



The Standard Bearer

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

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**Vol. 76, No. 4
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Giving Thanks to Jehovah

O give thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people.

Psalm 105:1

This psalm was written during the Babylonian captivity.

The purpose of this psalm was to give the church in captivity hope for the future by reminding her of God's faithfulness in the past. To that end the psalmist recounted God's promises to give Abraham and his seed the land of Canaan. He reminded the captives how the Lord was faithful to that promise in bringing Israel out of Egypt through Moses, preserving her in the wilderness, and bringing her to the promised land. Certainly the Lord would also restore Judah to Canaan again, as He had done long ago for their fathers.

All this is introduced in verse 1 with a call to thanksgiving. Yes, God's people must be thankful for God's covenant faithfulness in the past. Then in the midst of trouble they can have confidence that their covenant God will also provide for them in the future.

We too must do this as the covenant people of God. How good the Lord has been to us! How faithful He has been! We must reflect on this and thank the Lord. Doing this we will also have confidence that our covenant God will provide for us in the future. We must do this daily. And certainly this is appropriate for the national day of Thanksgiving.

The psalmist speaks of God's name.

God's name is God as He reveals Himself through the works of His hand. God is the Invisible One. Unless God reveals Himself

to us, He would forever remain unknowable to us. But God has revealed Himself. He has done so through the works of His hand. Men reveal a great deal about themselves by what they do and produce with their hands. The same is true with God. He reveals Himself through what He accomplishes and produces. Whenever God so reveals Himself to us, we have the name of God. In harmony with this reality, the psalmist also speaks in this passage of the wondrous works of the Lord.

When the psalmist called upon Israel in captivity to give thanks unto the Lord, he means that they were to thank the Lord for His name, i.e., for His mighty deeds in which He has revealed Himself to them.

From the rest of the psalm we learn what these works of the Lord were. Through Joseph the Lord preserved Israel in Egypt from the

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terrible famine that threatened her existence in Canaan. Through Moses He led Israel out of Egypt, where they had been enslaved for many years. Still under Moses the Lord preserved the nation as they passed through the waste howling wilderness for 40 years. And finally He brought them into Canaan.

All these wondrous works of God were in fulfillment of His covenant promises to Abraham and his seed. For the Lord had promised them the land of Canaan as their inheritance. There He would dwell with them as their covenant God. There they would enjoy His blessings. How faithful the Lord had been to His covenant with Israel. So the psalmist identifies God as the LORD, i.e., Jehovah. This is God's covenant name, the name which emphasizes especially His faithfulness to His covenant.

These wondrous works of Jehovah, which were accomplished in faithfulness to His covenant, constitute the name of the Lord.

And for that name Judah was to give thanks as she languished in captivity.

That we may also give thanks to the Lord for His wondrous works, we must understand that these works that Jehovah accomplished in Israel's history were only typical and prophetic of what the Lord would later accomplish in Jesus Christ. Thus, for example, Israel's slavery in Egypt was an Old Testament picture of a deeper slavery to sin into which we have all fallen. God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt under Moses through the Red Sea pointed ahead to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross to deliver us from the power of sin. God's preservation of Israel in the wilderness served as a picture of God's preservation of His church in every age as she passes through the wilderness of this world. And Canaan, the land of promise into which God brought Israel under Joshua, was a type of the heavenly Canaan into which

the Lord will bring His church one day in Jesus Christ.

All these wondrous works in Christ are in fulfillment of God's covenant promises to His people. They all constitute the name of the Lord. And for them we are to give thanks.

Notice, that the thanksgiving to which we are called as the people of God is for spiritual blessings: deliverance from the bondage of sin, spiritual safety as we pass through the wilderness of this world, assurance of attaining Canaan's shores. It is so common on a national day of Thanksgiving simply to focus on the material abundance we have. The crops are in; the horn of plenty is full; let us give thanks. And whereas we must certainly be thankful for our daily bread, and, should the Lord provide abundance, also for that abundance, nevertheless our emphasis in thanksgiving must be on the spiritual blessings of the covenant with which God has showered us.

How shall we give thanks to the Lord?

There are three things in this passage which suggest how we are to do this.

First, there is the phrase "give thanks." This is one word in the original and has the basic meaning of stretching out the arm, of extending the hand in order to point to something. It emphasizes that with thankful hearts we point out the various works and blessings of our covenant God.

Secondly, the psalmist speaks of calling upon the name of Jehovah. To call upon the name of Jehovah means, in part, to celebrate His name with praise. It emphasizes that we rejoice in celebration over the saving works of Jehovah and in that celebration we praise His name.

Thirdly, the psalmist speaks of making known the deeds of Jehovah among the people. The meaning is that we are to rehearse in the ears of our fellow saints, in-

cluding our children, the great works of our covenant God.

Although these three phrases overlap in meaning, there are definitely three things we learn about proper thanksgiving.

First, our thanksgiving must be characterized by celebration. In joy we must celebrate the great covenant works of Jehovah.

Secondly, in the celebration we must point out the great works of Jehovah and make them known to one another.

Finally, we must praise Jehovah for these works of salvation. We should do this in prayer and in song.

This is proper thanksgiving!

This thanksgiving we owe to the Lord daily, and not just one day of the year.

We must give this thanks especially as we face the problems and difficulties of life.

Remember, Judah was in captivity in Babylon. She was called here to give thanks to the Lord for past covenant blessings so that she might have confidence that Jehovah God would provide for her also in the future.

And we must do the same.

Often we find ourselves in trouble and distress. There can be marital problems, a wayward child, sickness, loneliness in the loss of a loved one, unemployment, financial struggles, discouragements of many kinds.

In these situations we are often inclined to worry about the future. What does the future hold? Will God really provide for us? Oh, the future can look very bleak sometimes.

Do you know what the problem is? We have forgotten the name of the Lord. In fulfillment of His covenant promises, He has given His only begotten Son to the death of the cross for our sins. He has delivered us from the bondage of sin and death. He has preserved us all these years as we made our way through the wilderness of this

wicked world. All the while He is has been leading us to the heavenly Canaan.

How important it is to remember the name of the Lord and to give thanks for His wondrous works.

As we do this we must also call upon the name of the Lord.

We have already seen that to

call upon the name of the Lord means to celebrate with praise the name of the Lord. But it means more. It also means to call out for help to the Lord who has revealed Himself as our faithful covenant God in the works of Jesus Christ.

Those who so call upon the name of the Lord, mindful of and

thankful for the wondrous works of the Lord in the past, will certainly have confidence that the Lord will keep them as they continue their pilgrimage through the wilderness of this world to the heavenly Canaan.

"O give thanks unto the Lord; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people." □

Editorial

The 75th Anniversary of the PRC: Looking Toward the Future

It is remarkable that a denomination of churches has remained faithful to the Word of God, as expressed in the ecumenical and Reformed confessions, for 75 years. It is still more remarkable that this denomination has been faithful over the past 75 years, when the great "falling away" of the end-time has developed more powerfully and widely than ever before.

Not a congregation here and there, not some of the officebearers, but all of the congregations and all of the officebearers in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) believe that all the articles and expressions of doctrine in the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dordt agree with the Word of God in all respects.

All love this doctrine as the truth of God in Jesus Christ. This love of the truth is necessary. The apostle points out the necessity of loving the truth in II Thessalonians 2:10. The root-evil in those professing Christians who are deceived in the great apostasy of the end-time is lack, not of knowledge of the truth but of love of the truth.

Love of the truth is simply required. Nevertheless, this love of the truth in an entire denomination over 75 years, and then the past 75 years, is remarkable.

One unmistakable evidence of the love of the truth in the PRC is the readiness of both the officebearers and the people, in our tolerant age, to condemn false doctrines and wicked ways of life.

The remarkable faithfulness of the PRC to this hour is the amazing work of the God and Father of Jesus Christ preserving His church. God's preservation of elect members of the universal body of Christ does not take place apart from His preservation of instituted congregations in their denominational union.

Therefore, the 75th anniversary is truly an occasion for celebration: a joyous giving of thanks to God, who has proved Himself faithful to us in the covenant of grace. And when we remember our small and difficult beginning, the fierce struggles along the way, and the great sinfulness of all of us, we sing with the psalmist:

Not unto us, O Lord of heav'n,
But unto Thee be glory giv'n;
In love and truth Thou dost fulfill

The counsels of Thy sov'reign will.

Hope for the Future

In God's gracious preservation of us hitherto is also reason for us to have good hope for the future.

Celebration by the PRC of their 75th anniversary necessarily includes looking forward. The previous editorial looked back over the history of the PRC. In this editorial, let us together look toward the future.

Our looking toward the future may be the looking of good hope. Churches, like individuals, face the future either with fear or with hope. There is no reason for the PRC to fear. He who is with us is more powerful than the influences of worldliness, mightier than the force of lawlessness, stronger than the pressure of persecution, and more attractive than the allure of false doctrine.

We may hope that God will

preserve us as true, genuinely (that is, confessionally) Reformed churches. We may hope that God will continue to work His salvation in our midst, especially in our children and children's children. We may hope that God will use us to gather His church from the nations by missions. We may hope that God will go on giving us the privilege of confessing His Godhead and glory to a man-centered world and to increasingly man-centered churches.

Not apart from our faith in, love for, and obedience to His Word! Where there is distrust of, disinterest in, and disobedience to the Word, there can be no hope, whether by a church or by a member of a church. But in the way of faith, which is itself the constant gift of God, the PRC may have good hope for the future.

Only they need fear the future (and they *ought* to be afraid!) who secretly are weary of the Word of the truth of the gospel as expressed in the creeds and who hanker after new doctrines, new worship, new ways of life, and new gods.

In a world grown old with weariness, apprehension, and sheer despair, the PRC face the future with calmness, confidence, and expectation. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is secure in the world! The church has the great business of the King to accomplish in history! The church is looking for the coming of the Omega—the End—of all God's will and works.

Our Calling in the Future

The second aspect of our looking toward the future must be that the PRC know their calling and are determined to carry it out. God has a purpose with us at the beginning of the twenty-first century. His purpose, and our calling, is the confession of the gospel of the glory and grace of God in Jesus Christ. We are to confess in our preaching and teaching in the congregations, in our instruction of men for the ministry, in missions,

in our witness and evangelism, and in our contact with other churches. To this confession belongs our rejection of errors. Those preachers and churches that refuse to say, "We condemn," always in the name of "love," thereby show that, in fact, they are unable to say, "We confess."

Especially are the PRC called to confess sovereign, particular grace—not only in predestination, in the atonement, in regeneration, and in justification but also in the preaching of the gospel and in the covenant with believers and their children.

Precisely here is where the gospel of grace is subtly, but stubbornly attacked today. As regards the sovereignty of grace *in the preaching of the gospel!* As regards the sovereignty of grace *in the covenant with believers and their children!* At stake is the sovereignty of grace, and thus the gospel, in the whole of salvation, from election to the resurrection of the dead.

Particular, sovereign grace is the heart of the gospel.

Particular, sovereign grace is hated and rejected, not only by Rome and liberal Protestantism but also by many of the nominally evangelical and conservative, Presbyterian, and Reformed churches.

In addition, it has by this time become plain in the concrete history of churches that rejection of particular grace at any point is essentially Arminian "free-willism," which eventually runs out into universalistic modernism.

Therefore, what Mordecai said to Esther at a critical moment in the history of the church of the old covenant can be said to the PRC today: "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)

At this crucial hour in church history, the PRC are called by God to preach, teach, witness, sing, and write the gospel of grace, boldly, loudly, insistently, unambiguously, unashamedly, in season and out of season. To this preaching, teach-

ing, witnessing, singing, and writing, by divine mandate, belong also the exposure and condemnation of every form of the compromise, weakening, hiding, and denial of grace, with the same boldness, loudness, insistence, forthrightness, and zeal.

Suffering in the Future

In closest connection with our confession of the gospel of salvation by grace alone, it will also be the calling of the PRC and their members in coming years to suffer for the sake of Christ. This has been the experience of the PRC in the past: cast out, ignored, scorned, misrepresented, slandered. The slander and murder of them today take the form of the charge, usually whispered behind their back, "hyper-Calvinists." This is the prophecy of Scripture regarding the true church in the last days: "ye shall have tribulation" (Rev. 2:10).

This is inevitable in light of developments in the world at the turn of the century and millennium. In a world in which man is increasingly deified under the forms of various idols, so that man's lusts are made law, all those who worship only the one, triune, true God revealed in Holy Scripture and who "live godly" must suffer persecution (Dan. 3:18; II Tim. 3:12).

The Threat of Apostasy in the Future

As we look toward the future, the PRC ought not to overlook the dangers that threaten. The confidence of a good hope is not the same as presumption. It is one thing for a denomination of true churches, loving and confessing the truth, to trust in a faithful God to keep them from the winds of doctrine that now blow with gale-force. It is quite another to assume that the pervasive, deceitful, mysterious power of apostasy will not threaten the PRC.

Such an assumption would be arrogant and foolish.

The graveyard of churches is filled with evangelical, conservative, Presbyterian, and Reformed congregations and denominations that once lived by the presence of Jesus Christ in His Word and Spirit.

Does not Jesus Himself warn the Church of Ephesus that He may "remove thy candlestick out of his place"? (Rev. 2:5)

Do not we ourselves see denominations that once were among the purest of churches falling away, both in Europe and here in North America? They doubt and criticize Holy Scripture; they deny biblical creation; they espouse or tolerate universalism; marriage is a joke among them; they are approving of homosexuality; their churches are empty on the Lord's Day.

Has there not already been departure of a large segment of the Protestant Reformed denomination?

Why then should we suppose that this could never happen to us?

Herman Hoeksema did not entertain such an assumption, nor did he permit his seminarians to entertain it. I well remember his parting charge to me on the last day of my classes with him, now many years ago: "You will soon be a minister in the Protestant Reformed

Churches. Preach the Word. Do not preach my dogmatics. Preach the Word of God (holding a Bible in his shaking hand). And if the day comes that the Protestant Reformed Churches put you out for the sake of the truth, preach the Word."

Which are the dangers that threaten us?

Everyone may call our attention to present weaknesses and future perils, as God gives him or her wisdom to see them. This is part of our life together in the unity of the faith. This is the responsibility of each in the office of believer.

These are real and mortal perils, in my judgment:

▮ that we lose our first love for the truth of the gospel, that is, our love for God as made known in the gospel;

▮ that a fascination with perishing earthly possessions and fleeting earthly pleasures kills our godliness—our piety;

▮ that we yield to the pressure of an ecumenical age, if not to compromise and surrender the doctrine of particular, sovereign grace in the preaching and in the covenant, then to view it merely as a kind of optional "PR distinctive," in which case also the Churches will give it up;

▮ that we succumb to the allurements and pressures of our depraved Western culture, so that we surrender the antithesis of life of the saints, as regards marriage and the family, first of all, but then also as regards entertainment, education, and labor;

▮ and that we react to the danger of the loss of doctrine and commandment with a legalistic, harsh radicalism that binds upon all the commandments of men.

To the PRC, as to each member, comes the sharp admonition of I Corinthians 10:12: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

If we foolishly or cravenly hold our peace at this critical hour in the history of the church, or otherwise render ourselves incapable of confessing, "then shall enlargement and deliverance arise ... from another place" (Esther 4:14). There must be a church that witnesses to the Godhead and glory of God right up to the time, shortly before the return of Jesus Christ, when the beast out of hell kills the two witnesses (Rev. 11).

God grant, in covenant mercy, that the PRC, among others in all the world, may continue to be these witnesses. □

— DJE

Contribution

Prof. Herman Hanko

Training Men for the Gap (1)

Prof. Hanko is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

The text of the address at the convocation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary held at Southwest Protestant Reformed Church of Grandville, MI on September 7, 1999.

Introduction

In the year of our Lord 1999 the seminary begins a critical two semesters of studies. This is not simply because the new year will span the end of the second millennium of the new dispensation and the beginning of the third; but the passing of this second millennium

reminds us forcibly that time is running towards its close and our Lord will soon bring history to an end.

Scripture makes abundantly clear that as the church nears the end of the ages, evil will grow significantly, and the powers of darkness will increase in boldness and in the ferocity of their attacks on

the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. What person here tonight who has paid attention to what is happening in the world today and in the church both in this land and abroad can doubt that the return of the Lord is near?

That makes the work of the seminary all the more crucial. Perhaps the final, great battle lies just over the next hill as the armies of Christ march onward under the Captain of their salvation.

In some respects, this thought makes what is no doubt my last speech at Convocation somewhat sad for me. Only the Lord knows what lies ahead for all of us. But it seems likely that my teaching days are all but over, and I cannot help but feel a bit as if I am leaving the battlefield as the last and most crucial battle is about to be fought.

But God has so willed it, and I am thankful that I need not leave with fear in my soul about the future of the seminary. God has given us faithful men to carry on the work, and I bid you farewell with confidence in the integrity of the seminary and a sure hope for the ultimate victory of our cause.

I have chosen to speak to you tonight on a striking passage of God's Word, Ezekiel 22:30: "And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none."

Zion's Walls

Because the language of our AV may be a bit misleading, I offer you the translation of a noted Bible scholar which is closer to the idea of the text: "I seek among them for a man who might build a wall and step into the breach before me on behalf of the land, that I might not destroy it, but I find none."

It is obvious that the Lord is speaking, through the prophet Ezekiel, of the city of Jerusalem with its mighty fortress on the hill

of Zion. Ezekiel was with the captives in Babylon, on the river Chebar, after Jerusalem had been sacked by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. This text was God's explanation for the necessity and inevitability of the captivity. God had looked for one to stand in the gap in the wall of Zion. One. Just one. One would have been enough. One to step into the breach. One to build the wall. One to lead the cowering armies against the enemy.

But there was none....

The references to Zion as a strong fortress and a walled city are many in Scripture. I need only remind you of Psalm 48: "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: count the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces..." (vv. 12, 13). Zion's citizens (and anyone of interest outside Zion) must do this, for Zion is "beautiful for situation." It is "the joy of the whole earth." It is "the city of the great King." "God is known in her palaces for a refuge," and the kings of the earth, when they looked upon Zion, marvelled, and were troubled, and hasted away, because "fear took hold upon them there..." (vv. 2-5).

That great and mighty city was now destroyed and her citizens were in captivity — because when God had looked for one to stand in the gap, there was no one. Not even one.

God had built Zion as an almost impregnable fortress because it was an abiding picture of His church in the world. It was the church of God in the old days when the nation of Israel sought refuge behind its walls. It remains a picture of the church throughout all time. No wonder that the author of the epistle to the Hebrews could say in astonishment: "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in

heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (12:22, 23).

Even today the church sings of her own glory:

Zion founded on the mountains,
God thy Maker loves thee well.
He has chosen thee most precious;
He delights in thee to dwell.
God's own city:
Who can all thy glory tell?

When Scripture compares the church with the walled and fortified city of Zion, Scripture does so for two reasons. The first is that by means of the walls built on Mount Zion and surrounding Jerusalem the church is pictured as separated from the world. The church is in Jerusalem; the world is outside. The people of God are within the walls; the enemy, on the other side. The wall is between them as a mark of separation.

The second reason for Scripture to present the church as a city with mighty fortifications is to depict Zion as indestructible, a city which cannot be taken, a fortress against which the enemy forever battles in vain. The reason is clear. God is the strength of Zion. "Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever." Forever and ever and ever. It is a city beyond capture into all eternity. It is a fortress against which the enemy hammers, but finally break themselves into pieces. Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva, was speaking of the church when he said to one of the bloodiest persecutors of the church: "Sire, it belongs, in truth, to the church of God, in the name of which I address you, to *suffer* blows, not to *strike* them. But at the same time let it be your pleasure to remember that the church is an anvil which has worn out many a hammer."

There is one other point that needs making.

When the church, whether in the old dispensation or in the new, is pictured by Mount Zion, it is the church of Christ in her historical manifestation. That is, the church is here pictured with elect and reprobate alike within her walls. Already in the Old Testament times not all those of Israel were truly Israel (Rom. 9:6). This is not less true today.

So, when we think of the figure so graphically used by Ezekiel in chapter 22:30, we must not think of one denomination such as our own Protestant Reformed Churches. We must think of the church at large, the church in her historical reality, the church represented by many denominations.

If I may extend the figure a bit, the church is like some castles which one can still find in the British Isles. While the castle as a whole is surrounded by thick walls and various towers and fortresses, in the middle of the castle is what is called a "keep." This part of the castle is a high tower with its own thick walls, its own source of water, large stock piles of food, living quarters for many people on many different floors. It is the last line of defense, should the walls of the castle be breached. To it the defenders flee. It is a last resort. If it falls, the castle is taken. The faithful church is today the "keep" of the castle.

Perhaps God has given to us the calling to be the "keep" of the castle. May we have the grace and strength to realize this and to welcome within the walls of our "keep" those who flee for safety to this last line of defense.

Breaches in the Walls

The city of God in this passage in Ezekiel is pictured as having breaches or gaps in its walls. This is, at it were, a given in the text. The Lord does not seem to be surprised by the fact that the gaps are there. What is a matter of some

surprise is that no one can be found to stand in the gaps.

We ought not to be surprised that there are gaps in the walls.

One obvious reason why these gaps are always there is the fact that the city is under constant attack. The city is, after all, something of an anomaly in the world. Satan succeeded in gaining man as his ally and the world as his possession when he successfully persuaded Adam and Eve to join his cause. The world, under the leadership of Satan, is God's enemy. The world is determined to destroy God's cause, rob God of His world, banish God from the creation which God Himself made, and make all the creation useful in the cause of sin and unrighteousness.

Into that world God puts the church through the power of His Son Jesus Christ. That church testifies of God's cause, God's truth, God's claims to this present creation. That church is a heavenly institution, a bit of heaven, so to speak, planted in the soil of this earthly abode. The church is an alien presence, a perpetual condemnation of Satan and the wicked hosts of men and demons. It is, therefore, an intolerable institution, a city which cannot be permitted to stand, a nagging, incessant reminder to all wicked men that Christ is on His throne and that they shall end up in hell. The church has got to go. The city of God cannot be permitted to survive. And so it is under constant attack.

No wonder that as Isaiah casts about for figures which adequately depict the church he speaks of it as "a besieged city" (Is. 1:8). The enemies are many, are fierce, are determined at any cost to destroy this citadel which always spells the defeat of their plans.

The world, incessantly bombarding the city, breaks down here and there parts of Zion's walls. That is not surprising. That ought not to catch us off guard. Indeed, if we are caught unawares at the

breaches that are made it is because we have a view of the enemy which underestimates seriously the severity of the hatred of wicked men and sees the world through some kind of rose-tinted glasses.

We ought, I think, to mention some of these gaps in the walls, these breaches, which, if left unguarded and unprotected and without repair, will be holes through which the enemy can pour in hordes to take over the entire city.

Some of these gaps are false doctrines. One such doctrine is the doctrine of common grace, with its Arminian teaching of the well-meant gospel offer and its serious compromise with worldliness. Already in the early history of our churches, Herman Hoeksema wrote a pamphlet in Dutch which, in its English translation, is familiar to us under the title "A Triple Breach." Through the breach created by common grace rush, unless a man can be found to stand in the gap, the enemies of Arminianism, the advanced skirmishers of modernism, and the cold and deadly force of worldliness. The gap is there. Can a man be found to stand in the gap?

Another such gap is the breach of higher criticism of the Bible, a serious and awful hole in the wall, to which most of the seminaries in the land are committed. It is a gap which, left unguarded, will permit the enemy to destroy the Scriptures themselves. It is a gap which already has been widened by the errors of evolutionism, denial of the miracles, and attacks on Scripture's clear and obvious condemnation of women in office.

We do well to mention the gap of postmillennialism, through which pour enemies who rob the people of God of their hope of the coming of Christ. Should they lose their hope of the coming of Christ, they will be content in the world, will leave the safety of Zion's walls, and will make their dwelling among the enemies of the church.

Another significant gap in the walls is the error of a conditional covenant, which leaves the city wide open to Arminian hordes who destroy the one reason why Zion was built in the first place: to give all glory to God who alone does wondrously.

Add to that the significant gap of an erroneous doctrine of divorce and remarriage. Through it stream those enemies that are bent on the destruction of the home and fam-

ily — enemies which have already left certain quarters of the city of God a desolation and a ruin.

We need look at our own churches, represented here tonight, to find gaps of worldliness, Sabbath desecration, a certain toleration of the enemy which results in speaking well of those who wish Zion's overthrow, and a certain softening of the battle cries as if the church has shouted "wolf" too often in her history. A perpetual clamor for change in worship, for

an abandonment of the Psalms, for the introduction of hymns — all these things are gaps in the walls, breaches in Zion's defenses. Perhaps they are not yet as serious as to let the enemy flood the church; perhaps they are only cracks appearing as the walls are battered; but once a gap is struck, there are only two things to do: man the gap and repair it, or see the gap widen until it can no longer be defended.

(... to be continued) □

In His Fear

Rev. Arie denHartog

What Are Good Works?

The Reformed religion has the biblical understanding of the place of good works in God's scheme of salvation for His chosen people. There is in Reformed religion a proper emphasis on the need for good works because of this understanding. God has redeemed us in order that we might be zealous of good works. "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:14). God has before ordained the good works of His elect. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus

unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10). In the day of judgment God will judge every man according to the works he has done, whether they are good or evil. He will reward them according to those works (II Cor. 5:10).

Good works contribute nothing to the basis of our salvation. They cannot. We are saved by grace alone, without works, otherwise grace is no more grace. The only basis for our righteousness before God is the perfect righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, merited by Him on the cross and freely given to us by His grace. Any imagination that good works contribute to the basis of our salvation is a denial of the perfect righteousness of Christ. When we boast of our own good works, we are guilty of robbing the Lord of the glory for our salvation that belongs alone to Him. Good works are the fruit of His work of salvation in us. They are performed by the redeemed child of God out of gratitude to God for His great salvation, not out

of the vain imagination that we can still somehow do something to earn our own salvation. History has proven again and again that man is terribly inclined to the imagination that he will at least in part merit his salvation through his own good works. Many heresies have arisen in the past because of this sinful inclination of man.

The Heidelberg Catechism, the great confessional statement of the Reformed faith, clearly defines the purpose and nature of good works. It states absolutely that good works are the fruit of conversion in Lord's Day 33. Conversion, rightly understood, is the mighty work of the Spirit of God in the heart of the elect child of God according to which he is radically changed, changed in his innermost being. The whole direction and course of his life is turned around from sin and death and wickedness, rebellion against God, to the love of God and righteousness, holiness and obedience, and the fear of God. The twofold application of this truth is that there can be no good works without conversion. But

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also, there is no man who is not interested in good works who can claim himself to be a true child of God. Good works are the mark of the true child of God. Our Lord declares in the Sermon on the Mount that a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, and a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. By their fruits ye shall know them.

But what are good works? Man has, since the Fall, debated the question of what is truly good. Believing the lie of the devil, man always wants to argue that goodness is possible without God. Pagan philosophers have boasted that they know morality and virtue. Modern godless society prides itself in being the champion of what is good and virtuous. Each man has his own understanding of what he imagines to be truly good. False religion always insists that goodness is possible without the grace of God. This is one of the greatest errors of the heresy of common grace. According to this heresy the grace for doing good works is common to all men. Therefore all are able to do good works, even the unconverted. How contrary to Scripture this teaching is.

The Heidelberg Catechism sets forth the absolute teaching of God's Word regarding good works. God alone is good. He is absolutely good. There is none good beside Him. There is no good that does not come from Him. He is infinitely good. He is the source and standard and judge of what is good. All of this has tremendous implications, practical implications for Christian living. We humbly confess as Reformed believers that the good works which we do are no reason for our boasting in ourselves, because no one can perform such good works except by the grace and Spirit of God.

I was impressed again by the clear and absolute definition of the Heidelberg Catechism of what good works are when I recently preached on Lord's Day 33 in our congregation. Good works are:

"Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory; and not such as are founded on the imaginations or institutions of men." This definition is soundly and sharply biblical.

Good works can be done only through faith in God and faith in Christ Jesus. Listen again to just a few passages of God's Word. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). There is no neutrality possible. One either does good or he sins. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Our Lord Himself has the same absolute teaching. He commands us: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; neither can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:4 and 5). The sum of Reformed doctrine regarding the relationship between faith and good works is as follows. Faith is God's gift to His elect. Faith is the personal, living bond that unites the believer to Christ. The power to do good works comes to the believer through relying on the Lord Jesus Christ, by abiding in Him and He in us. Therefore there is no reason for boasting in good works but only for glorying in Christ. When we walk in good works, the glory of the power of Christ in us is revealed. God is glorified by the good works that we do because they reflect His own work in us through His Son Jesus Christ.

The inspired apostle James, really in his whole epistle, teaches the truth that good works are the fruit of faith. "Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows

in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:17). James teaches that good works involve sincere and true love for the neighbor, which is revealed in genuine care and concern for our neighbor's welfare. Good works include the careful control of our tongues, so that we do not speak evil to or about the neighbor. Such good works must be the fruit of faith. Only when this fruit is evident is our faith true and genuine. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?... Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.... Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:14-24). Taken out of the context of the whole argument of James, such language might be construed to be heretical and to contradict the clear teaching of the rest of the Word of God regarding good works. James, of course, was not heretical. He did not contradict the teaching of the inspired apostle Paul concerning good works. Works are not the ground of our justification before God. Works are, however, the infallible and necessary fruit of justifying faith, which is the only faith that is living and true faith. God's people must be constantly admonished to bring forth good works in their lives.

The law of God is the perfect standard of good works. It is God's standard. Good works are not those performed according to the imagination and institutions of men. How prevalent this latter idea is in our modern society. Consider the feminists of our day who insist that the greatest good is a woman's so-called right over her own body. This "right," according to the instructors of this evil philosophy, allows her even to murder her own unborn child if this

child interferes with her freedom to live life according to her own selfish interest and pride. Goodness, according to modern philosophy, is concern over the environment, gay rights, freedom of the press even to produce pornography, and all sorts of other vile evils. What a warped standard of good man has when he departs from God! Jesus accused the Pharisees of neglecting the law of God and putting in its place the standards of men. Read Matthew 15:1-9. How abominable this was to the Lord.

The teachers of the Roman Catholic Church have given their own standards for good works. They insist that priests and nuns must remain celibate. They teach that such a state is superior to marriage for priests and nuns. They glory in the monastic life style and the life of asceticism. They extol pilgrimages to Rome and rendering homage to the images that fill their churches. In doing these things they become guilty of teaching the doctrines of devils, laying burdens upon people that God's Word does not lay upon them. At the same time they lead men away from true piety and godliness. In their churches they are guilty of promoting the gross idolatry of image worship. Through history foolish and sinful men have always argued that they can themselves set the standard for what is good. Man, in keeping with the lie of the devil, sets himself up as judge of what is good and evil. At the same time he rejects the only and perfect standard of God's law.

The law of God is not something arbitrary. It is not true that God could just as well have given us another set of commandments than those He gave to us. The law of God reveals the absolute perfection of God Himself in His very nature and being. Therefore in His law God Himself declares what is good in His sight and what is pleasing unto Him.

The psalmist often extols the

goodness of the law. He makes many earnest prayers to God. "Teach me thy way, O Lord. Teach me thy way. Lead me in the way of thy commandments. With thy law to be my guide I will never turn aside." The law of God is absolutely perfect. Read the masterful Psalm 119 and learn how the psalmist extols the law of God and how earnestly he desires that his whole life be ordered according to its perfect standard. What an example of true godliness!

The law of God is perfect because it requires first of all that we love God. There can be no good that does not follow from love for God. Humanism is not something which God calls good. Goodness cannot have its end in man's welfare alone. The law of God requires that we love God with all our heart and soul and strength and mind. The law of God is not a set of cold, formal principles but a guide for walking in the love of God. The law of God as it was given at Mount Sinai is introduced by the mighty foreword, "I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." The law is God's will for His redeemed people that they may learn to walk in obedience before Him in the way that pleases Him and brings glory to Him. In the way of keeping His law they enjoy His favor and goodness and blessing. By keeping God's law, His people show that they are a peculiar people, different from the world. We are called to be holy and separate and consecrated to God through the keeping of His law.

Obedience to the law of God is the supreme manifestation of love for God. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the great example of this. He kept the law of God perfectly, without compromise, because He loved God perfectly and it was His purpose to fulfill all righteousness. Through His death Christ exalted the glory of the law of God. He died for the righteousness of the

law of God. By honoring the law of God He honored God. Jesus fulfilled the righteous demands of the law of God on our behalf because we were wholly incapable of keeping God's law, being prone by nature to hate God and our neighbor. But it is also true that the righteousness of the law of God is fulfilled in us through His Spirit. So all things are according to the law of God. There cannot be any goodness independent from the law of God.

The glory of God must be the purpose for which we do all things. Only when the purpose of all our works is the glory of God are these works truly good in God's judgment. God created all things for His own glory. "Thou are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Man, the greatest of all God's earthly creations, was created a personal, moral, rational creature. He therefore has the moral obligation consciously and willingly to seek in his whole life the glory of God his Creator and Lord. God has redeemed His people by calling them out of darkness into His marvelous light, in order that they might show forth His glorious praises. Jesus teaches us this truth. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8). We must abide by faith in Christ so that through good works we might glorify His Father in heaven. God is glorified when His truth is maintained in the church and when it is faithfully confessed by her members. This is of course in itself one of the greatest of good works. God is glorified when His people, by His grace and Holy Spirit, walk in the good works which He has before ordained for them.

To have the glory of God as the

purpose for good works is absolutely contrary to every inclination of the natural man. He glories in himself. He is hopelessly devoted to seek his own honor and glory in the world. One need only pay a little attention to the modern-day media in its portrayal of man, the movie stars, the sports greats of the world, the rich and famous, to be convinced how shockingly wicked man is in seeking his own glory in the whole of his life.

Our sinful nature is contrary to the purpose of God's glory in the doing of good works. We are still terribly inclined to seek our own glory and to have the praise of men as the motive for the good works that we do. Many of the good works that we do are spoiled by the evil motives for which we do

them, especially the motive of our own vain glory before the world and even in the church. The real test of good works must be this, how we live when we are all alone and only God is watching us. We need often to confess before God the sins that we commit in connection with our attempted good works even in His church.

The glory of God must be the motive of our heart first of all. God is not pleased with mere outward works of righteousness, which are the occasion for boasting and glorying before men. If we love God we must live our whole life for His glory. How different the works of men are before God. They might appear outwardly the same. Two men may both put the same amount of money in the offering

plate during the worship service. One will do it for his own glory, perhaps even for secret self congratulations. Such a man has utterly spoiled his work. Another man, with grace in his heart, will do the same deed humbly in thankfulness to the God who has given us all things. Only this man has performed a good work before God.

Whatever we do, whether we eat or drink, we must do all to the glory of God. All the so-called common works of our life, whether in our personal life, in our life in the home with our families, at the work place, and in society, have moral dimensions to them. The great moral issue is: are we living for our own glory and aggrandizement, or for the glory of God? □

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ The Slippery Slope of Apostasy

In the past years there appeared to be a slowing of the drive towards ecumenicity and union of denominations. More recently that has changed. Lutherans and Roman Catholics appear to have struck a kind of agreement which would rescind the Reformation. And Lutherans and Episcopalians seem very close to establishing ties almost equivalent to union. *Christianity Today*, October 4, 1999, reports on the meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) held last August in Denver, Colorado. The report states:

Meeting in Denver for a week in August, ELCA's biennial Churchwide Assembly approved a unity proposal, "Called to Com-

mon Mission" (CCM), by 716 to 317—comfortably above the required two-thirds majority.

If approved by the Episcopal Church's triennial General Convention next year, CCM would unite ELCA's 5.2 million members with 2.4 million Episcopalians. Full communion would not be a merger, but it would enable the denominations to share clergy, celebrate Communion together, and work in more visible unity.

The previous Churchwide Assembly rejected the original full-communion proposal, the Concordat of Agreement, by a mere six votes two years ago.... CCM is a revision of the Concordat coming out of ecumenical talks that were revived last year....

Among Lutherans, CCM opposition focused on the ministry of bishops. Both denominations affirm the concept of apostolic succession as the authentic transmission of Christian faith through the ages. Many Episcopalians go further, saying they can trace the consecrations of bishops back to the original apostles and insisting that such lineage is essential to apostolic succession. During the six-

teenth century, that link was severed for Lutherans (except in Sweden) because few Roman Catholic bishops joined the Protestant Reformation.

The article continued by quoting some of the debate on this question.

CCM supporter Tom Koch said the debate about the historic episcopate "has taken on a life of its own." But it is not the real issue. He said, "Do we balk when we are asked to change? Sometimes there is a cost to discipleship."

Supporter Mark Betley said that a "Lutheran heresy" says only, "God loves us just the way we are," without adding "and loves us so much that God will not leave us there."

"This is too big a chance to miss," Betley said. "We must walk up to the precipice of the historic episcopate and remain people who live by the Word."

Opponent Rebecca Wagner worried that CCM would dilute Lutherans' confessional identity. "Words matter," she said. "The words we have before us are

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words I cannot agree with." Wagner said she could not reconcile CCM with the Augsburg Confession.

Marcus Miller disagreed. "Our ecumenical reach needs to be broad. It needs to be to the Right and to the Left," he said. "We have an opportunity to act our way into new ways of thinking for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ."

In this assembly, as in so many others within the church-world today, there was again a debate on the issue of homosexuality. Here, the issue was not whether practicing homosexuals can be members in good standing in the church, it was not whether these could be part of the clergy—provided they remained celibate; rather, the question now was whether it was fair and right for the church to maintain that "clergy with homosexual orientation abstain from sexual relations."

"It is the equivalent of saying that overweight people may be ordained, but may not eat," said Betsy Liljeberg.

Jay McDivitt, vice present of ELCA's Lutheran Youth Organization, said he has felt a longtime call to be a Lutheran pastor.

"If I perhaps fall in love with a man, which is a definite possibility, I would be prevented from serving the church I love," McDivitt said. "This hurts me deeply, because it is wrong."

The assembly overwhelmingly accepted a resolution, 820 to 159, that upholds ELCA's current policies on noncelibate homosexual clergy, but encourages continued discussion. The resolution says there is no "arbitrarily set timetable for concluding the discussion" and that ELCA must "await a time of clearer understanding provided by the Lord of the Church."

The arguments are simply unbelievable and amazing! "Await a time of clearer understanding provided by the Lord of the Church"??

Almost 2000 years ago there was a clear presentation of God's position concerning homosexuality—and not merely about non-celibate clergy. It is found in Holy Scripture. For almost 2000 years there was hardly a question raised about the issue. But now the church is awaiting a "clearer understanding"? Are these awaiting a time when the King of the church might possibly change His mind—to accommodate those who "love the church" but find themselves loving also members of the same sex? Or perhaps these expect a new revelation from that Lord of the church which will replace (and contradict) that which He gave 2000 years ago?

It is a slippery slope. In recent years there have been attacks on important teachings of Scripture. Denominational walls are crumbling. Unity, irrespective of doctrinal differences, must be sought by all means. Where will it all end? It would seem that we see here the development of the antichristian church which will walk cooperatively with the antichristian world power.

■ Cooperation Between the World's Religions

The *Christian News*, October 11, 1999, points out that there is growing cooperation not only between various denominations, but also increasingly between the world's religions. There are, of course, various things differing religions could properly talk about, especially wars and violent crimes done in the name of "religion." But one has the impression that there is more than that behind these conferences. The article states:

Representatives of some 20 of the world's religions will meet at the Vatican during October to discuss closer collaboration between believers to further justice and peace in the next millennium.

At least 235 clergy and laity from 48 countries—including Is-

rael, Algeria, Iran and India—will attend the Inter-Religious Assembly called for October 24-29 by the Vatican's Central Committee for the Great Jubilee 2000.

The theme of the meeting is "On the Eve of the Third Millennium: Collaboration Between Different Religions."...

...The goal of next month's assembly is to agree on a joint declaration on the role of religion in the next millennium.

"There are some major problems and challenges in the world which, for their solution, require the cooperation of all believers," Cardinal Francis Arinze, president of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, said. "Foremost among these are questions related to justice and peace."

Arinze said the assembly would discuss such issues as discrimination because of race, religion, language, social status or sex; the refusal of the rich to practice solidarity with the poor; injustice toward women and children; and "the modern scourges" of AIDS and drug abuse.

"Believers in the various religions cannot remain unconcerned in the face of such major challenges and problems. They are convinced that the highest ideals of their religions oblige them to join hands to find lasting solutions," he said.

Remarkable that all religions, according to the spokesman of this gathering, have "highest ideals" and that they can "join hands to find lasting solutions." But where is there mention of the cross? Where is it pointed out that the only way of justice and peace is through Calvary? The above sounds very much like the peace of the Antichrist.

■ "Dumbed-Down Protestantism"

The same issue of *Christian News* points to the developing unity of religions as reported in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*:

On Monday, October 4, 1999,

the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that 3,000 young people linked hands around the Trans-world Dome to pray for Billy Graham's health, for the success of his crusade, and for souls to be saved.

According to the Post article "One of the themes of Graham's crusades is breaking down false barriers, whether racial or theological."

Major magazines including Time have pointed out in recent years that, if you look at what Graham actually does, rather than listen to his own prepared publicity, you will clearly see he is an ecumenist and not an evangelist. While numerous studies have re-

peatedly shown that few people actually get converted at a crusade, these mass gatherings have done much to undermine Biblical theology and the clear teachings of not only Lutherans but also other denominations. The goal of Graham crusades is to produce a type of "dumbed-down" Protestantism as found most typically among the Baptists. Both privately and publicly Graham disdains the Sacraments. He treats them as mere human ordinances and powerless symbols, even though Jesus clearly taught the life-giving power of the Sacraments. Several St. Louis area Lutheran churches, including Webster Gardens, Concordia Kirkwood, St. John's Ellisville, and

King of Kings Chesterfield, are co-operating as much as they possibly can to help Graham spread his anti-Biblical teachings. Do these LCMS churches agree with Graham and the Pope when they say that Muslims, Jews and other non-Christians can get to heaven without saving faith in Christ?"

Such is the development in the church-world today. But there are still some who recognize and condemn the false doctrines which are being taught by so many in our day. May our God preserve His people against the deceptive doctrines which appear to appeal to so many. □

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Richard Moore

Foreign Missions in Ghana

I was asked to write some *Standard Bearer* articles on the work that we are doing in Ghana, West Africa. I am now fulfilling a part of this request. As I take up the writing of this article, it is rather difficult to know where to start and what to include. The reason for this is that so much has transpired since we took the call to be missionary in Ghana, and also because the Lord has so richly blessed us in this labor to the present time. That means that there are so many aspects of the work on the field about which we could write, that we hardly know where to begin. We shall attempt to use this as an introductory article, to be followed by others on the different aspects of our labors

here on the field.

When one comes to a field of labor such as that found here in Ghana, everything is new. It is new for this missionary from more than one point of view. In the first place, it is the first missionary labor that I personally have undertaken — although when I served in Isabel, South Dakota and in Edmonton, Alberta, I found that both churches had many aspects of true missionary work about them. They have therefore served to prepare us for this labor that we now undertake. In Isabel we did much work with the people of the community, also the native Indian people there. And in Edmonton we started with five families in a city of over 600,000 people, and much of our labor was of the same type that we must do here, in order to bring the gospel to others, so that the church could grow.

And yet, to go to a foreign

land, outside of the United States and Canada, and to bring the gospel of Christ there, is in many ways altogether different. The reason for this is that one must enter a country that is in a real sense very different from the one in which he has lived his entire life. The environment is very different, the climate is very different, and the people have a distinct and different culture. All of these factors become a part of beginning the labors here in Ghana. Even though we had visited here for seven weeks in 1994, and this was a great help, there were still many things to become accustomed to as we began the work in this beautiful land of very friendly people.

The Lord has given us the strength to face this change and to proceed with the labors without hesitation. We are thankful for the assurance of the care of a sovereign God, who also is our faithful

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covenant Father in Christ. This has meant for us that we may take up the labor without worrying about how that labor may be perceived before the face of man, whether Ghanaians or our people in the States. What we have had to do is be faithful to our calling before God in all the labors that we have performed. Then we have the confidence also that God will prosper that labor according to His purpose, and that will be sufficient for us. The Lord has blessed us as He has given us a place in the midst of the people of Ghana.

One thing that your missionary and the Foreign Mission Committee and the calling church of Hull, Iowa were convinced of as we came to undertake this labor was that we have the calling simply to preach the Word faithfully and that God would give the increase. This is exactly the way we have come to Ghana and the way that we have begun the labor here.

I understand that there were many in our fellowship back home who wondered, even questioned, how we could go to any field, especially a field in a country such as Ghana, without having a so-called "core group" with which to begin our labors. But had Paul waited to find a core group in every city he brought the gospel, the gospel would never have been preached throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and in Europe (Rome), etc. We were determined that, in order to begin a work in Ghana that would have the firm foundation of the unadulterated truth, it was necessary to come and let the preaching of the gospel gather the people and prepare them, by God's grace, to stand in that truth as a faithful manifestation of the body of Christ, if the Lord wills. By this we do not mean that if there is a group of believers that desires the preaching of the Word we will not go to them and help them. Of course we will. And we have already done so to some extent. About that we will elaborate in the

future. But we have begun the labors here in Ghana without any such connection.

When we arrived in Ghana there were several things we had to do in order to accomplish this purpose. First, we had to meet with the Ghana Attorney General's office to become incorporated as a non-profit church organization. This was granted us, and we are thankful for the help of Rev. Gabriel Anyigba, a long-time friend, for his help in these things. He was willing to be an advisor to us regarding our labors before the eyes of the government.

Second, we had to locate an area where we could labor in Greater Accra, a place where we could find a home located near the people of the area, so that it could also serve as a place of temporary worship. We accomplished this after a couple of weeks of intensive searching. We now have a nice home in North Legon, with a large sitting room that can be used for our worship services during the beginning stages of our labor. This place has proved to be well-suited for this purpose.

Third, we would have to advertise our location and begin worship services. We accomplished this by God's grace in several ways. We had a sign painted on our "car," a four-door Mitsubishi pickup. We had signs made and we planted them on prime corners of the roads in our area, announcing the worship services and where we meet.

Fourth, and probably the most important, we prepared pamphlets that give a small history of who we are, where we are located, what we believe, and again announcing the times of our worship and Bible Study. These we handed out to whomever we came into contact with. We also walked the area streets and handed out the pamphlets. Whenever someone would stop us to ask about the meaning of the name on our car, we handed out pamphlets. As of the present,

we have handed out over 1000 pamphlets that we have prepared for the field here.

In the fifth place, after a short while we were able also to get a prime time radio program started over Radio Universe, which is the Ghana Universities radio station. This program airs at 8:30 on Thursday evenings. The first week we delivered messages on the sovereignty of God, the Fall of man, and election and reprobation. Next we moved to the order of salvation, beginning with regeneration and ending with the preservation of the saints. During the last programs we have been speaking on sovereign and particular grace. We also have the lines opened for callers, as this is a live program, and the last four weeks we have been averaging about three callers per program. The program lasts one half hour. We have also had people come and visit us and worship with us as a fruit of this radio work.

Finally, once people started to come and worship with us and to study the Bible with us they began inviting others to come and hear "the sound doctrine of the Scriptures as it is proclaimed by our Missionary."

Through all of these means, God has been pleased to cause us to grow from three people who heard our preaching on the first Sunday to an average now of twenty-five at each service. We have had over 100 different people come to worship with us or study the Bible with us. Many have been to many of our activities, and repeatedly come to worship with us. We are very grateful to God for this positive fruit upon the preaching. Others come, and we do not hear from them again. But so far these have been few. Also, we believe that, because this is the Lord's work through the preaching, not all who have come will remain. But from this beginning we believe the Lord will continue to build and provide for the labor here. □

Promise

It is very striking that the word promise is found much more often in the New Testament than in the Old. We find two reasons for this. The New Testament gives us the fulfillment of the promise with the coming of Jesus Christ. And, most often when a promise of God is spoken in the old dispensation, the word promise is not used, but we simply read "And the Lord God said..." (Gen. 3:15), or "And I will..." (Gen. 17:7). There "are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises" (II Pet. 1:4). And we understand from the outset that the promises of God differ radically from the promises of men. Our promises, however seriously intended, are always subject to circumstances beyond our control. God's promises are not conditional in any sense. His promise is itself the power which brings it to pass. God promising is God keeping promise!

All God's promises are in Christ. "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen" (II Cor. 1:20). This means that, first of all, God's promises are *to* Christ. They were made to Abraham and his seed: "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). To Christ is given the promise of victory (Gen. 3:15); the promise of the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession (Ps. 2:8); and the promise of the Spirit as His Spirit (Acts 2:33). Because this is true, every promise of God to us *contains* Christ and is based on the work of Christ. The promise of Canaan as a picture of heaven (Deut. 9:28). The promise of the eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15) which is incorruptible, undefiled, and never fades away (I Pet. 1:4). The promise of the resurrection of the body (I Cor. 15:21, 22). The promise of the covenant with us and with our children (Acts 2:39). The promise of Christ to be with us even to the end of the world, even as He gathers the church (Matt. 28:20).

God's promise is *unconditional* in that it does not depend upon man for its fulfillment. "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16). Adam and Eve were hiding from God when He sought them, found them, and made promise to them (Gen. 3). Abraham and Sarah were past the age of child-bearing, yet they staggered not at the promise of God (Rom. 4:20). Rebekah was barren (Gen. 25:21). In the fullness of time the royal line out of which the Christ must be born according to God's promise to David (Ps. 89:34-36) ended in a virgin. With God,

who does not depend upon man, all things are possible (Luke 1:28).

The promises of God are *certain*, for reasons which are to be found in Him. He remembers His promise (Ps. 105:42); He cannot lie regarding His eternal promise (Tit. 1:2); He sware an oath by Himself that the heirs of the promise might have strong consolation (Heb. 6:13, 18); for He is faithful who has promised (Heb. 10:23); and even though ignorant scoffers mock God's promise, God is not slack concerning it, refusing to send Christ until the last elect comes to repentance (II Pet. 3:9).

The precious promises of God are *particular* with respect to their intended recipients. Just as election is in Christ, so are the promises for those alone who are in Christ by election. As we saw above, the promise of God is first of all to Christ. And then it goes out to all those who are ingrafted into Him by faith. The blessing of Abraham comes upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14). And, "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). So the recipients of the promise are the true seed of Abraham as they are born in his generations (Gen. 17:7). They are for Jews and Gentiles, and their children, even as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:39). They are for the Israel of God, the seed of Abraham, the children of God according to the Spirit, the children of the promise, that is, those who are brought forth unto everlasting life by the power of the promise of God; for the children of the promise are counted for the seed (Rom. 9:6-8). All these shall receive the crown of life "which the Lord has promised to them that love him" (James 1:12).

We must not let these promises slip (Heb. 2:1), but rather receive them, embrace them, and confess them (Heb. 11:13). This enables us to live as sojourners and strangers in the earth, spiritually dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with Abraham of the same promise (Heb. 11:9). Then we follow them, who through faith and patience inherit the promise (Heb. 6:12), and are willing to suffer all things "not accepting deliverance, that we might obtain a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). For there is one aspect of God's promise that remains to be fulfilled, Christ's great and glorious second coming. "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12). That is the crown to all God's promises in Christ! Even so, come, Lord Jesus! □

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Ahaz, Joseph, and the Virgin

Matthew 1:18-25

The Ancient Unbelief

A rumor had come to Jerusalem. The word was out that two foes of Judah, apostate Israel and heathen Syria, had become allies in order to conquer Judah. Their ambition was directed toward the throne in Jerusalem, to overthrow Ahaz, and to set up their own king in his place, the son of Tabeal. These nations had armies which were foreboding enough by themselves, but joined together they could surely overwhelm Judah and Jerusalem.

The king, Ahaz, and the people of Judah were together overcome with dismay. All was lost. The most advisable course was immediate surrender in the face of such a foe. Resistance was futile. Help from man was surely vain. And Ahaz would look no farther than man. He neither believed in nor expected God's help. He was a wicked king, refusing to look to Jehovah, the God of David his father.

But Isaiah will make him look. He comes with a promise that this confederacy, along with its objective, will fail. The prophecy that Israel would fall in sixty-five years was still solid as ever. Assyria would take them captive, even as Amos spoke long before the time of Ahaz and Isaiah (Amos 3:11).

Isaiah now speaks, but Ahaz would not believe the word. Ahaz's unbelief must become yet more manifest, and more inexcusable. To this end Isaiah offers (not well-meaningly to Ahaz) a sign. Ahaz may ask anything he might possibly think of, from the heavens above, even to the depths of the earth. Jehovah stands at the ready to perform it, to confirm the prophecy spoken. But Ahaz refuses, overlaying his refusal with a veneer of piety: he will not tempt God. The fact is that Ahaz's unbelief is behind this refusal. He wants no help from Jehovah.

Such is the folly of unbelief in the wicked today. They are not crying out to every quarter for help. They will cry—but not to God. God comes to them with the gospel, but they will not believe. God comes with the proofs of the gospel, but they will not believe. Let God work signs and wonders in the heavens above, blotting out the sun, causing the stars to fall. Let God work signs in the depths, even raising a man from the dead. They still will not believe.

But God has a particular purpose with the unbelief of Ahaz. He uses the king's wicked unbelief to give a most marvelous sign. The Lord Himself will give the sign. He will dictate its terms. A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, even a son in the line of Ahaz himself. We can be most thankful that wicked Ahaz refused to ask a sign! Since Jehovah Himself gives the sign, there is for those who fear

God the additional confidence that He also will do it.

The Sign Fulfilled a Cause for Consternation

This sign must be fulfilled and is fulfilled. Its fulfillment is only in the one about whom Matthew writes this gospel account. Two verses of this passage belong together. "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise...." "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet." This was done in this particular way in order that this prophecy might be fulfilled. The Messiah must be virgin born. He must be conceived by the Holy Spirit. Yes, so that the Scripture might be fulfilled on this point. But even more, because the Messiah must be true God and true man, the two natures united in one person. The virgin birth is the sign that points to the Messiah. The virgin birth is also the necessary means to bring the Messiah into the world. He has God for His Father, no human man. He must be Emmanuel, God with us.

The fulfillment of this prophecy causes trouble for the espoused husband of Mary. She departed from Nazareth to live with Zacharias and Elisabeth. In her haste, we may suppose, she did not tell Joseph the reason for her departure. Joseph knew nothing about the visit of Gabriel to her. Mary was gone for three months, had now returned, and was found to be pregnant. Avoiding all man-

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ner of speculation, we can say that Joseph drew the conclusion that Mary's condition of pregnancy was the result of fornication. He was a just man, whose justice was also merciful. He thinks and considers—no rash judgment or hasty activity here. He determines that the way to proceed is by a putting away, under a merciful privacy. He is minded to put her away privately. Yet he thinks and considers. We may be sure that he took into consideration Mary's history. He must have known that Mary was one who feared God, was an object of His grace. Further, she was espoused to Joseph. This legal appointment must have spoken very clearly that she did belong to Joseph already, as one to be married. Why would she be unfaithful?

While Joseph was thinking upon these things, God Himself provided the answer. He sent a heavenly messenger from His glorious throne with the truth. As such, then, it will carry far more weight than anything Mary herself could say in explanation of her own condition. This angel must appear to Joseph in a dream. Here there is no possibility of questioning, but only of obedience.

We understand this vision to Joseph as gracious—far different from the word of Isaiah to Ahaz. It is gracious because it comes to Joseph as already endowed with the grace of God. There is here no strict command: Take Mary as your wife. The commandment is given in the negative: Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife. The fear must be removed, and is removed by a reason. This child is not the result of fornication. Far from it! "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." Good enough reason for Joseph. The dishonor must now be replaced with a sense of high honor—to be married to the mother of Christ!

The Names Revealed

Following this revelation, now comes a most happy command.

This son, conceived by the Holy Ghost, born to the virgin Mary, Joseph must call Jesus. Though there were and are many called by the name Jesus, the name belongs properly and only to this Child. This name is the only name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved. This name is the personal name of Jesus. It is the name given to Him, by which men called upon Him. By it He was to be distinguished from other persons of other names. This is the most intimate name of our Lord. Calling upon this name, the believer may be assured that God will hear and answer and save. That name also reveals the truth about Him. He is Jehovah-salvation. In Him is revealed the salvation of Jehovah.

There is another truth that stands behind this name. This truth answers the question of how this One who bears the name Jesus bears it properly. What is it that makes Him this Savior of His people from their sins? We find the answer in the second name given: Emmanuel. This name Isaiah attributed to the virgin-born Son in his prophecy. Literally, "with us God." In this Son, God is with His people. Really, literally present. And with them. As this Son is present among His people, God is present among them. They behold him as dwelling among them, they behold God Himself.

This is salvation! Jehovah Himself saves His people. It can be no other way. For just as certainly as Ahaz and the people of Jerusalem and Judah could not stand before the host of Israel and Syria confederate, so certainly is salvation from sin impossible. The enemy is too strong, the corruption too fierce in its grip upon men. For this enemy, too, is a confederacy. Sin holds sway in the captivity of mankind to Satan. But sin holds sway in the very heart of man. It reigns supreme in the natural man. You see that supremacy in Ahaz's refusal to ask a sign, even masked

in piety. Salvation can be found from no other quarter than Jehovah alone.

That salvation, revealed by these names, is a particular salvation. The name Jesus, as explained by the angel, bears this out. He shall save His people—and none other—from their sins. His name is Emmanuel. God with us—not with them. Not with them yesterday: Rezin, Pekah, and their armies. Not with them today: the ungodly wicked. God with His people, in order to save them from their sins. Right from the start the Messiah is directed toward His people alone, the elect given to Him by His heavenly Father. He is coming from heaven to earth, from glory to humility, to bring to them salvation. Election rules the salvation of this King.

And thus it must be, for He is Jehovah God. He is Jesus—Jehovah. He is Emmanuel—God. This Jehovah God shall undoubtedly save His people. Should the bearer of these names fail to save any one of His people, He must no longer be Jehovah God, but only an imposter and a blasphemer. Were this angel to say, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for he shall try to save all men, head for head," we would have a contradiction. For so feeble an attempt, one is not worthy of such a name.

He shall save His people from their sins—and He does save! His work is successful in every way. Look at the cross, take note of the infinite value of that blood. It does redeem His people from the wrath of God under which they would otherwise be perishing. Take note of the application of that blood. There is a glorious church, in existence from the beginning of the world, even to its end. This is the company of the predestinated and redeemed.

Take note of how this Savior saves from sin. He does not wait for faith to rise up in the heart before He grants salvation. When this Savior saves, He works faith

by His Spirit, in the heart of the sinner, when and where he is dead in unbelief. Those who were one with Ahaz in unbelief now believe. They recognize that the virgin birth

is a mighty sign that God saves alone. And they humbly bow before this Jesus, confessing that He saves alone.

longing to the lineage mentioned in verses 1 through 17? How does Joseph demonstrate himself to be a true son of Abraham, if not of David? What virtues does he display throughout this passage? How are godly husbands and fathers to walk in this same way?

Questions for Further Meditation and Study

1. This passage in Matthew's gospel is the record of Jesus' conception and birth. How does its viewpoint differ from that of Luke or John? How is it then complementary? How do its differences relate to the context of this gospel, both the prior and the following? How does this passage fulfill the purpose of this gospel, to show that Jesus is the promised Messiah?

2. What is the particular role of the Holy Spirit in the conception of Christ? What does this have to do with the absolute holiness of Jesus' human nature? How does the understanding of this role preserve us from Mariolatry?

3. What part does the word of the angel to Joseph as the Son of David have in establishing Joseph as be-

4. Since Jesus had to be virgin-born, why did God preserve Joseph as the husband of Mary? What does this have to say about the importance of fathers in the home, aside from their role in procreation?

5. Which two names of Christ are revealed in this passage? How do they together show that salvation is of Jehovah alone? How does the virgin birth signify the Incarnation of the Son of God? □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Steven Key

The Benefits of Christ's Ascension

Having considered the fact of the ascension and what actually took place in that event — insofar as we are able to understand it by what Scripture reveals — we now focus our attention on the benefits of that ascension for us.

Christ's ascension was profitable in three ways, each of which is set forth by our Heidelberg Catechism in Question and Answer 49.

Our Advocate

The first benefit of Christ's ascension is that Jesus is now "our advocate in the presence of his father in heaven."

The term *advocate* appears in the Bible in I John 2:1.

The apostle had revealed the holiness of God, who is light and in whom is no darkness at all. He made clear that fellowship with Him is found only through Christ's blood, and in the single way of walking in the light as He is in the light. If we walk in the light, we don't deny our sin, for then we only deceive ourselves. But we confess our sins and turn from

them to lay hold on God's faithfulness and justice, according to which He forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

And so John writes, as he begins his second chapter: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not." These truths are set before us that, hearing the Word, we might walk in the light and fight against sin, showing ourselves to be the children of God.

However, aware of the fact that we have a continual battle to fight, involving our old nature and the sin which cleaves to us and even the best of our works, the apostle

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continues: "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

An advocate is one who defends us.

We are those who stand constantly before the Righteous Judge. But with us stands our advocate, Jesus Christ the Righteous. He is the One who died for us, who obtained for us the forgiveness of sins and everlasting righteousness. In Him we have also been delivered from the power and dominion of sin, and by His work in us we also walk in the light and long to be completely delivered from all corruption. But at the same time we find in ourselves sins that rise up against us, even sins that remain in us, any of which would make us damnable before God and would deprive us of all opportunity for His fellowship—except for this one thing: We have an advocate.

As our advocate, our Lord Christ pleads for us before the Father and defends us. He doesn't defend our sin. Far be it from Him to condone our sin! He is the Righteous One, after all! But He defends us from the just judgment of God.

He does that, however, by presenting Himself before the Father as our defense. On the basis of His own work of atonement, He appeals to the faithfulness and justice of God, and pleads on our behalf for the sentence of *innocent* and *righteous*.

What a tremendous blessing that is!

The exalted Christ is our advocate in a very special sense of the word. He is so as our High Priest. That is the significance of what we read in Hebrews 4:14-16. He is our advocate as the One who made the sacrifice once and forever for all who are His. He stood in our place, experienced our way of struggle and temptation. He took upon Himself our guilt and all our iniquities. And standing before the Father in perfect love, He paid the

price, the only price, that we might be redeemed and declared righteous.

As One who has walked our path, He is our advocate who also makes intercession on our behalf. His plea is not occasional, but constant for us. And because of who He is and what He has accomplished, that plea is always granted by the Father. The Father, hearing the plea of His Son, looks upon His people in the light of Christ's righteousness with an eye of everlasting love and mercy. So we read: "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Only in the consciousness of this work of Christ do we approach God through Him and obtain the assurance of our perfect righteousness and the forgiveness of our sins. That is the first way in which we find Christ's ascension profitable, exceedingly profitable, for us.

Our Sure Pledge

The second way in which the ascension is profitable for us is found in the truth that the ascended Christ provides for us a sure pledge that He, as our Head, will also take us His members up to Himself.

The last two verses of Hebrews 6 teach us this blessed truth.

Hebrews 6 speaks to the reality of our own experience, which seems as if the Lord is slow concerning the realization of His promises.

We are told to be followers of those who obtained the promises by patience, in full assurance of hope. That hope is certain. It cannot fail.

Our hope is certain by two *un-*

changeable things.

In the first place, that hope is sure because it is rooted in the counsel of God, which is eternal and unchangeable.

In the second place, our hope is sure because God has sworn an unchangeable oath to realize His promise. He did that for our sakes.

But the writer to the Hebrews points at that certainty of our hope and tells us that our hope, or really the object of our hope, has now become the anchor of our soul.

See the picture here. Our hope in Christ and in the fulfillment of the promise is an anchor, the cable of which is fastened to our soul, and which reaches into the innermost sanctuary of God, striking into the ground and securely stabilizing our soul. But that is true for one reason. Our hope has become an anchor, entering the very bosom of God, as it were, because our *forerunner* has entered into that sanctuary for us. That is the reason!

Because Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, and has entered the very sanctuary of God, our hope is anchored, solidly fastened, *immovably* fastened, upon the Rock of our salvation. Because Christ has entered the sanctuary, the object of our hope has been realized, and it has become an anchor to which our soul is bound.

That hope consists of a sure expectation. That expectation is *heaven*!

Heaven is the place "within the veil." The picture is that of the fulfillment of the temple. The place within the veil is the holy of holies. The idea of the holy of holies was that it is the place where God dwells. In other words, it was a picture of heaven. That is what *heaven* is. Not as if heaven can contain God, any more than the holy of holies in the temple could contain God. The heaven of heavens cannot contain God. But heaven is God's dwelling in the sense that there the creature, there we, dwell with God in Jesus Christ.

In heaven we shall see His face in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In heaven we shall have fellowship with Him in a way that we experience now only in a very, very faint measure.

In heaven we shall *live with Him*.

Heaven is a *home*, therefore. That home is the object of the Christian's hope. God has given us the promise in Christ Jesus that we shall dwell with Him some day in His house of many mansions. The wonder of the ascension is that Jesus has opened the door for us to that home. He is our forerunner. That is certain. And we have *that hope* as an anchor of the soul.

The Bestowal of the Spirit

Closely related to that benefit of Christ's ascension is the third benefit, as our Catechism puts it, "that He sends us His Spirit as an earnest, by whose power we *seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and not the things on earth.*"

Christ has sent us His Spirit as an earnest. For that reason we live in hope.

An earnest is a promise or assurance of something to come. He sent us His Spirit as an earnest of our final salvation.

The ascended Lord received that Spirit, in order that through Him He might bestow all the blessings of salvation according to His promise. For you remember how Christ said to His people, as re-

corded in John's gospel account, chapters 14-16, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:16-18).

Our contact with the ascended Lord is by the Word, but *through* the Spirit.

"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26).

And again in John 16:12-14, Jesus said to His disciples: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you."

All who are regenerated by the Spirit of Christ partake of Christ's life as the ascended and exalted Lord of glory. His life is the resurrection life! It is the life of heaven.

In union with Him by faith we are at this very moment citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

But that heavenly life in us also

brings us into a continuous tension in this world. It is a tension within ourselves, first of all.

On the one hand, we, being earthly creatures and sinful besides, are attached to the earth. We are strongly attached to the earth, from many different perspectives. Our sinful nature compounds the attachment.

But on the other hand, there is the Spirit of our heavenly Christ dwelling in us, drawing us unto Him, and making us partakers of His heavenly life. That also is ours, when we are His. So that we long to be with Him, to have closer fellowship with Him. And so the presence of Christ in heaven is an earnest to us that there awaits for us *heavenly glory*.

And by the power of that indwelling Spirit, we seek the things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God.

Do you find that in your own life? Do you confess that you are a pilgrim and stranger in the earth, whose home is in heaven? Do you declare plainly that you seek a country, whose Builder and Maker is God?

By the power of the Spirit of Christ, this is the life of the Christian. While yet present in this body, we are absent from the Lord. And absent from Him, we long to be closer to Him. That explains why we pray as we do, with all the saints, "Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly." □

Book Reviews

The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Church (Volume 1: The Biblical Period; Volume 2: The Patristic Age), by Hughes Oliphant Old. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998. Pp. x-383 v. 1. \$35.00. Pp. viii-481, v. 2.

\$42.00. (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

These are the first two volumes of a comprehensive multi-volume study of the history of the reading and preaching of the sacred Scriptures. Old proposes to give us the history of the reading and preaching of Scripture from Moses to the

end of the twentieth century. If Old is able to complete this ambitious project, and if the quality of the succeeding volumes is as good as the first two volumes, this series will quickly and deservedly replace the long-time, standard, three-volume *A History of Preaching*, by Edwin C. Dargan.

Old believes that preaching

and the reading of Holy Scripture lie at the heart of the worship of the Christian church. He states his purpose in writing this history as follows:

So, then, the purpose of this work is to come to an understanding of how preaching is worship, the service of God's glory. We want to see how preaching in one age after another has been done as a sacred service. It is upon the doxological function of preaching, then, that we wish to focus, even though surely other dimensions of preaching will unavoidably come into view. Although we will elaborate our discussion with a great number of different answers from a great variety of times and places, our basic question will always remain very simple: How is preaching worship? At the center of our discussion is, inevitably enough, Jesus.

Jesus came preaching.... At the center of Jesus' ministry was this reading and interpreting of the Scriptures, this proclamation that they had been fulfilled. He gave himself to us in his preaching as well as in the agony of his prayers, his baptism of fire, his drinking of the bitter cup, the suffering of his cross, and the victory of his resurrection. Jesus came preaching because he had been sent for this purpose by the Father. Similarly, Jesus sent his disciples out to preach: "As the

Father has sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). The earliest Church understood preaching to be at the heart of its mission... (v. 1, p. 7).

By studying the preaching of some of the greatest preachers in the history of the church, Old hopes to help contemporary preachers "recover what seems in our day to have become a lost art" (v. 1, p. 3).

Anyone looking for an excellent, exegetical analysis of apostolic preaching will find it in Volume 1. Old's fine analysis of Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2), e.g., is by itself worth the price of the book (pp. 167-169). In Volume 2 Old presents not only a first-rate history, but an excellent study of the preaching of Cyrillic of Jerusalem, the Cappadocian Fathers, Cyrillic of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, and many other of the "greats."

All these riches are given us in a fine, readable style of writing, as the following quotation from volume 1 will indicate. This quotation is taken from Old's study of Paul's sermon to the Athenian philosophers preached on the Areopagus. Old is commenting on the apostle's concluding admonition, wherein he tells the Athenians that "now God commands all men everywhere to repent." This is what Old says:

Polite apologetic has been put aside here. There was nothing diplomatic about telling the Athenians, of all people, that they were ignorant. To threaten the day of judgment was to reveal oneself as being hopelessly beyond the pale of polite humanism, and to affirm the resurrection was to kiss enlightenment a fond farewell. Be that as it may, essential to the missionary sermon has always been the call to repentance. No matter how disguised it may be, a call to repentance can never really be diplomatic or polite; it is always an affront to our self-sufficiency. The missionary sermon aims at baptism, even if baptism is not specifically mentioned, and baptism is the sacrament of mortification (pp. 177, 178).

Each volume is enhanced by a detailed bibliography of both original and secondary sources and an index.

Pastors, teachers of Homiletics, but also laymen will benefit from these volumes. We fervently hope that Dr. Old is able to finish the series.

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News From Our Churches

Congregational Activities

In mid-September, the consistory of the Hudsonville, MI PRC decided to present a survey to their congregation to help them understand the feelings of their members concerning the possibility of organizing another daughter congregation in the future.

Hudsonville currently has

about 150 families, with a total membership of about 580. Sixteen years ago, when Byron Center PRC was organized, Hudsonville was about 150 families; and she was around 160 families when Georgetown PRC started. In addition to this, Hudsonville often has to set up chairs in their narthex to be able to accommodate everyone in a worship service. The crowding will only get more severe as their children and families grow. Hudsonville's consistory has since appointed a committee to consider

the survey results and make recommendations on which direction to take.

Somewhat related to Hudsonville and their growth "problems," we couldn't help but notice that recently six fathers of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI appeared before their consistory at its October meeting to request baptism for their newborn children. We don't keep track of this sort of thing, but six at one time may be a record for our churches. We rejoice with them, and with all of our families,

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

in Jehovah's covenant blessings as taught in Psalm 102:28, "The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee."

The Young People of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ invited their congregation to a day of activities on Saturday, October 23. In the afternoon they planned to go apple-picking in New York State, followed by a hayride that evening.

During this year's Teachers Convention (Oct. 21-23), the members of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI got together for a Fall Church Camp-Out at the Christian Reformed Conference Grounds on the shore of Lake Michigan.

By the time you read this issue of the "News," Georgetown will have been, the Lord willing, in their new church home for about a month. One thing they have added to this building is a library, something they could not have before, meeting as they were at Heritage Christian School. Apparently they asked for and received an overwhelming response from their congregation for books. But they are still looking for more. They are especially interested in finding bound volumes of the *SB*, as well as good commentaries, e.g., Calvin or Matthew Henry, and also hymnals. If you have any of these materials you would like to donate, please contact their pastor,

Rev. R. VanOverloop
4510 Bridgeville Ct.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
616-662-0257.

The council of the Cornerstone PRC in Schereville, Indiana recommended to their congregation an evening Bible Study to which all were invited. Their Evangelism Committee proposed that, for the first three meetings, they study the three *SB* articles by Rev. Kortering on mission enthusiasm. This would give the new society a few weeks to choose a part of Scripture to study. And it would also provide an opportunity for Corner-

stone to grow together as a church as they studied their calling towards evangelism.

Mission Activities

Rev. D. Kleyn and Rev. R. Miersma report that they arrived safely in the Philippines. In Manila they were able to lead a three-hour Bible Study discussion with a Berean Bible group whose leader is Mr. Rodolfo Sy. They have traveled to the Daet area to do more work and preaching on the Lord's Day.

Rev. R. Moore reports from Ghana that he will be speaking at a public seminar October 21, 22, and 23 in Adukrom. The two main topics he was planning to speak on were "The Calling of Man" and "The Fall of Man in the Garden of Paradise."

Rev. Moore also writes that they continue to work toward finding a property or building to rent for their worship services.

Rev. R. Hanko, our churches' missionary to Northern Ireland, reports that the congregation of the Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland continues to make progress towards the actual purchase of property in Ballymena. The Lord willing, that will all go through in January. Tentative planning permission has been obtained, and a

price agreed on. Covenant is now waiting for plans, formal planning permission, and the rest of the legal red tape.

Evangelism Activities

Prof. D. Engelsma spoke October 14 at the Loveland, CO PRC on the subject, "The Second Coming of Christ: The Christian and the Reformed View of the Millennium." He spoke again the next evening on, "The Second Coming of Christ: Not Premillennial." He concluded his series with a sermon Sunday evening, October 17, entitled "Waiting for the Lord Jesus, the Parable of the Ten Virgins."

The Evangelism Committee of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA continues to receive good response to their mailers. In past months they received five requests for Mrs. Hoeksema's Bible Story Book, one all the way from Greece. This work has also resulted in a number of interesting contacts, including a group of four families in Medera, CA, who would very much like to see PR mission work in their area.

Food For Thought

"Thanksgiving is nothing if not a glad and reverent lifting of the heart to God in honor and praise for His goodness."

— James R. Miller □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Southwest PRC extend their Christian sympathy to Mr. Herman Kuiper, Mr. and Mrs. William DeKraker, and Mrs. Kathy Spaman, in the death of his dear wife and their beloved mother,

MRS. DENA KUIPER.

Our sympathy also goes out to the many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. May the bereaved family be comforted in the assurance of God's Word that "... all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Rev. Ron Cammenga, Pres.
Darrel Huiskens, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Southwest PRC extend their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Johanna VanderVeen and to Mr. and Mrs. Randy VanderVeen in the death of her daughter and their sister,

IDA VANDER VEEN.

May the family be strengthened by God's Word of promise in Isaiah 40:11, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom."

Rev. Ron Cammenga, Pres.
Darrel Huiskens, Clerk



As we come closer to the 75th Anniversary Celebration on June 19-23, 2000, we would like to reflect on the activities that will take place in the mornings. The mornings will be full of informational and spiritual activities for the whole family, which will start with morning devotions at the chapel.

We are planning to have Bible School for the children from 9:30 A.M. to 11:00 A.M. the mornings of June 20, 21, 22.

The Bible School sessions will be based on the theme *The Armor of God*, in which the lessons will come from Ephesians. The children will be divided into two groups, the first of which will be for Preschoolers to Grade 2. They will sing songs, learn about Christian armor, and make a different craft that will go along with the Bible lesson of that day.

The second group will consist of children who are from Grade 3 to Grade 9. Those who come for all three days will make a framed picture to take home as a reminder of the Bible lessons on Ephesians 6. Those children who come for one or two days will make a smaller craft that will go along with the Bible lesson for the day. Students in this group are asked to bring their Bibles to use during the lessons and also to watch in the *Beacon Lights* for additional information that will have articles to prepare for the lessons.

The adults will have an opportunity to attend sectionals the three mornings of the Celebration from 9:30 A.M. to 11:00 A.M. when the children are in Bible School. The sectionals will be informative and have a discussion-group style which will cover a wide variety of subjects. The sectionals will be comprised of two parts: first, the moderator will give an introduction and information on the subject. Secondly, the attendees will be given an opportunity to discuss and ask questions on the subject.

Some of the sectionals that are being planned are: Singapore, Pittsburgh, Spokane, Northern Ireland, Tasmania, Singing, Devotions, Evangelism, Organists/Pianists, Scriptorium, Protestant Reformed History, Mission Overview, and Creation. The Mission Field sectionals will talk about each specific mission and answer questions pertaining to the mission. The Singing sectional will give the attendees an opportunity to sing as a group for the length of the sectional. The Devotion sectional will be two separate sectionals, one for the men and one for the women. The Organist/Pianist sectional will be an opportunity to share ideas and thoughts for accompaniment during congregational worship. The Scriptorium sectional will give some history of the Bible, with the hope that several items can be taken to the Celebration from an individual's personal collection of older manuscripts.

Prior to the Celebration all the topics of the sectionals and where they will be held on the campus will be published so you can decide on which sectional you want to attend. Registration will not be required, but you will want to schedule your week appropriately around the sectionals that you wish to attend because each sectional may not be available each morning.

Whether you can spend one day or the whole week at the 75th Anniversary, you will surely be blessed with the experience of the communion of the saints and learn how God has used our means to spread His Word.

REFORMATION LECTURE

November 18, 8:00 P.M.

AD 2000: Year of Jubilee — by
Papal Indulgence or Reformation Gospel?

Speaker:

Prof. David J. Engelsma

Place:

First Protestant Reformed Church
2800 Michigan St. S.E.
Grand Rapids, MI

Sponsored by the
Evangelism Committee of
First PRC, Grand Rapids

The public is cordially invited.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On November 22, 1999, our parents and grandparents,

HENRY and CORYNNA BOER, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We thank God for them and their covenant instruction through the years. Our prayer is that He will continue to be with them and give them many more years together.

"For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- ❖ Scott and Deb Boer
Ryan
- ❖ Todd Boer
Nathan
- ❖ Shawne Becker

Hudsonville, Michigan