



**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

The Standard Bearer

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Our Eternal Blessedness in Christ

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3

Blessed! That is the keynote of the apostle's greeting to the church of Ephesus, even as the theme of the epistle is the blessedness of the church in Christ. Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blesses us, His church, with every spiritual blessing in the midst of this present evil world.

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God is the triune, covenant God who is blessed in Himself, the fullness of all infinite perfections, who lives His own eternally blessed life of covenant fellowship within His own glorious Being as

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the three persons of the holy Trinity.

Jesus Christ is the Son, the second person of the divine three, who is the Word, God's revelation outside of Himself. He is Jesus, Jehovah-salvation, eternally ordained to bring salvation to all those chosen in Him from before the foundation of the earth. He is the Christ, anointed of God as Head and Mediator of His church, to redeem her and bring her into glory through His Self-surrender and His sacrificial death of the cross.

Christ is presented here as He is exalted at the Father's right hand with a name above all names, entrusted with all power in heaven and on earth. He is Lord of His church, eternally appointed to rule over her and bless her in love. Therefore He is sovereign Lord over all the works of God's hands. The angels are at His service, also

deeply involved in His work of salvation. The devils are subject to His will and tremble before Him. The whole universe, with every living creature, including the wicked, is under His command, that all may serve to our salvation and God's glory.

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The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ made the heavens and the earth and all that they contain by Jesus Christ. The creation account focuses our attention on our first parents in the garden of Eden as friend-servants of God, on Adam as our covenant head and representative. Christ already stands in the background, since "all things were created *by him*, and *for him*" (Col. 1:16). And thus God in Christ made all things with a view to His church.

God in Christ made the myriad

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of angels according to their ranks as ministering spirits. He created the sun, the moon, and the billions upon billions of stars and set them in their courses. He called forth the great variety of birds of the air, the many sea monsters and all sorts of fishes in the sea, and a large assortment of beasts and animals. And last of all He made man as king of the earthly creation, serving his Maker.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ also upholds and governs all things by His eternal counsel and providence, so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, all things come to us by His Father-hand. Thus all things must serve for the salvation of the church to His glory.



Adam and Eve as our first parents experienced intimate communion with God as He talked with them in the garden of Eden. They were called to devote themselves to Him in love, to care for the garden as His friends, and therefore also to reject all evil by refusing to eat of the forbidden tree.

When they sinned they fell by the mercy of God, as it were, into the arms of Christ. According to God's eternal purpose He gave to them and us His covenant promise that He would put enmity between the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The former would crush the head of the latter.

At the time of the flood the seed of the serpent, the reprobate world, had become ripe for judgment. God preserved the seed of the woman, His church, in the ark by the waters of the flood. The covenant line continued in Shem. To Abraham came the promise that God would be his God and the God of his seed after him, in the line of generations, for an everlasting covenant. Galatians tells us that this

Seed is Christ, and adds: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:16, 29).

The twelve sons of Jacob became the twelve tribes of Israel that were separated from the nations of the world as the typical people of God. For within them was the true Israel, the elect, spiritual Israel to whom God promised the land of Canaan as a land flowing with milk and honey.

Thus Israel was delivered from the bondage of Egypt by the Angel of Jehovah as a picture of our deliverance from the bondage of sin and death. They were led through the waste and howling wilderness, where they were fed by manna and given water from the rock. Both the manna and the rock were types of Christ. After forty years they were brought into the promised land.

David was a type of Christ as he fought and triumphed over the enemies of God. Solomon was a type of Christ in His exaltation. Even though carnal Israel forsook God and turned to idols, God always had His elect remnant among them. There were always the seven thousand who did not bend their knee to Baal. It was because of that elect remnant that the psalmist could sing: "Glorious things of thee are spoken, O city of God." "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, ... the city of the great King." For the one place in all the earth where God dwelled among His elect people was Zion.

In the fullness of time the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ sent His Son into the world, proceeding out of the loins of Abraham, from the seed of David, born of the virgin Mary. He came as the Man of Sorrows, the Suffering Servant of God.

All His life He fought the battle of the Lord against the forces of darkness, and as the mighty Conqueror overcame them, crushing the head of Satan. All His life He

bore the wrath of God in our stead, culminating in the painful, shameful, and accursed death of Calvary. He bore our guilt away and merited for us eternal life with Father in His glory. Surrendering Himself to physical death, He arose again on the third day. After making His resurrection known by various signs and appearances He ascended to heaven.

Of Him the church of the shadows sang: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!" In Paul's epistle to the Philippians we are told that, because he humbled Himself even unto the death of the cross, "God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).



This God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is our God and Father for Christ's sake. Even as He has chosen us in Him, and has redeemed us by His blood according to the riches of His grace, He also blesses us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ.

Christ knows His sheep and calls them by His Spirit and Word with a powerful, efficacious calling, drawing His own out of death into life. We who by nature are dead in trespasses and sins are made alive as God's sons and daughters by the Spirit of adoption. He calls us by name and we come to Him. We come with a broken heart and a contrite spirit to seek all our salvation in Him alone. We are saved by grace through faith, the gift of our God.

Through that bond of faith that unites us with Christ we draw our life from Christ, even as a branch draws its life from the vine. Only in living connection with Christ can we bring forth fruit unto everlasting life.

We are justified, assured by the Spirit of Christ that we are righteous before God, yea, so completely as if we never had sinned nor will sin anymore, as if we ourselves had merited the right to eternal life.

Through Christ Jesus we bear our Father's likeness as His sons and daughters. He tells us: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

That does not mean that we are now without sin and do not suffer trials and affliction. When God visits the earth with His judgments, His people are also involved. Earthquakes, floods, famines, and other visitations affect them as well as the wicked unbelievers. Wars among the nations, riots and un-

rest among the people, the competitive preparing of nuclear weapons and ever increasing lawlessness — all serve the Father's purpose to purify and thus to prepare His church for glory.

"Why do the nations rage, and the peoples imagine vain things?" God has set His King upon His holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2). Zion is delivered through judgment. The judgments that come upon the wicked cause us to look forward to the glorious deliverance of the children of God.

In a certain sense we suffer more than the unbelievers (Ps. 73). For we are strangers and pilgrims, hated and despised, and often persecuted for righteousness' sake. As cross bearers we fulfill the sufferings of Christ. If in this life only we have hope in Christ we would be the most miserable of creatures.

Yet we are new creatures in Christ, with the beginning of eternal life in our hearts. We experience the peace of God that passes all understanding, for we know that God chastens us in His love.

We rejoice in Christ with a joy unspeakable and full of glory, experiencing a foretaste of the eternal joy. For nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. All things must work together for good to those who love God, the called according to His purpose.

We say with the inspired psalmist: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord."

We experience covenant fellowship with our God through prayer, worship, and adoration, and thus experience a foretaste of the full life to come. We live by faith and not by sight. For all things are ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's, to the glory of our Father, both now and for evermore.

Bless Him ye angels, wondrous in might. Bless Him, ye servants, who in His will delight! Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! □

Editorial

Our Seminary as Military Academy *

(2)

*Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same
commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.
Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.
No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he
may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

—II Timothy 2:1-4

* The text of the address at the convocation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary held at the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI on September 9, 1998. The first installment appeared in the November 15 issue of the Standard Bearer.

The real war is spiritual, not physical. It concerns the glory of the triune God in the world. The combatants are mighty spiritual lords, the risen Jesus Christ and fallen Satan.

The true church is the host, the army, of Captain Christ. The soldier is the minister of the gospel.

That the minister is a soldier and that his ministry, therefore, is a kind of fighting are clearly taught

in II Timothy 2:1-4. Paul describes Timothy as a "good soldier of Jesus Christ." With reference to the ministry, the apostle states, "no man that *warreth* entangleth himself with the affairs of this life." A minister purposes to "please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."

In chapter 1:18 of the first epistle to Timothy, Paul describes the charge, or commission, that a minister receives at ordination as the mandate to "war a good warfare."

A man who does not care to fight in the ministry, a man who is determined *not* to fight, has no place in the seminary. If one enrolls anyway, he must be discovered and asked to leave. A pacifist is a threat to an earthly nation; a minister who is a pacifist is a traitor or a coward.

The minister is a soldier in a special, uniquely crucial way. There is a sense in which all the saints are soldiers, who also fight. But the Holy Spirit identifies the ministers as the main fighters. They are the soldiers upon whom the fighting of the rest of the host of Christ depends. The core of the army of God is the body of ministers. The ministers are the special forces.

This is because of their office and its function, namely, the office of the preaching of the gospel.

The warfare of Jesus Christ on behalf of the glory of God and the salvation of the church is waged and won by the Word of God. The risen, living Christ Himself speaks this Word from heaven, routing the foe and defending His church. He speaks it through the office of the ministry.

The weapon in the real war is the spiritual weapon of the Word, that is, the Word *preached*. The Word preached is the glittering, invincible sword of the Spirit. With the sacraments and discipline, the Word of truth is the spiritual weapon that the apostle contrasts

with carnal weapons in II Corinthians 10:3-5:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ....

Similarly, the main weapon of the enemy is the lie, that is, the word that denies or falsifies God. That was the weapon of choice of the Old Serpent in Paradise by which he brought down the king and queen of the original form of the kingdom of God with all their princes and princesses and got the rule for himself. This is the deadly weapon that the Evil One wields nightly by means of television and movies to befoul millions, including multitudes of professing Christians. They suppose

that they are gods over their own behavior and that whatever pleases them is good. The lie of evolution in the state schools has destroyed many churches by its aggressive enlistment of the churches' children and young people in the materialistic, humanistic, hedonistic kingdom of the devil.

The most effective form of the lie is heresy—the teaching of a false gospel by false teachers in a false, or departing, church.

What follows in II Timothy 2 makes plain that the army of Christ fights with the Word of God and that the devil's crew fights with the lie.

"The word of God is not bound," we read in verse 9. As a good soldier, Timothy must rightly divide the Word of truth (v. 15). Even some who presently oppose themselves to the truth, because they have fallen into the snare of the devil, may be won by the

minister's instruction of them (vv. 25, 26).

On the other hand, there is the warning against heresy, a word in the sphere of the visible, instituted church that eats as a canker, overthrowing the faith of some members of the church (vv. 17, 18).

Such is the importance of the office of the ministry that ministers are hand-picked by Jesus Christ. The minister is a good soldier "of Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ has chosen the minister to be a soldier. No minister volunteers for this service, although he is willing to serve. Every minister is summarily drafted by Christ. This is why the Reformed church views the call of the minister as so important. The first 20 articles of the Church Order of Dordt have to do with the call to the office of the ministry.

This is why we tell men that if they can possibly avoid the ministry, they should do so.

And this is why the people of God should receive their minister and the Word that he brings, so long as he faithfully teaches the gospel of the glory and grace of God and so long as he devotes himself to his office, not entangling himself in the affairs of this life.

The reality of the great war and the will of Christ that the soldier be the minister make our seminary a military academy. It is a school that trains soldiers.

Because this is the work of the seminary, our churches insist that the teachers themselves be men with experience in the pastoral ministry. That is, they must themselves be men with combat experience. They may not be mere academic theologians, "arm-chair generals." Those who are to teach others to fight in the front lines of the real war must be men who have proved themselves to be capable soldiers in the congregations. This has always been the position of the Reformed churches.

The training in the seminary extends to the personal conduct of

A
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or a
coward.

the future soldiers. Students are taught to "endure hardness," that is, to suffer hardship in the ministry. They are taught to expect hardship, not only from without the congregation but also from within. The enemies are not only the wicked world of ungodly men and women and false churches but also the sinful natures of the members of the congregation. Besides, there are always hypocrites and the carnal seed in the church. The seminary calls the soldier-in-training to bear up under the "hardness" without surrender and without slackening in the work. Church history gives opportunity for this instruction. Pastoral theology is full of it.

It is also required of the minister that he deliberately avoid entangling himself "with the affairs of this life." Involvement in business, entertainments, and other aspects of the ordinary life of the citizens is destructive of the calling of the earthly soldier. To the extent that he involves himself in these things, he cannot fight. Therefore, when the soldier is serving his nation in the military, the state supports him.

This is also true for ministers. As much as possible, we must stay clear—and free—of matters of everyday life that are perfectly legitimate for the other members of the church: business ventures; sports; hobbies that take up inordinate time; and the like. Worldly prelates who spent much of their time hunting, making money, and having a good time contributed mightily to the falling away of the church of Rome at the time of the Reformation.

Those things entangle us!

Those things take up our precious time!

Those things exhaust our limited energy!

Those things imperiously demand our attention!

This is why the churches sup-

port us financially. It is not to give us a good living, but to free us from worldly cares, so that we can fight, undistracted and unencumbered.

We train men along these lines in our seminary.

Then there is the training of personal conduct that concerns the motive of the men, their motive for abstaining from unnecessary and entangling affairs of this life and their motive for fighting as a soldier: "that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier," that is, to please Christ.

This is why the minister fights with the Word. It is not because he is personally pugnacious. It is not because he loves the glory of victory in the cut-and-thrust of theological debate (a real temptation!). But his motive is to please Jesus Christ, whose call of him to the ministry, like His call of him to salvation, has its source in the love of the Lord that moved Jesus to give Himself to the cross for him. This is

a soldier that fights out of love for his Lord.

This is the motive already of the student in seminary to be hard on himself in his studies.

Primarily, the training by the seminary consists of instruction that gives the students the Word of truth and that teaches them how to use this Word in the congregation. "Commit the things of Scripture and the confessions to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also," the apostle tells Professor Timothy.

This instruction emphatically includes that they vigorously wield the Word against the lie, particularly the lie of the denial of salvation by grace alone.

The preaching of the minister must be antithetical.

In the Formula of Subscription, every Protestant Reformed minister swears to oppose especially the

errors condemned in the Canons of Dordt. Should one fail to do this, he would be guilty of breaking his oath. Congregation and consistory must then make this an issue with him. Not only is he not a "good soldier," but he is no soldier at all. The soldier fights against the enemy.

The seminary will not knowingly graduate a tolerant minister. If after graduation and installation a man shows himself to be tolerant of the lie, a man who cherishes peace and unity at the expense of the truth, a man who refuses to be negative in his teaching, the fault is his own. The seminary is not to blame.

But the condemnation of error is in the interests of the truth. The negative preaching serves the positive proclamation of the gospel of grace. The condemnation of heretics and of departing and false churches is the means of the salvation of the elect church to the glory of God.

We train them to be soldiers. After four years, that pass quickly, we send them off to the battlefield. We know how commanding officers feel when they must send young recruits into battle.

The graduates look so young—
younger all the time. They do not yet know—not really, not experientially—what the "hardness" of the ministry is, also in the Protestant Reformed Churches, where the ministry is still honored. They will soon find out.

The great war rages, in the congregations, among the saints. And there are ungodly men who creep in unawares.

There is a tug at the heart.

But the war is more important than they. It is worthy of their suffering and death.

And as true soldiers of Jesus Christ, they will be wonderfully strengthened—and rewarded. □

—DJE

■ **Good Things about the Issue on Kuyper**

Wonderful, impressive, informative, edifying, and scholarly ... and many other good things can be said about the "Special Reformation Issue" of the *Standard Bearer* (10/15/98). This issue I

shall pass on to fellow church members.

Unbelievable. The Utrecht church—35,000 members? The Amsterdam church—140,000 members, 136 officebearers, 28 ministers? A mega-church? Great preacher, Reformed, true to the Scriptures, man of God!

How could it be? The PRC indebted to Abraham Kuyper? But not without authentic (scriptural) reservations.

May the readers comprehend what is written.

Henry Doorn
Kentwood, MI

Report on the BRF Family Conference

The 4th bi-annual Family Conference of the British Reformed Fellowship was held in Castlewellan Castle near Newcastle in Northern Ireland, July 25-August 1, 1998.

The British Reformed Fellowship are to be commended for their fine efforts to provide the conferences that they have planned. I am convinced that there is no other place in the world that provides such an opportunity as their bi-annual conferences. One thing is for sure, there is no place more appealing to us as a family. The site of this summer's conference was a castle that is well over two hundred years old, on the grounds of one of the best arboretums in the UK (talk about an opportunity for a landscape gardener!).

We have gained many friends at the previous three conferences. Each time, in preparation for attending these conferences, we speculate who will be there. Some cannot make it to the conference, while others no longer walk with us. We were also informed of one man who had attended three previous conferences, and who went to glory just prior to the conference.

One thing that never ceases to affect us is that most of those who attend the conferences struggle through life with a lack of fellowship with those of like mind. It is therefore not only the instruction that they enjoy at the conferences but also the fellowship. It is impossible for us in this country even to begin to understand this void in their lives. They truly understand the text, "straight is the gate and narrow is the way, and few there be that find it."

This year, people from four continents were represented, including Jason from Malaysia,

whose contact with the PRC and BRF was through the Internet. For the youngest, honors went to Suzanna Moore, who was just seven weeks old. This year, about thirty young adults from the USA were introduced to this great heritage of the BRF.

One of the first things noticeable in Northern Ireland is the division of the country regarding unification or separation. Flags flying in different cities indicate that the cities are either Catholic or Protestant. The bigger question is, will ruthless and intolerant Rome rule Northern Ireland? Will Northern Ireland be under the rule of the representative of antichrist? That is the real question. For this reason, some government (Protestant) employees who attended this conference had to "sneak" in and out of the meetings, not sleeping in the facilities, for, if revealed, they could be the target of a bomb. For this conference was held in enemy territory. Castlewellan is a Republic.

Mr. Oomkes is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Byron Center, Michigan.

lican city, with its flags flying (illegally) from the power poles. Never mind that we were in a "Christian conference center." Satan uses these words too.

The conference began officially on Saturday evening, July 25, with a speech, by the present chairman, on Matthew 5:13-16: being the light of the world. This is easier said than done, especially in times such as are experienced in a spiritual vacuum like that in the UK. This was followed by a question period. There are no limits as to what questions may be asked.

Sunday, we were off to Ballymena for church in the town hall. By this time we had renewed acquaintances from past conferences and met most of the new attendees. Our mealtimes were some of the best times to converse with all the different people. We always made sure that we ate with someone different at each meal and got acquainted with everyone. This time often serves as a springboard for many an in-depth discussion. The education system in the UK is aimed at developing deep and systematic thought processes. There are no shallow thinkers in the group. This can be a real challenge for one coming from the US. The British educational system is superior to ours.

Now to the heart of the conference itself. The theme this year was the doctrine of the last things. The schedule of speeches was as follows:

"The Idea of the World's End" (the place and importance of eschatology) by Prof. Hanko, on Monday morning.

"The Millennium" (an exposition and defense of amillennialism) by Prof. Engelsma, on Monday evening. He not only defended amillennialism, but pointed out that, if one were to hold any other view, he would find absolutely no support from any of the Reformers. The church of the Reformation knew nothing but the amillennial view.

"The Signs of Christ Coming" (near but not imminent) by Prof. Hanko, on Tuesday evening.

"Christ's Return" (its time, manner, and purpose) by Prof. Engelsma, on Wednesday evening.

"The Great Judgment Day" (the parties, standards, and parts involved) by Prof. Hanko, on Thursday evening.

"Our Calling With Respect to Christ's Coming and the End of the World" by Prof. Engelsma, on Friday morning.

Friday evening was devoted to a question and answer period on all the speeches. This also gave opportunity to discuss the differences of the views held by some of those in the UK.

All of these speeches give great comfort and hope for the child of God. The signs that are presently unfolding are sure signs that God is in control, and that all things work toward the coming of the new heavens and new earth.

All of these speeches are worthy of being given again in North America. The last one especially would be an excellent topic for an evangelism lecture.

Tapes of these lectures can be obtained by sending \$18.00 (US) to:

Bill Oomkes
6299 Wing S.E.

Grand Rapids, MI 49512,
or in Europe, sending £10 to:
Mr. Jonathan McAuley
164 Church Rd.
Glenwherry, Ballymena
Co. Antrim, BT42 3EL
Northern Ireland.

One of the characteristics of these conferences has been the lusty Psalm singing from the metrical Psalter. Many of these tunes are beginning to become quite familiar, after these many years of practice.

One of the most difficult times of the conference was Saturday morning, when we all went our separate ways. Although we hope to see each other again in the year 2000 in the beautiful country of Wales, we are also mindful that for some it may be the last time on this side of eternity. Such was the situation this year, as just prior to the conference Jimmy Fraser was taken into glory. He was a faithful attendee at the three previous conferences.

The next conference will be held in Bangor, in beautiful North Wales, in July, 2000, the Lord willing. □

Ezekiel's Song

Dry Bones! Dry Bones!
Now hear the Word of the Lord!
Their ears are stones;
How hears this desert dust hoard?

And how shall they hear without a preacher?

So I do preach
A trembling, foolishness, noise:
Each bone to each!
And Flesh and Breath He employs.

And now shall we know that we're His creature!

Connie L. Meyer

The Elders and Family Visitation

When we take up the matter of the elders' work of family visitation, we are dealing with a Reformed tradition. Family visitation is a practice not found in other branches of the church. The venerable practical theologian J. J. Van Oosterzee points this out when he writes, "... it is sufficiently evident that house to house visitation may be looked upon as a peculiar fruit of the Reformed soil."¹ Though it makes an interesting study in itself we do not intend to consider the history of family visitation, except to note that it was initiated by John Calvin in Geneva.²

Family visitation belongs to the official work of the elders of the church. The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America states in Article 23:

The office of the elders, in addition to what was said in Article 16 to be their duty in common with the minister of the Word, is to take heed that the ministers, together with their fellow-elders and the deacons, faithfully discharge their office, and both before and after the Lord's Supper, as time and circumstances may demand,

for the edification of the churches, to visit the families of the congregation, in order particularly to comfort and instruct the members, and also to exhort others in respect to the Christian religion.

Strictly speaking, this article requires eight visits per family per year when it stipulates that these visits must be "both before and after the Lord's Supper." The greater frequency was due to the fact that when this article was written the Reformed churches were in their infancy in the Netherlands. The people of God needed more careful supervision and instruction in the faith. In our churches family visitation is conducted annually.

Because the Lord, the Chief Shepherd, calls elders to shepherd the precious flock of God, the flock purchased with the blood of Jesus, He demands of them that they thoroughly prepare for the work of family visitation. This preparation ought to be spiritual. This means that, both collectively as a consistory and individually and privately, the elders should ask the Lord to enable them to do this work. By means of prayer the elders must seek the Lord's blessing upon this work among the families of the congregation.

On a practical level, consistories ought to decide on a theme or subject to be used on the visits to the families of the congregation. A specific passage of Scripture should be read. Both the subject and the Scripture passage should be discussed prayerfully

and thoroughly by the elders at a regular consistory meeting. This, obviously, needs to be done before the annual visits by the teams of elders begins. The subject and Scripture passage should be announced to the congregation several weeks prior to the beginning of family visitation. This allows the individual families ample time prayerfully to meditate on the passage and in this way prepare themselves to receive the elders.

The elders must prepare for each family they are scheduled to visit. What is the occupation of the husband? What are the specific needs of this particular family. How old are the children? Are the children faithful, obedient catechumens? Are there young people in the family? The youth ought to be reminded of their calling to make public confession of their faith (Romans 10:9). Family visitation provides an excellent opportunity for the elders to remind the young people of their calling to "marry in the Lord." If there be a spiritually-minded young man in the family with intellectual abilities and other natural and spiritual gifts which would qualify him to serve

¹ J. J. Van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology*, p. 520.

² Those interested in the history of the practice of family visitation may consult: P. Y. DeJong, *Taking Heed to the Flock*, pp. 19-24; J.J. Van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology*, pp. 518-520; or John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, XII, 2; *Commentary on Acts 20:20-21*.

the Lord in the ministry of the Word, let the elders encourage him to face the question whether the Lord calls him to pursue that lofty calling. Are there any weaknesses evident in this family which ought to be addressed? Any strengths in which they ought to be encouraged to persevere? What specific applications from the Scripture passage should be made to this particular family?

Sometimes it happens that the subject and Scripture passage chosen do not apply with quite the same force among all the families of the congregation. For example, the elders may want to select an appropriate Psalm upon which to base their visit with an elderly couple living in a retirement or nursing home. Sanctified discretion needs to be used in this regard.

Family visitation should be directed towards the normal, not the abnormal. By this we mean that matters of a disciplinary nature ought not be saved for the annual family visitation. The same would apply to the work of the deacons. The elders must not be called upon to admonish someone concerning poor stewardship. Nor must family visitation become the time for families to bring their criticisms of the way things are being done in the congregation or of the minister's preaching, criticisms which they have accumulated during the past year. If a member has a problem of this sort he ought to speak to the officebearer involved or the consistory immediately.

A record should be kept on file of all the visits made. This gives the elders a record of the content of each visit. Elders know what subjects and Scripture passages have been discussed. Thus consistories avoid duplication and repetition. Elders ought to take note of any particular problems or concerns which might arise and which might need to be pursued by a committee of elders or brought up again the following year. In this

connection the reports of the various visits must not be oral and ought not be mere generalities. They should be detailed enough to give the consistory some idea of what is going on with each family.

As to the method of conducting the visit we note that each visit must be opened with prayer. Petitions must be directed to the Lord for each member of the family concerning his/her place and calling within the family, the church, and society. Prayer serves the purpose of putting all concerned in a proper frame of mind for a fruitful discussion of each one's needs and concerns on the basis of God's Word. This prayer ought to be offered very soon after the elders arrive. Time must not be wasted on "small talk."

After the prayer, one of the elders must read Scripture. He ought then briefly expound the verse or verses chosen for the basis of the visit. After this the elder must ask questions of and discuss the Word with each member of the family. The elders must take care not to dominate the discussion. Rather, they must try to get the people to "open up." Let the elders listen carefully and "between the lines" so as to discern the needs, concerns, and problems of the family members. Care should be taken by the elders too that they not neglect the little ones and the young adults of the families. Near the end of the visit opportunity should be given for any of the family to bring up any questions or concerns he/she may have. This must not be allowed to degenerate into a "gripe session." But, for all of that, family visitation can often provide the elders a wonderful opportunity to offer well-founded advice and/or instruction from Holy Scripture which will prevent little problems and concerns from becoming big and serious later.

It should be remembered too that there are always a few "chronic complainers" in every congregation. The late and highly

respected Rev. Gerrit Vos told this writer during his seminary days, "Robert, the Lord puts a 'billy goat' or two in every congregation to keep the preacher humble." Rev. Vos proved to be right! These complainers usually direct their sometimes cruel criticisms against the officebearers. More often than not they complain against the preacher, criticizing some aspect of his work (especially his preaching) or of his life. The sermons are too long, too brief, too doctrinal and deep, too practical and light, etc. With these let the elders be patient, but firm. Sometimes chronic complainers need sharply to be rebuked from the Word of God. The spiritually-minded, godly elder will know how to respond to these.

The minister ought to be required to take part in leading the family visitation. Especially in the larger congregations wherein the minister is kept extremely busy, he ought not have any more visits than any of the other elders. In other words, divide the families by the number of elders (minister included), so that each elder has an equal number of family visitation calls. When the team consists of the pastor and an elder, the elder ought to participate. The elder ought not allow the minister to dominate and do all the talking.

Each visit ought to be closed, as it was begun, with an appropriate prayer. The elder who leads the visit ought to allow time and opportunity for his fellow elder to ask questions and make appropriate comments. The non-presiding elder ought to lead in the closing prayer.

May God in His mercy grant that the Protestant Reformed Churches may continue faithfully to maintain the practice of family visitation along the lines offered above. The practice has proved to be a wonderful means to instruct, edify, and unite the people of God in the truth of Scripture. □

Christ Returning for Judgment

I had occasion to give special consideration to this subject in connection with preparing a sermon on this aspect of our Lord's return. Both the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, in their articles about the return of the Lord, focus on this aspect of the Lord's return almost exclusively.

What comfort is it to thee that Christ shall come again to judge the living and the dead? That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered Himself for my sake, to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven: who shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all His chosen ones, to Himself into heavenly joys and glory (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 19).

The well known theme of the Heidelberg Catechism of the Christian's only comfort in life and death that he belongs to His faithful Savior Jesus Christ shines through in its article on Christ coming for judgment. The wicked have every reason to contemplate with great terror the return of the Lord

in judgment. The judgment of the Lord will be for them a day of terrible darkness and dreadful calamity. Those who belong to Christ will have unspeakable comfort when He comes for the judgment.

Article 37 of the Belgic Confession is certainly one of the most beautiful statements regarding the return of the Lord found anywhere outside of the Bible itself.

Finally we believe, according to the Word of God, when the time appointed by the Lord (which is unknown to all creatures) is come, and the number of the elect complete, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly, as He ascended, with great glory and majesty to declare Himself the judge of the quick and the dead, burning this old world with fire and flame to cleanse it. And then all men will personally appear before this great judge, both men and women and children, that have been from the beginning of the world to the end thereof, being summoned by the voice of the archangel, and by the sound of the trumpet of God. For all the dead shall be raised out of the earth, and their souls joined and united to their proper bodies, in which they formerly lived. As for those who shall then be living, they shall not die as the others, but be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and from corruptible, become incorruptible. Then the books (that is to say the consciences) shall be opened, and the dead judged according to what they shall have done in this world, whether it be good or evil. Nay,

all men shall give an account of every idle word they have spoken, which the world only counts as amusement and jest: and then the secrets and hypocrisy of men shall be disclosed and laid open before all. And therefore the consideration of this judgment, is justly terrible and dreadful to the wicked and ungodly, but most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and elect: because then their full deliverance shall be perfected, and there they shall receive the fruits of their labor and trouble which they have borne. Their innocence shall be known to all, and they shall see the terrible vengeance which God shall execute on the wicked, who most cruelly persecuted, oppressed and tormented them in this world; and who shall be convicted by the testimony of their own consciences, and being immortal, shall be tormented in that everlasting fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels. But on the contrary, the faithful and elect shall be crowned with glory and honor; and the Son of God shall confess their names before God His Father, and His elect angels; all tears shall be wiped from their eyes; and their cause which is now condemned by many judges and magistrates, as heretical and impious, will then be known to be the cause of the Son of God. And for a gracious reward, the Lord will cause them to possess such a glory, as never entered into the heart of man to conceive. Therefore we expect that great day with a most ardent desire to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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AMEN. Even so, come, Lord Jesus
(Rev. 20:20).

Once again notice the beautiful element of comfort expressed in this confession of the Reformed believer. The Reformed believer looks for the return of the Lord "with ardent desire." How much is this true of us?

There are many wonderful aspects of the Lord's coming that we could occupy ourselves with. We will limit our comments to the statements of these confessions regarding the judgment with which the Lord will come. We will write a second article about the expectation of the coming of the Lord. The character of this expectation will of course be entirely determined by what we believe concerning the nature of His coming. Few churches today preach the distinctive truths contained in the above quoted confessions.

Even the fact as such that the Lord will come in judgment upon this wicked world is something commonly denied in the church at large today, and increasingly so in Reformed churches. From many corners the teaching of universalism is being promoted. Many even today imagine that this present world is getting better and better. According to the teaching of many churches today most if not all men will be saved. This is the consequence of the prevalent heresy of our day that God loves all men. The Word of God clearly teaches that the Lord will come to judge the ungodly with terrible judgment. He will come to make righteous discrimination between men. He will come to execute terrible vengeance on His enemies. The Lord will come to burn up this wicked world with the fire of His holy wrath.

The Scriptures are very plain regarding these truths of the Lord's coming. The Old Testament proph-

ets spoke of this repeatedly. The coming of the Lord will be a day of great and terrible wrath. The day of the Lord's return is called the day of vengeance. (See Isaiah 63 and Joel 2 for example.) The New

Testament is full of the same language. (See Hebrews 10 and 12; II Peter 3; Jude 14 and 15; and so much of the book of Revelation.) The nations of the world are enemies of the living God of heaven and earth. The vast majority of the men on the earth are the enemies of God and followers of the evil one. Rather than teach that God will in the end save the vast majority of mankind, the Scriptures teach the very opposite.

Until the very end, most of the world's population will remain heathen. It will also be the case that near the end of the world, when the Lord comes again, most of Christianity will have become apostate. The fierce anger of the Lord will be poured out on those who have denied the name of Christ and crucified the Son of God afresh. The apostate church will be judged for joining forces with the wicked world against the true church as enemies of God. The true church will be but a small remnant in the last days. She will be hated, despised, and persecuted in the last day.

This world cries out for judgment. Wickedness abounds in the earth. Every day the news media in our land portray the evil times in which we live. The fiasco our nation is going through with its incumbent president, the gross immorality of other of our leaders, the impenitent wickedness of those involved in the scandals of our day, the nonchalant attitude of much of the American public—all of this cries out to high heaven for judgment. The wickedness produced daily by Hollywood and Broadway, the glorying of these organi-

zations in the transgression of all of the holy commandments of God, the jesting about what is abominable to God, the filling of the world with the vilest of adultery and fornication, and worst of all the brazen blasphemy of the name of God promoted in our land will all some day be judged in the fierce and holy wrath of God.

The apostate church that has denied virtually every fundamental article of the faith, and that tolerates the grossest iniquity in her midst, all in the name of love, will find in the day of judgment that the Lord is angry with her with terrible judgment. All her glorying in herself, all her boasting about love and tolerance and magnanimity, all her pride in the huge numbers that follow her teachings and praise her for accommodation to the prevailing philosophy of the time, for all this she will come into judgment. She will be judged as having hated the truth and righteousness of God and for having gloried in herself rather than in the sovereign, righteous, holy, and infinitely glorious Lord of heaven and earth. The faithful church of Jesus Christ in true love for God and for His glorious sovereignty and righteousness must faithfully preach and warn men of this world both within and without the church about the coming judgment.

Jesus will come personally to the judge the earth. He will come literally and bodily as the incarnate Lord. This too is denied by many theologians in the church. They teach the heresy that there will really never be a literal return of the Lord at all. The truth of the Lord's return only means that He returns in spirit whenever men speak about Him in the church, and His spirit is revived among His followers. This world will continue on indefinitely. As the ages go by, it will get better and better, so that there will be no need for a final judgment by a personal and literal return of the incarnate Lord.

But the Lord will return per-

sonally as judge for the sake of His beloved saints. The same Lord who died on the cross to justify His saints shall appear in that last day to judge them to be righteous.

The Bible indeed teaches that the Lord in His first coming did not come to condemn the world but to save it. Yet already when He was on the earth and when He went everywhere preaching the truth concerning Himself, the judgment of God was revealed. Those who believed on Him were given the hope of eternal life, and those who did not believe were declared by the Lord to be condemned already. All men will be judged for what they have done with the Christ and for what they have done with His truth.

Jesus Himself declared that He would judge all men. "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.... And hath given Him authority to execute judgment also because He is the Son of God" (John 5: 22 and 27). The inspired apostle testifies, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). It is because of this great truth that Paul in the next verse says, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences" (II Cor. 5:11). With these words also agrees the statement in Romans: "But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10).

The return of the Lord for judgment will be the revelation of His glory. He will be glorified as the one whom God appointed and who has the authority and power

to judge all men. The righteousness of the Lord's judgment will be the revelation of His glory. The day of His judgment will be the public justification of His elect. The righteousness of the cross will be exalted as having covered forever the guilt of all of His chosen ones. This will be the exceeding great glory of the judgment. But the glory of Christ will also be revealed in the just vengeance that He will execute on His enemies.

The judgment of Christ will be in connection with the victory of the cross and the righteousness that He accomplished there. That is exactly why it is so fitting that Christ will be the final judge. Christ will appear as judge in order to reveal the justice of His cause. This cause is despised by the wicked world. It is defended and preached by His faithful church. The true church is persecuted and hated in this ungodly world because she represents and boldly preaches the righteousness and truth of the cause of

The same Lord who died on the cross to justify His saints shall appear in that last day to judge them to be righteous.

the Lord. The most grievous persecution that the church receives for representing the cause of the Lord comes not from the heathen world but from the apostate church. This apostate church will be overwhelming in number, presence, and power in the last days before the Lord's return. The apostate church commonly mocks and ridicules the faithful church for what she preaches about the Lord. But in the day of the Lord's judgment it will be clearly revealed that this church and she alone has truly represented the cause of the Lord. The Lord will reward His church for her faithfulness.

The coming of the Lord for judgment will be an objectively real event. There is indeed in this present age a judgment of God in the consciences of every man. Even the wicked can sometimes already in this world have great torment

of conscience. The saints of God on the other hand have a pure conscience. They have the peace of knowing that they are justified in Christ before God. But there will in the last day be an objectively real judgment. There are many things about how exactly the judgment will take place which we cannot know now. We must remember that the last judgment will be a great wonder, even as all the works of God in Christ are wonders of God. But we must maintain the objective reality of the judgment. The many visions concerning this judgment found in the Scriptures make this very clear. (See for example Matthew 25:31ff.; II Corinthians 5:10; and Revelation 20.)

All men that ever lived, from the beginning to the end of time, must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The heathen who never had the gospel preached to them will also be judged. They will be judged for their idolatry. This idolatry will not be recognized as a sincere searching after God or as an innocent alternative name for the worship of the true God. It will be judged because it is the fruit of denying and opposing the truth that God clearly revealed in His creation concerning His own eternal power and Godhead. It is denied by many modern-day mission endeavors that the heathen will be judged. This has caused the church to lose her reason for preaching the gospel of Christ. The Word of God in Romans 1 is very clear. The heathen will be without excuse.

But those who have known the truth and have departed from it will receive a double punishment. The apostate church in the last day will be judged to be the great whore portrayed in the book of Revelation. She will receive the punishment prophesied there. It will be worse than the punishment of the heathen who never had the gospel preached to them.

We cannot help but realize that the articles of the Heidelberg Cat-

echism and Belgic Confession referred to above were written in the context of the great Protestant Reformation. The lines in those days were clearly drawn by the Reformers. Apostate Christianity in our day has blurred the lines. It is even being said that Protestantism should join again with Rome, even though Rome is as apostate as she ever was and continues to show the signs of being the foreshadowing of the Antichrist. In the days of the Reformation many faithful saints suffered great persecution because of their love for the truth of Christ. Many thousands died as martyrs. Even in our day the faithful church is despised and ridiculed. The time will come again before the Lord's return when the faithful church will be severely persecuted by the apostate church. She will be hated in the world for the Lord's sake. The great comfort of the church under the cross is the truth that the Lord shall appear as the final judge in the end to reveal who has truly stood for His Word and His righteousness. He shall appear to save and deliver and to glorify His faithful church.

The consequences of the judgment will be everlasting. The

wicked will be sent away into eternal darkness and the terrible fire of the judgment of God. This too is much denied in our day. It is argued that a God of love will never find pleasure in the eternal burning of His creatures in hell. It is argued that eternal punishment is far too severe a judgment for sin that was done only in the short moments of time. But all this is nothing more than humanistic argumentation. Such humanistic arguments have little regard for the seriousness of man's sin. This sin is so serious because it is committed against the most holy majesty of God. The arguments of the humanists have little regard for the fearfulness of God's infinite, perfect, absolute holiness and righteousness. The apostate church cares more for man than it does for the glory of God. It is striking how often our Lord Himself spoke of the coming of the judgment. He spoke of the eternal destruction of the wicked. He gave some of the most terrifying descriptions of the judgment of hell as being the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth and the place where the worm dieth not and the fire is not

quenched? Do these words come from the Lord who is love?

The saints will be personally rewarded for their works, for their faithfulness, for their suffering, and especially for the persecution which they endured in the world. Great shall be their reward. The deepest cause of the reward of the saints is God's sovereign gracious election of them. Of this our Reformed confessions speak repeatedly in describing the coming judgment of the Lord. The reward of the saints will be a gracious reward, merited for them by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ Himself, who by His amazing sacrifice of love on the cross atoned for the sins of the elect and justified them by His cross, will personally appear in the day of judgment. He shall justify His saints before the whole world. That is the reason why the saints "expect that great day with a most ardent desire to the end that they may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen." Therefore the constant prayer of the church as she suffers persecution in the world is, "Come, Lord Jesus, Yea, come quickly." □

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ "Hate Crime" Laws

A horrible crime was committed some miles north and west of Loveland—in Laramie, Wyoming. A young man, Matthew Shepard, was tied to a fence in a desolate area and deliberately beaten until he was almost dead. A few days later he did die in the hospital in Ft. Collins. Matthew Shepard was "gay." This terrible act has been widely reported across

the country—and even over the whole world. Doubtlessly, every one of the readers of this article has heard of the event. The two young men accused of killing Matthew Shepard were caught and are presently held for trial. If convicted, they can and likely will receive the death penalty.

A spate of articles have been printed about all of this—many of which advocate expanded "hate crime" laws. The *Denver Post*, October 19, 1998, reports the reaction of Attorney General Janet Reno.

Attorney General Janet Reno urged Congress to expand federal

hate crime laws to include offenses based on sexual orientation, saying Sunday that the killing of gay Wyoming student Matthew Shepard shows the government must take a stronger stand.

Reno, appearing on CNN's "Late Edition," said such nationwide legislation is needed to address "situations where the state cannot or will not take action."

She said a bill introduced almost a year ago—but not passed by the current Congress—sends "a clear message from the federal government, if we can get it passed, that hate crimes will not be tolerated."

...Reno said the legislation would not pre-empt state action against those involved in hate crimes. The Justice Department

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would consult with states, she said, and "if the state after consultation cannot do it and says that the federal government should proceed, this is too important for this nation not to let justice take its course."

Gary Bauer, head of the Family Research Council, said conservative groups like his are being smeared by those who blame them for inciting an anti-gay atmosphere with their campaigns to get gays to go straight.

He said on CNN that his group is not going to change its opposition to gay marriages and other gay lifestyle choices, and said it was "terrible that the murder of this young man is being exploited" by the Clinton administration.

Reno also pressed for expanded hate crimes legislation when she met last week with representatives of more than a dozen gay and lesbian groups.

One wonders, of course, about the purpose of "expanded hate crime laws." What would such laws mean for the two young men accused of this terrible crime? They already face the death penalty. Or is it directed against those who condemn homosexuality? Is such condemnation now to be judged as a "hate crime?" Is the government, in its court system, going to be the judge of one's thought as well as one's act?

One might even ask, "What crime is ever committed in love?" And is the crime any worse when one kills a "gay" person because he hates "gays," than when he kills a little old granny in order to take her purse?

There are presented some very serious reflections on the proposals to pass "hate crimes" laws (and most states have some form of these already). One of interest was written by Alan Keys, himself a man of "color." It appeared in the World Net Daily, October 16, 1998.

A great furor on behalf of "hate crimes legislation" is being stirred up by the usual suspects in re-

sponse to the heinous crime in Wyoming this week—two thugs beating a young man to death. Defenders of free speech and private conscience should take this liberal offensive very seriously. And we need to begin by thinking through the call for hate crimes legislation in the wake of the Wyoming murder. In fact, we are seeing the ruthless exploitation of this terrible tragedy by those who wish to push the agenda that will give them the power to coerce conscience on issues of moral concern.

Because what do we find if we examine the details of the situation in Wyoming? It was, indeed, a terrible crime of physical violence. But if we examine the legal facts of the situation, it turns out that if the murderers are convicted of this crime they stand in danger of the death penalty, because the death penalty exists in Wyoming for this kind of a heinous murder. So people are clamoring that we need to pass hate crime laws, and yet based on the nature of the act of terrible violence itself, the men who did it are already subject to the death penalty. Is it proposed that murders that are also hate crimes should be punished more severely than by the death penalty? (The criminal might respond: "I regret that I have but one life to give for my crime!" —G.V.B.)

The whole concept of hate crimes is faulty. There are indeed crimes motivated by hatred, but it is not entirely clear to me what that does to the crime itself. Take an example. Let's say that I am a ruthless drug dealer, and one of my drug deals goes wrong because somebody double-crosses me. And I don't hate this individual; I don't feel anything in particular. I'm a crook myself, and expect that people are going to be crooked. But in a very cold-blooded and calculated way I realize that my whole business will fall apart if I let people cross me up this way. So I plot, and systematically carry out, the extermination of this person who crossed me up. But there is no hatred involved.

Put that side by side with a

crime that is motivated by racial, or religious, or other kinds of bigotry, but with the end result being, in each case, the deliberate murder of an individual. Should we have two separate standards for these two murders? Or should we judge by the nature of the act, not the nature of the attitude that accompanied the act? Does the fact that I kill you in cold blood, without the fires of racial or other hatred in me, mean that my killing of you is somehow less terrible than the other killing?

The proper approach to take toward crimes is to judge the act, not the attitude. We must insist that our government restrict itself to punishing the action, because the government has no right to punish attitudes. The real purpose behind the hate crime legislation movement, however, is to accord to the government the right to punish attitudes.

But not all attitudes, mind you. Just those attitudes that disagree with the liberal ideologues and their state religion. These would-be thought police are trying to take advantage of a terrible and real crime in order to criminalize the offense of dissent from the religion of sexual indulgence. They want to force us to treat it as a terrible crime if someone considers homosexuality to be immoral. And so they are using this episode and other episodes, where the crimes in and of themselves would justify harsh punishment, in order to convince us that harsher punishment is needed because of the attitude that accompanied the crime.

The fact that Wyoming law already envisions death as the appropriate penalty for such cases just makes it clearer that the goal of the liberals is not to strengthen punishment of crime. What is really going on here is an effort to convert our laws in such a way that the liberal ideologues of the permissive left will be able to enforce their ideology with fire and the sword, particularly against people of faith, who, based on their scriptural beliefs, refuse to accept their culture of sexual licentiousness and self-indulgence....

...The hate crimes legislation movement is bogus, but the existence of hateful attitudes toward the Christian conscience is undeniable. This is a very dangerous world that we are moving into. And sadly speaking, it is clear that opponents of the Christian conscience will use every opportunity, and will even make use of terrible and tragic events, in order to promote their political agenda. And that is what is happening in the Wyoming case. We face the promotion of a political ideology that aims at arming the liberal left with coercive force of law as its advocates come after those who disagree with their immorality....

...The whole push with respect to hate crimes legislation is an effort to create a body of law that allows the government to coerce opinions, and to punish people because of their opinions. In this particular case, the opinion that is going to be punished is the opinion that homosexuality is immoral and against the laws of God. That opinion is now going to become a crime. And this whole push with respect to hate crimes is an effort to establish that agenda....

...Jefferson said that the opinions of men were not under the jurisdiction of civil government. At the end of the day, government can govern men's actions, it cannot govern their hearts. And

when it attempts to govern their hearts, that is simply an excuse for the worst kind of tyranny. And make no mistake, tyranny is what these liberals seek to impose on us.

The warning is appropriate and very necessary. Truly we live in dangerous times. Is it perhaps true that all who condemn the sin of homosexuality will soon be judged guilty of a "hate crime"? How long will it be before the Bible itself is judged a book encouraging "hate crimes" when it condemns so strongly homosexuality—which must therefore be outlawed? □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Steven Key

The Son of God

In our treatment of the names of our Savior, we drifted into the consideration of His threefold office as Mediator. Thus we have looked at the name *Christ*, the Anointed, as His mediatorial work comes to expression in His work as Prophet, Priest, and King.

That leaves us with two other prominent names which we must yet consider. Scripture does reveal still other names of our Mediator, but, other than the names Jesus and Christ, there are but two names that are used frequently in the New Testament Scriptures. I refer to the names *Son of God* and *Lord*.

The name *Son of God* is used some 48 times in Scripture. Still more, Jesus is denoted as the *only begotten Son of God*.

The Unique Son

He is, in other words, a unique Son.

That is certainly the emphasis in the first chapter of John's gospel account. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:1-4).

This Word is very God. John goes on in verse 14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Still more, we read of this same "only begotten" One (v. 18): "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

So this only begotten Son is

unique, being the only One who has seen God, living eternally in the very bosom of the Father.

The writer to the Hebrews confirms the same in Hebrews 1, where he refers to and explains certain of the inspired Psalms. He writes in Hebrews 1:5-8: "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee?" (That is Psalm 2.) "And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?" (That is Psalm 89.) "And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." (That is what God says concerning His Son, according to Psalm 97.) "And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." (Again, quotations from

Rev. Key is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Randolph, Wisconsin.

Psalm 104 and Psalm 45.)

Finally, to mention but one more passage, I John 5:20: "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

So the Scripture extols Christ as the unique Son of God.

He is unique, the only begotten Son.

That means there is none other who is begotten of God as a natural son. Christ is not a created being. He did not come into being by virtue of His being born. He is, as the Bible puts it, "the firstborn among many brethren, the firstborn of every creature." But that reference of Colossians 1, which speaks of Christ as firstborn in the counsel of God, is true only of the Son of God in human nature. And Christ has not only a human, but a divine nature.

So again, the emphasis here is on the truth that Christ is *God*. In His divine nature He is not born, but begotten. He does not have His origin in the divine conception, nor in the divine counsel. He Himself is the Author of that divine counsel.

Nor is Christ a son by adoption. God has other children, begotten according to His sovereign decree of election in Christ and by the Spirit's wonder work of regeneration. But they are all children by adoption and by spiritual rebirth. The Son is not adopted. He is the only begotten, without beginning and without end, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last.

According to Hebrews 1:3, He is the express image of God's person. And therefore He is the eternal Son of God. He is Son by an unchangeable act of the Father within the divine essence, in which the Father is active with all the infinite fullness of His Godhead. Eternally the Father gives life to the

Son. And therefore Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is Himself God. He alone is the natural Son of God.

That means also that He possesses in Himself all the divine perfections. Our Savior is almighty, all-wise, all-knowing, everywhere present, eternal, and so on and so forth, the overflowing fountain of all good. And when He became flesh, He did not shed His Godhead. His incarnation, His coming into our flesh, did not mean that He left the bosom of the Father in order to become a mere man. The Suffering Servant of Jehovah is *very God*.

Perfectly Revealed

The Son Himself has perfectly revealed this. The only begotten Son, the unique Son of God, came so close to us that He, as it were, challenged sinful men to deny His Godhead, while at the same time revealing that Godhead in many ways to those who knew Him by faith.

We read it in John 1. He revealed His eternal power and Godhead by creating the world! "All things were made by him and without him was not any thing made that was made." But then John writes, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." Though "the heavens declare His glory and the earth sheweth His handiwork," in the revelation of Jesus Christ, God seems hid!

He lay as a baby in the manger of Bethlehem, helpless and dependent upon Joseph and Mary. He grew up like any other child; except, even then, they could see He was different, unique.

He revealed His Godhead repeatedly, so that there could be no misunderstanding. He spoke with authority second to none. His wonder works, beginning in Cana of Galilee, revealed His eternal Godhead. And not only did He have power to heal and to raise men from the dead, but He had

power also to forgive sins!

Men could see Him, hear Him, understand Him, even oppose Him. And that is exactly what they did to the very Son of God. How easy it is to deny that He is God at all! That is what they did. "*He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.*" They even killed Him because He confessed that He was the Son of the living God.

They admitted that He was a wonderful man, a good man, that He spoke with authority. And they still admit it. They will even grant you that He was a man entitled to the name "Son of God," even the greatest son of God, although there are many other sons of God. But just as in Jesus' earthly life, so now, those who are caught in the bondage of unbelief deny that He is God. Not only the cults do, but much of the so-called Christian church does.

There are all kinds of heresies, some of which are very subtle, which deny the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and which, when embraced, deny all possibility of salvation.

The errors of some would not even require our attention, if only they would speak in plain language and declare clearly that Jesus is not God. But those who want to instill the poison of their false doctrine into the minds of us and our children never proclaim their heresies openly. Rather, they try to hide the real meaning of their views by speaking in the same terms as the church.

When the Jehovah's Witnesses (so-called) come to your door and strike up a conversation, and you ask them, "Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God," they say, "Oh yes!" And they try to deceive you and make you believe that they are fellow Christians, and that there are many aspects of their religion that make it more desirable than yours. It is only when you ask them, "Do you believe then that Jesus Christ,

the Son of the living God, is *God* in the flesh," that their heresy will be exposed and they will ardently deny the deity of Christ. Then you must call them to repentance and tell them that without confessing Christ as God in the flesh, they are lost.

That denial of the Son of God is also found with the Mormons or Church of the Latter Day Saints (LDS people, as they are often called), as well as other cults.

But the same denial of Christ's Godhead has permeated a large part of the nominal Christian church today. Much of the modern church is built upon a philosophical Christ. Its proud, hopeless structure is built not upon the only begotten Son of God, but upon a man whose example of goodness and nobility and love for all is set before all men, that all might reach deep within and make themselves like him.

For the most part, that is the perspective of the modern church today, which has no Savior and therefore finds in common all kinds of social causes and religious activism. Without the Son of God as God in the flesh, the unifying confession of the church (Matt. 16:18) is lost, and churches are coming closer and closer together in error, bringing about the amalgamation which will be the religious aspect of Antichrist.

The faith and hope of the church cannot possibly rest in a mere man! When you and I confess with God's church, "I believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God," the object of our faith is always God, who reveals Himself through the Son as the God of our salvation. Deny that unique character of the Son, deny that He is God, and you end up with the hopeless confession, "I believe in man." That is the proud philosophy of unbelief.

An Important Confession

Our confession of the Son of God is an important confession.

Its emphasis in Scripture makes clear that it is very important and necessary for the church to maintain this confession and to insist that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God.

If we do not maintain the confession that Jesus is the only begotten Son of the living God and very God Himself, we have lost the Savior!

We have confessed that Jesus, the Christ, is our chief Prophet. As such He reveals unto us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our salvation. But that is possible only if He is the Son of God. God must speak. As the writer to the Hebrews says in Hebrews 1:1,2: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."

Christ cannot be our chief Prophet if He is not the Son of God. That is why they who deny the deity of Christ, also inevitably deny the authority of His Word. Then the Word, the Bible, has no authority. If Jesus is a mere man, His Word is also the word of a mere man. And men are liars. Deny that Jesus is the unique Son of God, and there is no standard of truth anymore. All men are right. All men worship the same god.

And that is exactly where the modern church is today, and where most churches are going. Beware! That is exactly why to a great extent the difference between the church and the world has been wiped out—to the point where the devil himself can hardly tell the difference anymore between his children and the so-called children of God. That is why the anti-christian world power is developing so rapidly, taking all men under its giant wingspan.

But we believe in the only be-

gotten Son. Christ revealed Himself as the Son of God from the moment He began to speak. He alone can be our chief Prophet, because He is the Son of God in the unique sense.

Christ is also our only high priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body has redeemed us and makes continual intercession with the Father for us. To believe in Him is salvation for you. But deny that Jesus is the Son of God, and you empty the cross of all its power. Deny that He is the unique Son of God, and the One who died on that middle cross of the three is no different from the others. His blood has no more value than the blood of the malefactors.

Deny that Christ is the Son of God, and you have no salvation!

It is that serious! For redemption is the bringing of satisfaction to God to satisfy His justice. Only the infinite Son could satisfy for the sins committed against the infinite majesty of God. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.

We must confess Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God.

That is the confession upon which the church of Christ is built in all ages.

Only upon that confession can we claim inheritance as the children of God. For in Christ, the eternal and natural Son of God, there is salvation by adoption for us who were no children.

So John writes those solemn but beautiful words in I John 5:12,13: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." □

*Deny
that Jesus
is the Son of God,
and you empty
the cross
of all its
power.*

The Secret of the Future

(John 16)

Fascinating is man's fascination with the future. It is not even here. It is a nothing. It might never even be—that certain future of man's imagination. And yet not only are we interested in it, but we are often *taken up* by it and into it in our thoughts. Powerful nothing, this elusive Future! Never *is*—never seen, never touched, never *now*. Yet *ever* is—calling, gripping, exciting, alluring. One day in gathering darkness it is that *wolf*—there lurking, soon to pounce we just *know*, are Future's fangs. Then another day it is a sun brightening our spirits—Future rays of hope. And just about every day Future is the thief stealing us from our now and work, making day-dreamers out of us.

Future is a delight of optimists. And aren't we all that at least some time? Is it not the case that at least *once* we have viewed our present as a glass half-full (or more), and thought, even, that the future will certainly be fuller? The optimist relishes the possibilities Future holds forth. Future is all the stuff optimistic dreams are made of. Everything we might want to be is there in the "just might be" of tomorrow. There is the dream career. Soon will be the dream house. One day, you just know it, your ship will come in. And two weeks from now will be the dream *Standard Bearer* article....

Dreamers love the future.

Dreaders dread the future. They are pessimistic enough about the present. Tomorrow, they are *sure*, their glass will be less than half-empty. The next day their cup (of suffering) will be overflowing. Future, for them, is worse than the monster under the bed. This One is going to get them. And no one can turn on the light to make it go away.

Now that the next millennium is at the door, out is coming the futurist in us all. Among the religious folk, everyone and his Jehovah's Witness uncle (I can imagine) are predicting the end. The Pope is looking forward to the year 2000 and the jubilee year of his making, and hundreds of millions are hoping from him for another astounding infallible pronouncement about Mary (Mediatrice?). Those who know computers and how much the world needs them have made Y2K our common concern. National Geographic has recently prophesied the problems of population as we enter the twenty-first century. And no doubt there are plenty who are planning now for *that* New Year's party....

What of the future...and Christians?

Two things direct our view of the future. One is the Word of God. Note well! It is not a crystal ball. Not a guru. Not your local arithmetic theologian (the guy who adds up some numbers or pretends to find "the code" in Scripture and claims by his calculations to be able to tell when Christ will come). Not a palmist. Not the message in the

fortune cookie. But the Word of God, and the Word of God only, reveals the secret of the future—all we need to know about it.

The Word of God says: *the future is in God's hands*. The only God, the sovereign King—God *owns* the future. He ordained it. He knows the end from the beginning. His purposes are accomplished in and through it. There is no chance-god who throws a monkey wrench or a thousand into God's decree. There are no devil-gods who will upset God's good plan. There are no human beings who can know and create the future—no human masters of fate. Rather, the God who is in the heavens has done and shall do whatsoever He pleases (Ps. 115:3).

The Word of God is that the future, God's future, is just this: *the coming of the Lord*. All the future, every future second, minute, hour, day, week, month, and year, the exalted Lord Jesus will be coming! Every nation, every president, earthquake, tempest—every event and person and power great and small will serve this main event, this coming of the Lord. Just as all things were made by and for Jesus (Col. 1:16) in the beginning, and throughout all history—past He was coming to save His own, so all things proceed since Jesus has come the first time in humility, in order that He might come again the second time in glory.

Into that Word, and into the truth of the future, therefore, we are led by *hope*. The Word of God, and the hope God gives, are the two things that determine how we view the future. This hope is

faith's hope. Faith is the substance of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1). Faith rests in God now; faith's hope reposes in a certain conviction that, come what may, God will come. Faith's hope is telescopic, looking with sure sight into the future, even to the end. Faith's hope is lively, living hope of those born again (I Pet. 1:3), so that that future of Christ's coming is *now*.... We are so certain of it...We can taste it!

In this last part of Jesus' farewell discourse (John 16) Jesus focuses on the future. As He has said before, so Jesus tells the disciples here that the future for the disciples is persecution, tribulation. The future is, however, bright. For the future of the disciples is the presence of the Holy Spirit Comforter. He will work faith and peace and joy in Jesus.

The future peace and joy in Jesus in the midst of tribulation and distress at the hands of the ungodly is, for the disciples, due to an outstanding future work. It is the work of the cross, the atonement the Savior will make. Future. So certain Jesus is that He presents His future cross victory, the victory of a few hours away, as *now*: *I have overcome the world* (v. 33)! Let us by the light of the Word and hope, look into the secret of the future, and that, with as much confidence as the Savior whose future first involved His exposure to an infinity and eternity of wrath. Covenant secret. That we might grow more in the knowledge and delight of the fellowship we have with the God of our now and of our forever.

Good Bible Study! Of the Future! Of the God of the future! Of the coming of the Lord in the future! All is well!

For Study, Meditation, & Discussion

1. In the future ye shall have tribulation (vv. 1-3).

In light of this and other passages which speak of the persecution of the saints (e.g., the Psalms!; John 15:18-25; Philippians 1:29; II Timothy 3:12), consider and discuss the following:

What does the wicked world hate about the church?

From whence does the worst persecution come? Why?

How can some people think they are doing God service (John 16:2) when they persecute the people of God?

How is this persecution evident today: in laws and actions of governments; in the media; in the activities and pronouncements of churches? How do we experience persecution?

Is there evidence that our own ungodliness and compromise are reason for there being so little persecution in our life?

Would the tolerant Jesus who

is preached today have been crucified?

2. In the future the Holy Spirit (vv. 7-16).

Jesus has spoken of the coming of the Holy Spirit several times in this last discourse. About the Holy Spirit consider and discuss:

What are the various names given the Holy Spirit? What do these say of His identity and work?

When exactly does the Spirit come? Was He present in the church in the Old Testament (cf. John 7:39)? How will He be present *more* in the future of which Jesus speaks?

According to John 16:8-11, what is the Holy Spirit's work in the *world*? Is there any evidence of His working to save, if possible, the wicked reprobate?

From John 16:7, 13, 16, 22 and other passages explain the relation between the Spirit and the following: the church's comfort; truth and

the church; the presence of Christ in the church.

John 16:14 teaches the main work of the Spirit: to glorify the Lord Jesus. How does the Spirit do that? What does this teach us about discerning the spirits of the age, to see whether they be of God (I John 4:1-3)?

3. Future Joy (vv. 20-22).

The disciples would surely weep when Jesus was crucified. But soon their sorrow would be turned into joy (John 16:20). What is the Christian joy? How is our joy distinguished from the joy of unbelievers (cf. John 15:11; 16:22, 24, 33)?

The other day my six-year-old son told me I ought to smile more. Listening to and learning from our little children (O, the sermons they preach!) is surely one way to develop the joy-fruit of the Spirit. What are other ways we can grow in joy?

Of course, there are some who think our theology hinders our joy. What of it: are Calvinists sad, sour sticks-in-the-mud?

4. Future Prayer (vv. 23-26).

The Bible speaks here and in other places of prayers that the disciples of Christ shall make after Jesus is gone. Jesus speaks in His last discourse, for example, of prayers from now on being made in Jesus' name (16:24); of their certainly being answered (vv. 23, 24); and of their being mediated from on high (16:26). Consider and discuss prayer. What is it to pray *in Jesus' name*? Are *our* prayers answered? How can we grow in effectual, fervent prayer living?

5. Future Perspective (John 20:31).

These things of the future are written that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life through His name. How do Jesus' predictions work faith (cf. John 14:29; 16:4)? In light of the Word of the future would you con-

sider yourself an optimist? A pessimist? A realist? An optimilennialist? Tomorrow may bring the loss of a job. It may mean the

end of a very precious relationship. It may bring persecution. You may die. But tomorrow, as the next day, and the next, *the Lord is coming!*

Are you joy-full? Joyful, full of hope in the future, shall we not then purify ourselves (I John 3:3), and watch? ☐

The Prediluvian Period From the Protevangel to the Flood

The Conflict of Cain and Abel (1)

Introduction

The peculiar character of sacred history comes to the fore immediately when we study the biblical narrative concerning the prediluvian world. For the Scriptures do not furnish us with any kind of account concerning the personal history of Adam and Eve, nor even with an account concerning their family and its history in detail. But it immediately centers our attention on but one event in the lives of their two son, Cain and Abel, and to this one event devotes what might seem, superficially considered, to be a disproportionately large place.

What, we may ask, might the historical significance of this obviously significant narrative be?

In answer to this question, we point out the following:

1. In the first place, it reveals that the prophetic announcement of Genesis 3:15 to the effect that Adam and Eve were to be the progenitors of a twofold and antagonistic seed goes into fulfillment immediately after the Fall. It is not delayed, but the conflict between these two parts of the one human race, existing side by side in spiritual enmity, begins to be revealed

at the very dawn of history.

2. In the second place, the antithesis between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent is very marked. In Cain sin reveals itself as enmity against God and as a reaching out for the things of this world. In Abel the grace of God becomes manifest in a clinging to the promise and a willingness to be a pilgrim and stranger in the earth for the sake of the city that hath foundations. Between the two there is enmity, an enmity which becomes manifest sharply as soon as the right conditions and situation are present. Cain's act of murder is not merely fratricide: it is the murder of the righteous by the unrighteous, of the godly by the ungodly. This history is intended to reveal that no human ties of blood relationship and natural love are strong enough to wipe out the antithesis or to prevent the conflict between the ungodly and the godly.

3. In these two sons of Adam and Eve we behold the representative commencement of the conflict of the ages. We see in their conflict the motif of subsequent history. For Cain is succeeded by his generations, who are also spiritually like him and who compound his sin. Abel is replaced by Seth and his generations, the generations of the sons of God. The conflict begun with Cain and Abel is

carried on to its climax and ultimate realization in Christ and Antichrist.

4. Finally, we may observe that the victory in this conflict is by faith—faith which is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4).

The Setting

After a brief mention of the birth of Cain and Abel and of their respective occupations, the Bible simply introduces the narrative of the conflict between them by the words, "And in process of time it came to pass...." In attempting to place this narrative in its proper time-setting, we may note various scriptural data. In general, first of all, this event belongs *within* the first 130 years of history, for Adam was 130 years old when Seth, the replacement of Abel, was born. More specifically, in attempting to place the narrative in that 130-year period, we may at least say that it appears to have taken place later, rather than earlier, during that period. For one thing, Cain and Abel are grown men. For another, Cain was very probably married at this time. Still more, there must have

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been a good many more children of Adam and Eve at this time. For not only does Cain marry and beget children; but he also goes out soon after the curse is pronounced upon him and builds a city (Gen. 4:16, 17). While, therefore, we cannot precisely date this event (which is also unnecessary), it appears rather clear that it took place a good many years after the expulsion of our first parents from Paradise.

The Offerers

For a proper understanding of this facet of sacred history, it is important to consider its two main characters, Cain and Abel. Both of them brought offerings to Jehovah, but the Lord had respect only unto Abel and his offering. What accounts for this? What was the difference between the offerers?

In order to see that difference in sharp focus, we must consider the two offerers, first of all, from a natural point of view.

We note, in the first place, that Cain and Abel were brothers, sons of the same covenant parents and members of the same covenant household. It has even been suggested, on the basis of the fact that in connection with the birth of Abel the words, "And Adam knew Eve his wife," are not repeated, that Cain and Abel were twin brothers. The latter, however, cannot be determined with certainty. If it were true, it would serve to sharpen the conflict and the antithesis involved, even as was the case later with Jacob and Esau. Apart from this possibility, however, the fact remains that Cain and Abel were brothers. In them, therefore, the fact that Eve was to be the mother of a twofold seed immediately begins to be realized. The conflict between Cain and Abel arises from a spiritual antithesis which exists in the natural sphere of a close, brotherly relationship.

In the second place, we may note certain natural differences between these sons:

1. Cain was firstborn. Very likely we must understand Eve's words, "I have gotten a man from the Lord" (hence, Cain, "acquired"), as reflecting her faith in the promise of God, though she was mistaken. Abel is second, even granting the possibility that he may have been Cain's twin. Here we see an instance of that which repeats itself frequently in the history of God's covenant, namely, that the firstborn according to the flesh is not the heir of the promise.

2. There is ground for believing that Cain was the stronger of the two, endowed with the greater natural gifts. Apparently Eve's second son calls to mind the frailty and vanity of human existence, for she names him Abel, which means "breath" or "vanity," which would seem to point to the fact that Abel was a weakling. Besides, the very difference in occupations points to a difference in natural endowments. Cain turns his ambition to the earth. He will subdue the earth and grapple with the curse that is on the ground and labor for the development of the things of the world. But Abel turns to the quiet life of a keeper of sheep.

Moreover, even as Cain is the stronger and is endowed with greater natural gifts, so these traits also become manifest later in his generations. The men of talent and power, the men who become famous and powerful, the great builders of civilization, are found in Cain's generations. All of this is significant. This difference between Cain and Abel is characteristic of all history and of God's work in history. Not among God's people, but among the ungodly are found, as a general rule, those who are endowed with the greater natural gifts. The mighty and the noble are not found among the children of the light, but among the children of darkness, who with their great natural endowments turn to the world, in order to find their portion below. At the same time, God has chosen the foolish and the

weak and the base and the despised and the things that are not, in order to bring to nought things that are, in order that no flesh should glory in his presence (I Cor. 1:26-29).

In the third place, these very natural differences lend emphasis to the natural and historic and outward similarity between the two and thus underscore the sharp spiritual contrast between them. In the historic, external sense of the word, Cain and Abel were both children of God's covenant, though Cain was in the spiritual sense a stranger to its fellowship and blessings. It is true, of course, that God's covenant had not yet been revealed and established formally. The Lord had not yet singled out a tribe or nation or separate family as His covenant people. There was but one family which constituted the human race at this point.

But there can be no doubt that the covenant had been maintained and revealed after the Fall, that Adam and Eve had a part in it, and that the promise of the covenant had been given them. Cain and Abel both were born of covenant parents and were both, in the external sense of the word, covenant children. As such they occupied a similar position and had many things in common. They both had the same direct traditions from their parents and were acquainted with the early history of creation and of the Fall. They were both acquainted with Jehovah and His Word. They knew about Paradise and about the state of original righteousness and about the Fall into sin and death of their parents. They knew of the curse that was pronounced upon all things. They knew about the protevangel and about the enmity and conflict which the Lord had announced, as well as about the promise of victory for the seed of the woman.

The narrative plainly presupposes, as does the rest of Scripture, that they knew about proper sacrifice to the Lord as a means and

symbol of exercising communion with God. They knew, too, about the necessity of a righteousness which was not their own and not by their own works.

There may be a danger of overestimating the degree of knowledge and light which they possessed, so that we think of Cain and Abel in terms of the fuller and brighter light of revelation which we now possess. But there is a greater danger in the opposite direction. We certainly must not conceive of these men as primitive, ignorant, heathen savages, standing very low on the evolutionary scale, possibly with their feet hardly on the rung of the ladder which represents humanity.

Do not forget that they possessed a veritable treasure of revelation even at that early date. We must not minimize the value of the direct tradition which they received from their parents, who could relate by firsthand experi-

ence concerning righteousness and life in contrast with corruption and death. Besides, we must not overlook the fact that their very surroundings reminded them of former things. The garden of Eden was still there; and the way to the tree of life, guarded by cherubim, was there. Above all, we must keep in mind that they were the recipients of direct revelation. God spoke to them. He spoke not only to Abel and gave him the testimony that he was righteous; but He also spoke to Cain, as is plain from the narrative of Genesis 4.

Yet spiritually there was day and night difference between Cain and Abel. The Word of the Lord was realized in them. The one was elect, the other reprobate. The one was of the seed of the woman, the other of the seed of the serpent. Not fatalistically was this Word of the protevangel carried out in

them. On the contrary, the difference was a spiritual one which came to manifestation in and through their own natures and in and through their own conscious, intelligent, willing conduct, though fully in harmony with God's sovereign decree and according to His promise. Cain was wicked, and his works were evil; Abel was righteous, and his works were righteous (I John 3:12).

Such were the offerers in this narrative.

They *both* offered: the righteous Abel and the wicked Cain, both of them covenant children, both of them of God-fearing parents, both of them born in the sphere of the covenant, both of them having received covenant training. The contrast between them is not between a heathen and a child of God, but between righteous and wicked in the sphere of the covenant. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Mission Activities

Wednesday evening, November 4, Revs. B. Gritters and K. Koole left Detroit, MI for a two-week visit to Northern Ireland, the Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland, and our churches' missionary there, Rev. R. Hanko and his family. While there, the emissaries' work was to include preaching, visiting the consistory at least two evenings to conduct church visitation and discuss possible sister-church relations, visiting as many of the families as possible, and spending time with the Hankos to minister to their needs. They planned to return, D.V., on November 18.

Revs. A. denHartog and R. Smit returned safely home in late October from their trip to the Philippines. Thankfully, the areas they visited were spared the brunt of the destructive storms that swept over the Philippines the two weeks they were there. They reported briefly that they were

well received wherever they went and they were very impressed by how eager the people are to have the truth brought to them.

In late October Rev. C. Terpstra and Elder Al Rau made visits to Spokane, WA, Loveland, CO, and Alamosa, CO on behalf of our churches' Domestic Mission Committee. Plans called for them to meet with Loveland's consistory and Missionary Rev. T. Miersma to review his labors in the San Luis Valley. Rev. Terpstra planned to preach once both in Spokane and in Alamosa.

While filling the pulpit of the South Holland, IL PRC in mid-October, Prof. H. Hanko also agreed to give a brief informal presentation on the work of our churches in Northern Ireland and Wales. You may remember that he and his wife just recently returned from that area, having spent the past few months laboring in Wales on behalf of our churches and our Domestic Mission Committee.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Lynden, WA PRC sponsored a public lecture on October 23 entitled

"Reformed Worship," with their pastor, Rev. M. Joostens, speaking. Rev. Joostens planned to consider such aspects of worship as its central purpose, worship in the light of Scripture, and Reformed worship versus contemporary services.

The Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL sponsored a Reformation celebration on October 23 at the Wheaton College Church in Wheaton, IL. Prof. D. Engelsma spoke on the topic, "Justification by Faith Alone, Why Is It Still Important Today?" Bethel considered this an important and timely topic in light of the recent discussions between Evangelicals and Rome on justification. It seems very important today that as children of the Reformation we know and declare the truth of the only way a person can be right with God.

We couldn't let this issue of the "News" go by without passing along our congratulations to the Loveland, CO PRC, which celebrated their 40th anniversary as an organized congregation on October 30. This celebration was marked in part by a Reformation Day lecture by one of their former pastors, Prof. D. Engelsma, speaking on "Celebration of Gracious Faithful-

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

ness." Activities around the lecture included a dinner, followed by a program of thanksgiving and praise, with the lecture and a time of fellowship afterwards.

Young People's Activities

In an effort to generate enthusiasm for next summer's young people's convention, the young people of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA began publishing "The Convention Chronicle" in October, and we pass part of that information on to you, hoping that it will do the same for you.

The site for the convention is the beautiful, 145 acre Camp Cedar Falls, near Angelus Oaks. It includes facilities for basketball, softball, volleyball, tennis, and swimming. The young people also report that after sampling the cooking, the food is as good as that of most conventions.

The conventioners will be housed in cabins that hold 16 to 24 people. They include bunks, heaters, electricity, and mirrors (very important).

Ministers

We rejoice with Rev. Allen and Crysta Brummel in the birth of a son, Brandyn Trey, born October 27.

Congregational Activities

Our Byron Center, MI PRC addressed a problem that many of us have faced or will face in the future when our children attend catechism on a week night at church. Instead of bringing your children to catechism by 6:45, returning home, and coming back within the hour, why not stay to study God's Word? Byron Center's Men's Society began meeting Monday nights at 6:45 during the catechism class of the evening.

In the latest bulletin from our Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL we find that the roofing of their sanctuary is now complete, with steeple, and the coming week asphalt was scheduled to be poured.

News from Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI also includes reports that brick work continues, with

completion of outside work and the start of inside walls. Some floors have been poured, and trusses for the fellowship hall and south wing were delivered in late October.

Denominational Activities

October 29 Rev. D. Kleyn, pastor of the Edgerton, MN PRC, spoke at

a Ladies League Meeting in Edgerton on the subject of "Angels."

Food For Thought

"He cannot have God for his Father who refuses to have the church for his mother."

— Augustine □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With great thankfulness to God, we extend our congratulations to our parents and grandparents,

PETER ROY and JOHANNA WESTRA, who celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on November 26, 1998. We thank them for all the loving care they have given and the godly example they have been. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to bless them and keep them in His care.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments" (Psalm 103:17, 18).

- * Art and Karen Flier
Duane, Laura, Kara, John
- * Peter and Jan Westra
Peter, Kevin, Jason, Brian, Kristen,
Nathan
- * Marlin and Sandy Westra
Aaron and Donita, Robyne, Sara,
Philip, Katelyn
- * Ed and Verna Westra
Eric, Valerie, Joel, Evan, Lisa
- * Gary and Jeri Westra
Jeff, Glenda, Steve, Brett, Kyle,
Janelle
- * Bruce Westra
- * Bart and Jan Zandstra
Brianna, Brent, Justin, Jared

Hull, Iowa

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On November 17,

MENNO and SADIE SMITS

celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary.

We thank God for the loving and faithful parents and grandparents He has given us. Their commitment to God and His truth has been an example to each of us.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

- * Rich and Frieda Smits
Mark and Laura Moes
Jack and Valerie Krysheld
Rich and Mary Smits
- * Carl and Trudy Smits
Ross and Sue Rispens
Dan and Julie Lyzenga
Mike and Lisa VanDrunen
Carl and Deb Smits
Joel and Deb Smits
- * Clyde and Beth Rinsema
Dan and Sarah Rinsema-Sybenga
Nathan Rinsema and Nikki Kuik
Rebecca Rinsema
20 great grandchildren

Lansing, Illinois

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Loveland Protestant Reformed Church extend their sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. David Poortinga, their children and grandchildren, in the death of Mrs. Linda Poortinga's father,

MR. JACOB POTTS,

on Friday, October 23, 1998. May the God of all grace comfort them with the confession of the Psalmist, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Ps. 17:15).

Rev. G. VanBaren, Pres.
Larry Nelson, Clerk