahtani gave the keynote address, the theme of which was "The Indispensability of Denominational Unity." Pastor Arie denHartog gave a presentation on the importance of denominational unity to missions. Rev. Gise VanBaren spoke on the dangers of independentism. The conference concluded with a panel discussion on several matters pertaining to the theme of the conference. Tuesday evening, although not part of the conference, Pastors Brummel and denHartog gave a brief slide presentation of their recent trip to the Philippines.

Pastor Rodney Miersma chaired the meeting of classis on Wednesday.

The focus of classis' agenda was the matter of the disbanding of the congregation of Trinity PRC in Houston, Texas. Classis gave approval to Trinity's decision to

disband. After over 25 years of faithful witness to the truth and extensive evangelism labors, they decided that the Lord had revealed to them that they ought not continue. With three significant grounds for disbanding, Trinity presented their case to the classis for approval. The grounds reflected upon the small size of the congregation, the growing subsidy demands from the denomination, and the inability to maintain an ongoing consistory. The light of Trinity's witness will be extinguished with a final worship service on Sunday, June 7, the Lord willing.

The difficulty of disbanding was complicated by the concerns for Pastor Jai Mahtani, Trinity's minister. In compliance with Article 13 of the Church Order, Trinity sought approval for Pastor Mahtani's temporary emeritation after the dissolution of Trinity Church. Although it is the prayer of all that Pastor Mahtani soon receive another call, classis approved his temporary emeritation, recognizing that by June, through no fault of his own, he will have been left without a fixed charge. The synodical deputies of Classis East concurred in that decision. Pastor Mahtani's financial needs during this temporary emeritation will be provided for by the Churches. The assets of Trinity PRC will be forwarded to the Synod after the disposition of the church property.

Such an occasion is necessarily a solemn one. We believe, however, that the will of the Lord has been accomplished, also in the many labors performed in Houston by Trinity's congregation and the various pastors who have served them. Steadfast is our con-

fession: "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." His Word never returns void, but accomplishes the purpose whereunto He sends it. We commend Pastor Mahtani and his family, as well as the members of Trinity, to the care of our heavenly Father.

Among other business conducted, Classis gave advice in one discipline case, giving approval to the actions of the consistory involved. Subsidy requests from four congregations were treated and will be forwarded to synod. Classis acknowledged with thanksgiving to God that the congregation in Edgerton, Minnesota no longer requires subsidy.

Classis granted classical appointments to South Holland PRC as follows: Rev. Joostens (April 19 and 26); Rev. denHartog (May 10 and 17); Rev. Mahtani (June 21 and 28); Rev. Brummel (July 19 and 26); Rev. Moore (August 9 and 16); and Rev. R. Miersma (September 6 and 13).

Voting for delegates to synod 1998 resulted in the following elections: **Ministers:** *Primi:* A. denHartog, C. Haak, S. Houck, S. Key, G. VanBaren; *Secundi:* W. Bekkering, A. Brummel, M. DeVries, M. Joostens, R. Moore. **Elders:** *Primi:* E. Gritters (Hull), R. Kelley (Lynden), A. Kooiker (Hull), L. Nelson (Loveland), E. VanVoorthuysen (Redlands); *Secundi:* R. Campbell (Loveland), A. Hendriks (Edgerton), John Hilton (Edgerton), J. Hoksbergen (Lynden), L. Regnerus Jr. (Randolph).

Among other elections: Rev. C. Haak was re-elected to a three-year term as a Synodical Deputy from Classis West. Revs. R. Moore and G. VanBaren were elected as

church visitors, with Revs. A. denHartog and S. Houck as alternates.

Classis West accepted the invi-

tation of Loveland PRC to host the next meeting of classis on September 2, 1998. The March 1999 meet-

ing is scheduled to be held in Redlands, California at the invitation of Hope PRC, Redlands.

Rev. Steven Key, Stated Clerk

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Young People's Activities

The young people of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI have been busy working on a fund-raising project for the better part of a year now. About this time last year they began gathering the necessary information needed to put together a church directory that would include all the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches in Michigan. But, more than that, the thought of the committee was to incorporate also a directory of businesses in those same churches. After what must have been a lot of time-consuming work, Hope's young people succeeded in putting together that directory. It contains some 50 pages of names of the Michigan PRC membership, followed by some 14 pages of advertising. All in all, a nicely done directory and a good addition to the individual church directories that each Michigan church has.

The young people of the Grandville, MI PRC recently hosted a hamburger fry at Hope PR Christian School. What caught my eye regarding that event was the fact that Grandville was offering both sit-down and to-go services. In other words, fast food comes to your young people's fund raising.

One final item about our young people involves the Young People's Society of the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL. They met recently to discuss the theme, "The Morality of the

U.S. Constitution and its Authors," a thought-provoking topic. No word on what was decided.

Congregational Activities

Staying with the Bethel PRC for a couple more news items, we find that architectural plans have been completed on their proposed new church building and have been sent out to various contractors for bids. Final cost estimates were expected by the end of February. If all went as planned, Bethel could possibly have a congregational meeting in early March for final review and approval.

In case you haven't heard yet, the official Bethel PRC web site is now on-line at: <http://www.mes.net/~bethelpr>. Bethel is also linked with our other churches who have home pages on the web.

As noted in an earlier "News," the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI observed their 25th anniversary on February 15. This evidence of God's faithfulness was celebrated that evening with a short program which featured Faith's Choral Society, the Sunday School, the Voices of Victory, and others of their congregation. A light lunch followed. That Sunday morning the congregation also had the added blessing of celebrating the Lord's Supper together.

Sister Church Activities

We extend our somewhat belated congratulations to one of our sister churches, the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, on the occasion of the observance of their 16th anniversary as a congregation on January 17. We echo the thoughts taken from

their January 18 bulletin and pass it along to you, our readers. "The beauty of a bride lies in the harmonious adorning of her whole frame, so the beauty of Christ's bride is in her members living harmoniously according to the eternal Word of God." Good words for each of us to remember.

Our churches recently received notice from our denomination's Committee for Contact with other Churches that they had received official notification from our sister church in Wellington, New Zealand that they have disbanded. They have formed themselves into two fellowships, one in Wellington and one in Ashurst, approximately 2^o hours drive from each other on the North Island. It was also their wish that the amount of their General Fund be divided into three equal parts between the work and promotion of the *Standard Bearer*, the Reformed Witness Committee of Hope PRC in Walker, MI, and the radio ministry of the Reformed Witness Hour of the PRC in America. They also wished to convey their thanks to all of our church membership for all that we have done for them over our years of contact with each other.

Minister Activities

Our vacant South Holland PRC formed a new trio consisting of Revs. Gritters, Koole, and Dale Kuiper. Rev. Gritters was elected to receive the call.

Food for Thought

"The only kingdom that will prevail in this world is the kingdom that is not of this world." □

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of the Edgerton PRC expresses its sincere sympathy to the family of
MRS. HATTIE VER HEY.

This charter member of our congregation was taken to be with the Lord on February 22, 1998 at the age of 99 years. We rejoice that now she is able to experience sweet communion with God, which was the desire of her heart. "Nevertheless 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" (Psalm 73:23, 24).

Rev. A. Brummel, Pres.
John Hilton, Clerk

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 13, 1998 at the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk by April 15, 1998.

Jon J. Huiskens,
Stated Clerk

NOTICE!!!

Each issue of the *Standard Bearer* is available on cassette tape for those who are blind, or who for some other reason would like to be able to listen to a reading of the *SB*. This is an excellent ministry of the Evangelism Society of the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church. The reader is Ken Rietema of Southeast Church. Anyone desiring this service regularly should write:

Southeast PRC
1535 Cambridge Ave. S.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

NOTICE!

This year marks the 20th year of Protestant Reformed education at Covenant Christian School in Lynden, Washington. We render constant thanksgiving to God for His abiding faithfulness to us. "... His compassions fail not, they are new every morning: Great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22, 23).

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church, Wyckoff, NJ, express their Christian sympathy to Steve & Bev Hanko in the death of their infant son,

ADRIAN MARK,

born February 25, 1998.

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death" (Psalm 68:19, 20).

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness to our heavenly Father we were privileged to celebrate, on March 15, 1998, the 35th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

DEWEY and ELAINE VANDER NOORD.

We are grateful to our heavenly Father for their love and faithfulness to one another and to the church these many years. We give thanks to God for providing us with Christian parents and grandparents who have guided and instructed us in the way of Christ.

We pray that God will continue to bless them and keep them in His care. "And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 16:62).

- * David VanDerNoord
- * Randy and Shelley VanDerNoord
Ashley, Dewey, Ross, Clark
- * Lee and Brenda Wiltjer
Daniel, Lee Jr., Lauren
- * John and Deb VanKalker
Kyle, Amanda
- * Ryan and Melanie Zandstra
Courtney, Kayla (in glory)
- * Stephanie VanDerNoord

South Holland, Illinois

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of the Hudsonville PRC express our heartfelt Christian sympathy to two of our faithful members.

Mr. Tom Spriensma in the death of his sister,

ENGELINE DYKMA,

in the Netherlands and Mr. Ray Praamsma in the death of his beloved wife,

JULIA PRAAMSMA,

early on Friday morning, February 6, 1998.

May they, as well as all of God's children, find comfort in the Word of God as found in Revelation 21:3, 4: "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."

Erv Kortering,
Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, expresses its heartfelt Christian sympathy to the family and friends of one of our faithful members, until a debilitating disease made it physically impossible for him to attend,

MR. WILLIAM LAFFERTY,

who was taken home to his eternal rest on February 12, 1998.

May we be comforted in the words of Romans 8:38, 39: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Erv Kortering,
Secretary