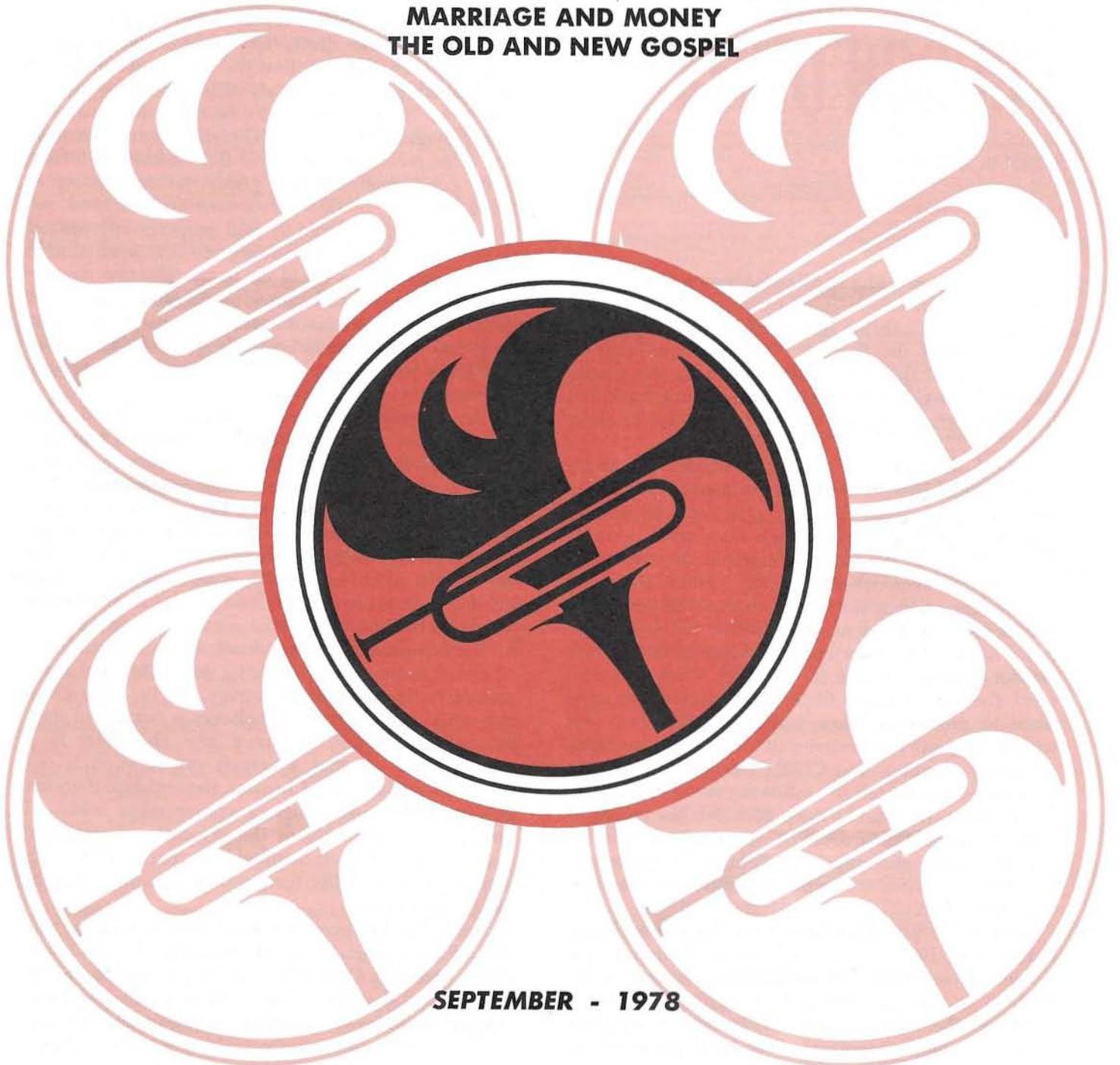


The Outlook

**QUOTAS
MARRIAGE AND MONEY
THE OLD AND NEW GOSPEL**



SEPTEMBER - 1978

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

of QUOTAS, QUALMS, and CHURCH UNITY

JOHN R. SITTEMA

At the last meeting of Classis Orange City a decision was taken which is of extreme significance to the life of the Christian Reformed Church. Unfortunately, many of the delegates, and perhaps many of you who read this, view the decision as the proper means of bringing a "naughty" congregation back into line. But other, far more serious, issues are at stake here.

The history of the situation is simple. A certain congregation decided unanimously to withhold certain (not all) of its quota offerings as a form of protest, claiming that in good conscience they could not give these offerings. We do not need to go into their reasons, nor even whether those reasons are valid. The congregation is responsible before the consistory and before the Lord of the Church; not before us. But what is of concern here is Classis' decision with respect to their decision to withhold. Classis encouraged them to change their mind, and encouraged them to protest in other ways. Both of these are within the proper boundaries of Classis' responsibility in such a situation. But Classis Orange City did not stop there. It adopted the following recommendation: "That (name of church) must consider her action of withholding certain quotas as one that tends to independentism, and persistence in their procedure could seriously jeopardize her fellowship or membership in the C.R.C."

One of the grounds adduced for this recommendation is the 1975 decision of Synod "scolding" the Toronto II consistory for withholding certain quotas. Nothing in Classis Orange City's grounds seriously considered the unique history of Toronto II case nor even mentioned important Synodical decisions on

the matter. But even more significantly, the underlying premise of the adopted recommendation is clearly an unbiblical one. It is that the unity of the the Church as it comes to expression in fellowship or membership in this denomination is at the heart a financial one. In this article I wish to comment on both of those issues.

First the matter of Synod's stand on quota giving comes into focus. It should be clear to many that the Toronto II case is far more involved than just the withholding of quotas. Any perusal of the *Acts of Synod* in the years preceding 1975 will show the complexities of that case. Surely, Synod's response in this situation cannot be considered normative for denominational policy. Rather, one must look to more complete definitive decisions of Synod on the matter under discussion.

In 1939 a committee reported to Synod that there should be a clear distinction made between quotas and assessments, noting that the latter implied forced or coerced payment. Surely this committee understood the implications of its recommendations, and surely Synod did as well. Therefore Synod went so far, in its recommendations of the committee, setting forth our denominational policy toward giving as being by way of quota recommendations, and not assessments. Synod rightly and properly encouraged faithful giving, no doubt aware of what irresponsible and cavalier giving could do to the planned denominational agencies and causes. Yet Synod went so far, in its efforts to safeguard against the assessment idea, as to state that a congregation's quota delinquencies of a given year cannot be held against her the following year.

Synod itself, therefore, clearly contradicted what is now becoming an increasingly widespread tendency in our churches, namely, to view denominational and classical quotas as non-debatable assessments. Not only is this contrary to what Synod has said; even more clearly, it is contrary to Scripture, which enjoins us to give cheerfully as the Lord has blessed us, but not to give or to force giving under compulsion, thus binding the consciences of those giving. This is clearly taught in II Corinthians 9:7.

Furthermore, we must reassert the responsibility of giving responsibly, practicing good Christian stewardship in the usage of the money we give. If a given individual congregation or believer is convinced that, in good conscience, it cannot give cheerfully to a certain cause, or that a certain organization is not wisely exercising good Christian stewardship, then not only may that individual or congregation withhold funds, but in the light of the principle of corporate responsibility, it must withhold its funds. Otherwise it incurs responsibility (corporately) for the abuse of the Lord's money.

Secondly, however, we must clearly examine the idea of the financial basis of the unity of the Church which underlies Classis Orange City's position. Some have argued that the privilege of denominational fellowship involves the paying of one's quota/dues. (Notice, I have deliberately avoided using the phrase

“paying quotas,” as I do not think it can be legitimately used.) Others have said the same thing, using different words. Classis Orange City, however, is more blatant when it says that withholding quotas “tends to independentism, and persistence in this procedure could seriously jeopardize . . . fellowship/membership in the C.R.C.”

Several things are involved here. First is the matter of accused independentism. To be sure, as part of the Reformed family of churches we have adopted a Reformed church polity. We do not accept a strictly congregational view of the government of Christ’s Church.

Yet, Reformed church government clearly placed the direct authority of the Lord in the local consistory, and not in the broader assemblies. It is incredible that this principle needs to be reasserted, but it seems to be widely forgotten or ignored today. In other words, while local churches band themselves together for the purpose of hearing appeals or for issues which are of mutual concern, their authority is only a delegated one, while the direct and original authority resides with the local consistory. The conscience and stewardship of a local congregation cannot be bound or restricted. Classis may disagree, and exhort, and encourage, but she may not threaten! She simply does not have the right or the authority to do so.

But more significantly we note the assumption underlying the Orange City decision that unity in the branch of Jesus Christ called the Christian Reformed Church can be determined by whether or not giving is precisely regulated according to quota recommendations. That assumption flies in the face of all the concepts of the Church proclaimed by the Word of God and therefore taught in the creeds of the denomination. The Bible knows of no other standard for the basis of the unity of the Church than the unity of confessing “one Lord,” and “one faith” (Eph. 4:1-6). The Heidelberg Catechism recognizes this when it calls the holy catholic Church a “unity of the true faith.” The Belgic Confession says, in Art. 27, that the universal Christian Church “is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit.”

Notice that there is no mention of a basis for church unity within this confessional church other than that of “the true faith.” In fact, in its confession regarding the order and discipline of the Church, the Belgic Confession sets forth some strong words in Art. 32 which are extremely appropriate to the subject of quota compulsion. It says: “And therefore we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever” (italics mine, JRS). Also, in discussing the false Church in Art. 29, it mentions some words which alert us to some present-day occurrences: “As for the false Church, it ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God . . . it . . . persecutes those who live holily according to

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“And the three companies blew the trumpets . . . and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands . . . and they cried, The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon” (Judges 7:20).

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the Word of God and (who) rebuke it for its errors, covetousness, and idolatry."

No, the unity of the Church, and membership within it, may in no way be determined by some assessment view of quotas. Not only is that contrary to the decision of Synod, 1939, but it is in no way acceptable by the standards of Scripture and thus of the Creeds.

Preserving this externally-enforced unity of assessments is not a preserving of the unity of the faith, It is, rather, a conscience-binding ploy by which God's people are duped into believing that they should give blindly and let someone else worry about responsible stewardship. Before the face of the Lord we affirm that both the recipient and the giver are to be responsible stewards. It is about time we recognize that.

But what about the fears of many who read this and become uneasy because "it will pull the financial rug out from under our denominational agencies?" My answer is simple. If these agencies demonstrate their wise and proper use of the Lord's money, the Lord will see to it that their needs are met. If they cannot demonstrate that responsible stewardship, they will surely have to do with less, or be forced to act responsibly. If they will do neither, they must close their doors.

But certainly those alternatives are not tragic, as some would have us believe! That kind of demanded responsibility is wholly proper! Agencies and committees and organizations within Christ's Church should be willing, and able, and required to demonstrate responsible stewardship. If they cannot, they will have their "one talent" taken from them and given to him who has ten!

Denominational agencies only need fear a cutback in funds, in other words, if they are abusing their quota-ed privileges now. If so, they deserve a cut-back!

From the above it is clear that the issues involved in the Orange City decision are not limited in their effect to just one congregation or one area of the denomination. Rather, the issues involve the very nature of giving, and most importantly, the very nature of the Church, according to the Word of God and Reformed church polity.

What can and must we do about it? We can and must study the recommended quotas for each of the denominational and classical causes. We can examine their budgets, and write them letters if more information is needed. We must stop believing that Synodically set quota recommendations are non-debatable. We must debate them by all means, remembering that we are responsible for the use of the money which the Lord has entrusted to us. But, someone will quote Church Order Article 29, "that the decisions of the assemblies shall be considered settled and binding," thus stating that the quotas are not debatable. The answer is obvious. Synod recommends quotas. That recommendation is settled and binding. But, they do not levy taxes or assess quotas. They merely recommend them.

If, therefore, it is impossible for you to give, in good conscience, to a certain cause, then do not give to it. Inform your consistory. Write letters to the causes involved, explaining your objections and asking for a response. But do not subsidize any agency or cause which you are convinced is operating in violation of the Word of the Lord, the creeds, or the Church Order.

On the other hand, let this not become an excuse for not giving or for giving less to the cause of the Lord than is proper. Remember His clear teachings about giving: "the measure you will give will be the measure you get back" (Luke 6:38); "Everyone to whom much is given, of him will much be required" (Luke 12:48); (cf. also Psalm 37:21; Proverbs 21:26, 28:22, 25, 27). Rather, let us give wisely, faithfully, generously, but also responsibly, in the way the Lord Himself requires: "Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:7). ●

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reformed women speak

Are You Listening?

LAURIE VANDEN HEUVEL

Recently a missionary said: "Violence against Christians is on the increase in every part of the world, the West included. God is removing His restraints, with the result that political oppression, polarization of peoples and ideas and harsh raw violence are surfacing everywhere, and as it was in the days of the early church, men and women are being persecuted and killed simply because they are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather than being merely a few isolated instances, such things are in-

creasing in number and intensity and will probably be the prevailing condition of the church in many lands within a few years."

Did we only hear what was said, or had we really listened? If we truly had listened our reaction would bring more than just a shrug to our shoulders. A first thought would be something to this effect, are my children being prepared to live in such a world?

We are living in an age when from morning til night we hear music, news, gossip, lectures, today's scheduled events, etc. All this comes by way of radio, television, telephone and face to face conversation. We hear so much, but do we take the time or the trouble to really listen?

Perhaps we should first ask the question: Why should we listen? We counter that question with another, namely, if we do not listen, how can we understand our world, others or even ourselves? People who never listen, never grow. They are stunted, their whole world is no larger than "me myself and I."

Listening is needed for communication. How can you communicate if you don't take the time or effort to listen? For example, when your husband or friend has said to you "yes, I'll be happy to join you in your project," were you also listening enough so that you heard him communicating to you that though he would be happy to be a co-worker, he was also pleading to have you postpone involvement for a little while? Listening is needed to enable us to understand others as well as ourselves.

This leads us to ask: how do we listen? Listening demands our total self, i.e., our attitudes, beliefs, feelings and intuitions. If we think "I know what she's going to say," why listen? When we hear a rebellious young boy speaking of parents always quarreling, can you feel this child's longing for love? For happiness? When we make a statement to the effect that someone has a whole different philosophy of life, can we really listen objectively?

Knowing then that there are these various ways of listening, permit me now to ask you: How do you listen to yourself? Do you hear yourself speaking from the heart, truthfully and sincerely? Did you tell your pastor the sermon was so good, such a blessing, while at the same time knowing you hadn't listened because you kept planning your hours and days of the coming busy week?

Sometimes when we listen to ourselves speak, we hear words spoken for effect rather than content. This can easily be done when in public we are asked to lead in prayer or when we are sitting in a Bible Study group. One day a young lady was giving a devotional talk on the subject of God's love. Again and again she repeated "God is love." Then she went on to say, "I'd sing the character He bears and all the forms of love He wears." She didn't understand what she was saying, nor did her audience, but somehow it sounded so good (in her own ears), so impressive.

Indeed, we must listen to ourselves as well as others. But more importantly we must ask why and

how do we listen to our God, our Covenant God, our Creator and Redeemer? In a sense we give the impression of being so self-sufficient while at the same time when things go wrong, how quickly we panic or get depressed and forget to listen when God says, "Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. For I the Lord your God hold your right hand, it is I who say to you, fear not, I will help you."

Again, when God speaks and asks of us to love Him and only Him, to keep a holy sabbath, to honor parents . . . are we listening?

Unless we learn to listen, we will not realize nor will we develop the virtues of compassion and kindness. I challenge you to take some time each day to listen — listen to God, yourself, fellowmen, and your life will be the richer.

Marriage and MONEY Problems

JOHN H. PIERSMA

(Part II: Marriage in the Scriptural Context)*

Money is a disturbing word, and the Bible knows why. Please note how many "modern problems" come to be exposed in the light of the following:

But godliness with contentment is great gain: for we brought nothing into the world, for neither can we carry anything out; but having food and covering we shall be therewith content. But they that are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil; which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows (I Tim. 6:6-10, ASV).

No wonder that money problems cause such great strain in marriage, especially today! And that is the

*The second in a series, based on material found in the writings of Prof. B. Holwerda, one-time Professor of Old Testament, Kampen, the Netherlands.

case in spite of the fact that our problems are often the reverse of those which were once common. We used to cope with problems caused by too little money. Now it is often the availability of too much that disturbs marital bliss. Perhaps this is worse? I think so.

The reason why it is worse is that it might be harder to know what it means to live Christianly in marriage when money is plentiful than when it is scarce. Living as Christians in marriage means more than spiritual or confessional compatibility (that is to say that both believe and practice the Reformed religion), that you are regular church-goers, that your children are baptized, attend the Christian School, etc. I am in no way minimizing these, of course, but Christian marriage is more (not other) than these.

Among other things, Christian marriage also has to do with *the way* that one seeks to provide for his wife and family. There is only one way, after all, that Mr. and Mrs. Christian may seek to provide for themselves and their children, and that is the way of faith. Which means: only in such ways and by such means as allow you to remain obedient to your God, the God of your baptism. For in that baptism He promised that He "will provide us with every good thing and avert all evil or turn it to our profit." *Every good thing*: that includes our daily bread. *All evil*: that covers every kind of difficulty, even economic problems.

There is a precious and beautiful book in the Bible which requires just a short half-hour to read (and that would give time for a careful reading). I'm referring to the book of Ruth. (At this point please drop everything and read it!)

Now that you have reminded yourself of the content of the Book of Ruth you will understand why I say that it deals with the whole problem of marriage and money. It tells us what happens when people make the wrong kind of decision under the pressure of economic hardship. It reveals to us that we are duty-bound to obey God's law also when we make choices with respect to employment, vocation, etc. In fact, we are so bound to that law that we stand to lose everything if we seek to solve such problems in the way of sin and unbelief.

That message we need to hear if we are to understand marriage in the light of Scripture.

Money in the Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth talks about a family that lived in Bethlehem, the family of Elimelech and Naomi with their sons, Mahlon and Chilion. It tells us of their experiences from the time that they emigrated to Moab, a move made because of the famine that afflicted the land of Judah. In other words, this is a family which knew the dark shadows of economic crisis. Elimelech, however, was one of those people who are minded *to do something* about such a situation. He took steps to provide for his family, and the Book of Ruth describes the consequences of his action.

It is important to understand well the significance of the words which open this Book: "And it came to pass in the days when the judges judged . . ." (1:1a).

You will remember what we said about the suffering of God's people in Egypt when we discussed the marriage of Moses' parents. That was a time of slavery with all the ugliness such a lot involves. But now Israel was in "the Promised Land." Freedom and prosperity, rather than slavery and economic oppression ought, at least, to be the lot of God's people. Their deliverance, like all divine deliverances, was provided by God for a definite purpose, namely, that they "being delivered out of the hand of (their) enemies should serve Him without fear" (Luke 1:74).

It ought to have been a beautiful time for Israel, especially in view of their blessings. That made their responsibility greater, of course. Paul says, "where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly" (Rom. 5:20). The reverse of this is also true: where grace abounds there sin becomes more sinful, more serious. And that is the tragedy of the period of the Judges. The people did not live obediently and thankfully. For example: they made a good start with the eradication of the indigenous, godless peoples. But they soon gave up. Then they started a process of reconciling themselves to these peoples, intermarrying with them, adopting the Canaanitish gods — in short, they established a lifestyle which radically contradicted the will of God.

Famine Was a Revelation of Divine Wrath

It is important to remember that the famine in Israel was not just another natural phenomenon. Nor was it a disaster or catastrophe impossible to understand so far as either its origin or purpose was concerned. It wasn't even something to be accepted as one of those periodic, unavoidable occurrences which can be expected in this life. Fact is, Israel did not have to experience misfortune. There was no need for taking out insurance against crop failure. So long as Israel feared the Lord there would be an uninterrupted flow of abundance in every economic area. The Bible says so,

If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; then I will give your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit (Lev. 26:3,4).

Of course the opposite is also said,

And if ye will not yet for these things hearken unto me . . . I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass; and your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruit (Lev. 26:18a, 19b, 20).

That means that when we read of the famine in the Book of Ruth we can be sure that things were spiritually wrong in Israel. God's people had again corrupted His worship and departed from His ways. And it appears that this was a matter of long standing. Israel had not merely fallen into sin, but had been

living in sin. There was in *all* of Israel no food. Which means that the falling away was not partial but *general*. The wrath of God was afflicting the people with a terrible drought. We must remember this in order to understand what followed.

Elimelech's Way Out

The drought had its sad effect in Bethlehem also. In "the house of bread" there was no bread! Elimelech and Naomi with their sons were desperate. It was time to do something. They decided to move to Moab to find food and say alive. How can we blame Elimelech for his? From the Bible we see that he did it reluctantly, that he didn't like even for a little while to be away from his own country. But he went because he couldn't stand to see his wife growing pale with hunger and his sons hurting for lack of nourishment. Elimelech understood, apparently, what it meant to be a husband and a father.

He didn't intend to stay there permanently, nor to become a citizen of Moab. A Dutch translation of the Book says that he went there with his family to live *as a stranger*. Elimelech did not intend for a moment to turn his back on the land of his fathers. He intended to maintain his own character nationally and religiously. He knew that as an Israelite he would never feel at home in Moab, and he did not plan to gain a name and place there. He was not indifferent nor careless with respect to the truth that Israel was the land of the Promise, the people of the only true God.

There is more that we can say for this immigrant. Later, when Naomi returned to Bethlehem with Ruth we hear the famous words: "Your God shall be my God." That was ten years after leaving home. Ruth's assertion meant, obviously, that Elimelech's family never gave themselves over to the idols of Moab. From this we may conclude, I believe, that Elimelech and his family had never gone along with the general falling away which had provoked the Lord's fierce anger, and which occasioned the famine which brought about their re-location in Moab.

It is hard, humanly speaking, to fault Elimelech. His heart was warm with love for his family, and for his land and people. And for his God. Who likes to bear the consequences for the sins of others? It must have been a painful problem for him that God had not made exceptional provision for the pious, that they had to go hungry with the rest!

Dead End!

And yet we must condemn Elimelech for moving to Moab.

First of all, he disobeyed God's Word, and our attitude toward people and their conduct must be determined by His Word. In Deuteronomy 23:3-8 the Lord gave specific instructions as to Israel's proper dealing with the Edomites, Egyptians and Moabites. The Edomites were not to be "abhorred," even though they had not dealt kindly with the Israelites in the wilderness. Even the Egyptians were not to be permanently excluded because they had allowed Israel

to live in their land. But the Moabites were never to enter the assembly of Jehovah (outside of which there was no salvation!). Elimelech's first error was to forget this divine injunction in favor of food for his family.

Secondly, Elimelech forgot that the question is not, How shall we survive? But, how shall we find God's favor? Moab might have food, but Moab did not have it as a gift from our heavenly Father. Moab's food was at best an evidence of God's longsuffering, of His "common grace" as He postponed the day of reckoning. It is better to be in Israel without food and with the Father, even though He is angry for the while with His children and is chastising them. After all, the chastisements of the Father are good (Heb. 12:6), and are intended to bring us to repentance and blessing. Elimelech preferred the bread of Moab to the pricelessness of God's grace in God's company.

To summarize: Elimelech knew full well that the cause for Israel's plight resided in Israel's sin. He knew as well that the solution to the food problem did not lie in Moab but in conversion and repentance. Even if he had not gone along with the apostasy, he could have called his people back to God and prayed for them. But he ran away. He abandoned his calling. In the last analysis the land of his fathers was not of greatest importance for him. He did not believe the psalmist's testimony, "Thy lovingkindness is better than life" (63:3). He did not really believe what Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

That was his sin. And that became his curse.

Father Elimelech died in Moab. This was unspcakably tragic for his family. He had gone to Moab in order to eat that he might live. Now he ate . . . and died! Because man does not live by the power of bread but by the grace of God. Life is only secure so long as God continues to speak the Word of His grace over us.

A Sad Ending

A second blow was the marriage of the boys with Moabitish girls. I know, it wasn't their intention when they left Israel to get mixed up with these people. But nevertheless they began to mingle with the accursed Moabites. What else could one expect? The drought in Palestine lasted longer than expected, and if they were to wait until it was over they'd be old before they could get started. Besides, those Moabitish girls were so beautiful. . . .

We see here the disturbing consequences of Elimelech's wrong decision. He steered his sons into the arms of those whom God cursed even though he had found the "blessing" of bread for their stomachs.

The curse did not depart from his house: no grandchildren were born. And a few years later the sons also died. The life that was sought here was now cut off. "At least we can find something to eat in Moab," they had said. But they found death instead.

Elimelech went to Moab to keep his family together and his marriage intact. But he went apart from God's grace, and contrary to the will of God. In less

than ten years both family and marriage were bankrupt. We see three widows. No children. Everything was ruined by death. And that in Moab, where life seemed to secure.

Spiritual Decline

That the family of Elimelech had gone into spiritual downfall in Moab is obvious from more than one fact. The mixed marriages of his sons, for example. And the bitter complaint of Naomi, "the hand of Jehovah has gone against me" (1:13).

But the most serious evidence of spiritual decline is to be found in the mentality which was exposed by the advice which Naomi gave to her daughters-in-law. Orpah and Ruth wanted to stay with her, to go to Bethlehem. That was a proper desire for them. They had come into contact through their husbands with Israel and with the Living God. It was a beautiful thing, this desire of these heathen women to belong to the true people of God.

But what did Naomi say? She urged them to go back to their own country and to their own gods (idols). And that because there was little if any chance for them to marry in Israel! Naomi declared, you have no future. There is no hope with Jehovah. I'm sure that she had once spoken to them of Israel's God as the only God. But now she denied Him totally. Could they expect Jehovah to give them new husbands? There was much more in their own country with their own gods!

Adding Things Up

Let's add things up at this point.

When Elimelech went to Moab his was one of the better families in Israel. They had not bowed the knee before Baal. When economic problems plagued them they looked for a solution in the way of unbelief. But even then apparently they wanted to remain faithful to God.

In the end, however, nothing good came out of this family. The marriage of Elimelech and Naomi was wrecked upon the rocks of their materialism. It was their own fault that their sons strayed so that they did not reckon with God's laws in their marriages. It was also Naomi's fault that Orpah perished. And Naomi herself sank deeper into spiritual decay.

All this because their great goal was a prosperous, affluent life for themselves and their children. If only we have enough! "I want my children to have it better than I had it when I was young." Precisely in the way of that kind of materialism and selfishness everything came to a sad ending. It would not be easy to find a more apt illustration of the complete marital misfortune which often comes when we look for a living in ways that are not determined by God's service, God's church, God's Word.

How About Us?

The circumstances under which we live today are, of course, quite different. But the danger that we be thrown off the right course because of money remains as real as ever. There are in our day any number of Christian families who have sacrificed everything for

the realization of those "ideals" which are covered by the sociological term: *upward mobility*. Simply translated that means: Do whatever you have to do to get ahead (financially, socially).

Elimelech and Naomi weren't indifferent to God and His claims. They were pious Israelites. But the first item on their goal list was: Make sure that the future for yourself and (especially) for your children is safe and "good." If this means that one can't take things so seriously and precisely as, say, Reformed Christians ought, well, that's the way it goes. If the children want to marry, and it isn't exactly "in the Lord," who knows, maybe this will be a successful evangelistic project.

One must not ask, however, what kind of spiritual effect such materialism has upon people. Or what is the result in terms of spiritual weakness, bitterness, discontent and even rebellion against the Lord in the day of trouble.

Wouldn't it be better not to marry than to do so under such circumstances? Be careful, says the Bible, that you don't become a curse for yourself and your family by the way in which you strive to attain success in life. Elimelech's way looked reasonable and practical. But it was exactly this "realistic" view of life which brought his family to ruin.

God's Way Out

It is interesting and comforting to notice that there are four chapters in the Book of Ruth of which three are devoted to an elaborate explanation of how God brought about the salvation of Ruth, and through her of Naomi. Unbelief always ends in disaster, but God's irresistible, sovereign grace ends in redemption and glory! In fact, it is often just at the moment when all things look as hopeless as Naomi described them that the Lord enters to demonstrate the glory of His mercy and grace. Doesn't this illustrate again that just because it *appears* as if there is *no way out* of our difficulties it isn't necessarily true that there isn't? One more thing before we go further: All of this is part of the living Word of God. That means that the Book of Ruth is not merely an account of something which once happened, way back there, but is a real promise to the faithful always, even today.

This was mightily demonstrated by Ruth's refusal to return to Moab. Surely this was not to be credited to Naomi or anyone else but God that she so stubbornly chose for Israel! If Ruth had based her decision on the existing practices and ideas of so-called believers, the "people of God," she would have concluded that the Kingdom of Israel wasn't worth anyone's trouble.

Ruth refused to make the mistake which many make, namely, to judge God by His people. Nor did she evaluate His grace in Christ according to the faith and testimony of people who call themselves Christians. Ruth saw clearly that the people of Israel's God were not better than other people. But the God of that people stood infinitely above the gods of other peoples. For that reason she resisted Naomi and insisted that she be reckoned with the members of "the

Church." Even though that people no longer believed that they had a solid future, she saw that only life under the grace of Israel's God was bright with future blessings.

Ruth's good choice meant that God's grace would still exist in Elimelech's inheritance. Naomi's latter days would be neither lonely nor dark.

Food for the Poor

God's measureless possibilities come only in the way which He provides, however. An important step in the way back to His favor for Naomi and Ruth was Ruth's simple readiness to use God's provisions for the poor and the stranger in Israel. Times were better, there. There was a harvest in the fields. But that didn't help Naomi: her land had gone over to others. But there was always food for the hungry among God's people, and the laws of God which governed His people made provision for the poor to glean in the fields of the wealthy.

Ruth did not feel that this was beneath her dignity. She went to the fields, and worked as one of the poor. Now that which is often typical for God's people happened. They, having returned to God's way in humility and fear, found that things began to look up!

Ruth's Second Marriage

With respect to marriage, Ruth's conduct was no less obedient. She submitted herself to the law of God for marriage, the law of the God for Whom she has chosen. She did not seek a man of her own choosing, but submitted herself to the law of levirate marriage which bound her to the nearest blood relative of her deceased husband. In this way of obedience her future became everlasting secure. Boaz was willing to marry her if the other and nearer relative was unwilling or unable. And so it came to pass that Boaz married Ruth and that all the family possessions were restored to Elimelech's widow and lineage.

A Good Future!

In course of time a baby was born. This son, according to the law for levirate marriage, was the legal heir of Ruth's first husband. The generations of Elimelech were restored, even though everything seemed to have disappeared in the cold precincts of death. By the grace of God Elimelech's family was forever "saved" in the Messianic line (Matt. 1:5).

See the contrast: the wages of sin are death, but the grace of God is life eternal. There is both food and life in Israel, not in Moab, even though it comes in the way of special mercy for the poor. Such food does not dishonor so long as it is received in the spirit of true humility and obedience. In Israel is marital restoration and family preservation, in contrast with the sin which destroys these. That is to be found, however, *only in Israel*, among the people of God — we would say today, in the true Church of Christ! — thanks to the law of God, the law which may ask for self-denial and even for the setting aside of one's personal aspirations, but which nevertheless redeems and blesses wherever it is honored.

The Gospel for Marriage in Ruth

Our circumstances today are, as we have said, altogether different in practically every respect. We don't even know how to think about such customs as levirate marriage, for example.

And yet there is Gospel in the Book of Ruth. And this is its happy message: all who believe, and who live out of and according to true faith, especially in marriage and the pursuit of the wherewithal to provide for a family, may always be sure that theirs is a good future.

It may happen that such a believer must make use of the New Testament law for the poor and its provision as provided in that other office which was begun by the apostles (and which may never be separated from the apostles in authority or dignity!), namely, the diaconate, but that is not humiliating. It is the mercy of God which has opened this way to His people. The same mercy from which all believers, rich or poor, live.

Maybe you will have to forego certain personal desires or aspirations (read Ruth 3:10), but he who obediently walks in the way which the Lord has prescribed finds the road ahead marked and smoothed out by God. And the outcome always surpasses our highest aspirations!

A Biblical Outlook

The conclusion of the matter is that if you seek the Kingdom of God first you will be doing yourself, your wife and your family a great favor — even if it does not look that way at the moment. The Bible is still true when it says, "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in Jehovah, lovingkindness shall compass him about" (Ps. 32:10).

In all of this the Bible is honest. It never claims that the pathway of this life will be easy, or that marital or family life will always be sunny and happy. But it does say that this great principle, so often repeated in God's Word, also holds for marriage and family: "the righteous shall live by faith."

"By faith" — that is the demand of God for marriage.

But in that way, in spite of anything, we shall *live!*

With that promise you can always move ahead: for that faith never fails to offer a sure and glorious perspective of that Day when "the new Jerusalem" shall come down out of heaven from God, "made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21).

CORRECTION:

A correspondent has called to our attention two errors which appeared in the July reprint of the interview with Dr. C. Van Til (p. 16): The name of Dr. James O. Buswell was misspelled and in the merger negotiations between the OPC and RPCES it was the RPCES assembly, not that of the OPC which failed to approve the merger.

EDITOR

LESSONS FROM I PETER



REV. HENRY VANDER KAM

Lessons 3 and 4 on I Peter by Rev. Henry Vander Kam, pastor of the Christian Reformed Church, Lake Worth, Florida, are in this issue.

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LESSON 3

I Peter 1:10-12

The basis for hope

The writer has spoken of the hope of the believers to whom he is writing despite the fact that they are now suffering various hardships. They must be able to look beyond the immediate present and look to the salvation they have received as the product of their faith.

They must now also see the marvel of that salvation. The salvation of God's people is the most wonderful thing which has ever been made known. It is so simple, yet no man can fathom it. It is indeed the product of their faith, but it is the gift of God. It is that which has been experienced by believers since the earliest time, but it is more clearly revealed now than ever before.

The work of the prophets — To give them a clear view of the great benefits they have received in the full salvation made known to them, he makes reference to the work of the prophets during the Old Testament times. These prophets were called to declare the Word of God to the people of their day. They did this in the full consciousness that they were not writing their own words and thoughts but were used by the Spirit of God to write His Word and His only. They warned the people of their day concerning sin. They instructed the people. They held before the people a blessed future in communion with their God.

But, there was more. They also prophesied of the grace which was to be revealed to the readers of this epistle. The prophetic message was not limited to the day in which they lived. They were speaking the Word of God and that Word contained much which the prophets themselves did not understand! They realized this. As a result, they "sought and searched diligently" to try to come to the proper understanding of their own words! They realized that the words spoken to the people of their own day was far richer than they were able to grasp. They were speaking of a grace whose content they could not imagine. A salvation was prophesied which they could not understand. Let the readers realize that they are blest far above even the prophets of the Old Testament times.

The inspired Word — These verses bring important truths to light in regard to the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures. The writers were indeed used as they were, but they did not have the mastery over the words and thoughts. They were instruments used by the Spirit of God to cause His revelation to go forth. The words of the prophets were meaningful to the people of their day but the words contained much more than either speaker or hearer could understand. When we speak of the nature and extent of Biblical authority we must never neglect these verses.

The prophets were aware of the fact that they were speaking the Word of God and they were also aware of the fact that the Spirit was going far beyond both them and their hearers. Yet, they saw enough of the revelation of future salvation to make them inquisitive. They "searched diligently" the revelation God had given them to see whether or not they might be able to understand it more fully. The grace which was to be given in later time was so attractive that they pored over their own words! These prophets had the hope of salvation. They had tasted of the grace of God. But, the grace of salvation to be given to future generations was so glorious that they wanted to see more of it.

The sufferings of Christ — They began to wonder about the One who was going to come and the time of His coming. Israel may be faithful in bringing sacrifices but, surely, the blood of bulls and goats will not redeem men. Israel may have the types — but these cry out for the antitype! Isaiah had written that magnificent 53rd chapter of his prophecy, but what did it mean? David pours out his heart in

Psalm 22, but what does it really mean to be forsaken of God? In these passages, and various others, the Spirit of Christ which was in them spoke of the coming sufferings of the Christ. These sufferings of Christ will be the basis for the salvation which is to be revealed. They would, no doubt, compare the words they had spoken with the other Scriptures. What kind of a picture emerged? One that was cloudy and yet gave promise of real riches. The glories following upon the sufferings of Christ were unspeakable.

So the prophets of the Old Testament had to wrestle with the Word which the Spirit had spoken through them. They knew that salvation would come (they were the recipients of that salvation themselves) but they did not know **how** it would come. Salvation does not come by logical development. They could not simply use the revelation they had and project it into the future to come to clarity on the nature of that salvation. No, salvation always remains a miracle. It, therefore, had to be wrought by God and He has to reveal it. It is His salvation from beginning to end.

A progressive revelation — The prophets were sent to Israel in order to instruct the people and to lead them ever closer to their God. Israel was always in danger of externalizing their religion. They had to bring sacrifices at scheduled times. The danger always existed that they would bring these sacrifices and accomplish the other demands of the law without the necessary spiritual attitude. The prophets then came to show the people that their hearts must first be right with God. The revelation progressed. More and more insight was given into the nature of the salvation which God would give to His people. But, the people who received the words of the prophets would not live long enough to see the fulfillment of all these promises.

The prophets were not only speaking to themselves and the people of their day, but they were ministering to **you!** Although they lived so many years before the first coming of Christ they were already ministering to the church of the New Testament. God was far ahead of the times — as He always is. The revelation given through the prophets was to be used by the believers in the new dispensation to come to a fuller understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. No wonder the prophets were not able to understand all that the Spirit revealed through them! They were also aware of the fact that the Spirit was using them for purposes far beyond their own time. This caused them to search diligently the words of the Spirit so that, if it were possible, they might see something of the glory of the day of Christ.

The preaching of the Apostles — The readers of this epistle have now received the “announcement” of the things which the prophets were not able to comprehend. This “announcement” has been made by those who have preached the gospel to them by the Holy Spirit. The things of which the prophets have spoken have now been revealed through the coming of Jesus Christ into this world. The “mysteries” have now been made known. The historic events in the

life and death of Christ give the full and true meaning to the words of the prophets. The prophetic word now comes alive because it is fulfilled! The simple Christian of the New Testament day has a far better understanding of the way of salvation than the “giants” of the Old Testament. Christ said that Abraham had wished to see His day — so did the prophets — and the readers have seen it!

Those who have preached the gospel to them are the Apostles and those whom the Apostles had chosen to preach. These are now placed on the same plane with the prophets of the Old Testament. The Apostles are now doing the work of this day as the prophets did it in theirs and the Apostolic message is the further development of the revelation God has given His people. They are also speaking through the Holy Spirit. This Spirit has been sent from heaven after Jesus ascended. He was the Author of the Old Testament Scriptures and He is the Author of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no distinction made between the Old and New Testament Scriptures concerning authenticity. It is the one Word of God. The one is “prophetic” the other is “announcement.” The whole Word is needed to receive the proper view of salvation.

Their salvation known to readers — Not only were the prophets unable to understand all that the Spirit was revealing through them, even the angels desire to look into it to be able to understand the things which God has made known. The Apostle is emphasizing the favorable situation in which the readers find themselves regarding the salvation they have received. It certainly was significant that even the great prophets did not share in the complete understanding of salvation. Now he goes still farther. Even angels stand amazed!

Angels, who live in the perfect state, who do the bidding of their God daily, are not able to comprehend what God has now revealed to His people. The angels do not share in salvation because they do not need it. They do know the holiness of God and are also fully aware of the fact that man has sinned. How can the sinner again have communion with a holy God? **That** angels desire to look into. Salvation is a miracle! All man’s sacrifices would not avail. God sends His “Lamb.” Angels are called to strengthen Him! What is being accomplished? Angels desire to look into it because nothing like it has ever happened.

The readers of this epistle have tasted of this salvation. They are privileged above the prophets. As “children” of God they **know** that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The angels as “servants” are not able to understand God’s dealings with His people.

It is true that they are suffering at the present time and are even suffering for the sake of their faith. However, they must not lose sight of the great benefits they have received. Their salvation must not “be taken for granted.” To paraphrase: The suffering of the present cannot be compared to the salvation which has been made known to them. They are in

danger of losing their proper perspective. Peter calls them to consider their true blessedness in the midst of trial.

Questions for discussion:

1. What was the essential task of the prophet?
2. Were there "two meanings" in many of the words of the prophets? Explain.
3. May we interpret the prophets exclusively in relation to Christ or must we also take the time of their prophecy into consideration?
4. What is inspiration? Why do the writers use different styles? Is every word inspired or only the thought?
5. Some say we are through with the Old Testament. Who profits more by the Old Testament — the believers of that time or the believers today?
6. Do angels understand our salvation? Explain.

LESSON 4

I Peter 1:13-21

Called to godly life

In the previous verses the author spoke to the people concerning the glorious salvation which had been revealed and of which they are the heirs. A solid basis has been laid for their faith.

Salvation to dominate all of life — That basis was necessary and it now calls them to build upon this foundation. Doctrine or faith is always the groundwork for the practical life. They must, therefore, says the Apostle, set their hope perfectly on the grace that is brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ. All of their life and every part of life must be directed toward that grace. They must always keep it clearly in sight. As every part of life is so directed, they will influence all of life by it.

Surely, these people knew of that grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Yet, they did not always keep it clearly in mind. They were easily led astray by the stubborn present! So many difficulties faced them in life. They must therefore set their hope **perfectly** on that grace which is to be brought to them at the revelation of Christ. They may not allow other things to obscure their vision. The salvation which they have received must dominate their whole life.

Priorities to be right — To do this, Peter counsels them to "gird up the loins of your mind." He refers to the loose, flowing robes in which the people were dressed. These must be tied up in order to walk and to work. Now, gird up the *loins of your mind*, i.e., take hold of yourself! Prepare for activity. Prepare for battle. Do not let your minds be unprepared thereby allowing all kinds of thoughts and ideas to influence them. No, the mind, together with all the other faculties of the soul, must be directed to the grace of God which has been revealed to you!

Do not allow any part of your life to stray from the goal set before you. They must be sober, i.e.,

seek their own highest welfare. They must have their priorities straight. They must be converted from a partial view of the grace set before them to a complete embrace of the grace of God which will color all of life.

Be obedient — They are called to be obedient. The gospel calls to obedience just as well as the law. But, His commands are not grievous because theirs is to be the obedience of children and not of slaves. It is an obedience which is brought out of love for the One Whom they serve. It is obedience to the Word which has been revealed to them. Their lives are to be regulated according to that Word.

There had been a time in their lives when they were ignorant of the Word of God. At that time they lived according to their lusts. Now that they have received the knowledge of the Word of their God and have tasted of the salvation which is in Christ, they can no longer live according to their former manner of life. The knowledge of the Word and the profession of faith in Christ produces a life which differs radically from the life of those who are ignorant of these things.

Be holy — God is the One who has called them. He chose them. He called them out of the darkness in which they formerly lived to the light which is risen in Christ Jesus. He is the Holy One. He is completely separated from sin and from darkness. They know that He is holy. If they are now to be well-pleasing to Him Who is holy, they must also be holy "in all manner of living." Not only must their faith be shown by the profession of the lips, their lives too must reveal their relationship to Him. He demands everything! Less than everything would be a denial of His complete renewal of the believer. Their holiness will not mean that they have attained to perfection, but it will reveal that they hate sin and can no longer live in it. It will reveal that they are completely devoted to God and to His service.

To strengthen his argument, the Apostle now quotes Leviticus 19:2. There God reminded the Israelites of His holiness. He is completely separated from all evil. Even though the people must cry out: "Woe is me," when they are confronted by the holiness of God, they are warned that they must be holy because He is. He does not only choose a people for Himself, He desires His holiness to be reflected in a holy people. The people of God must pattern their lives according to His revelation of Himself in His Word. Their manner of life is very important as a revelation of their faith. If they are not holy in their manner of life they will not be able to have communion with the God Who is holy. Thus, again, they are to keep the mind's eye fixed completely on the grace which is revealed in Jesus Christ.

Pass the time in fear — They call on Him as Father, and so they have been taught. However, they must realize that that is no guarantee of salvation in itself. Not everyone who calls Him "Lord" will inherit eternal life and not everyone who calls Him "Father"

is His child. No, He will judge everyone's life without respect of persons. The fact that they are Abraham's children or that they know the proper terminology is going to be of no help. They are to have a living faith which binds them to Christ of God and they are to live lives which correspond to that faith.

Therefore they are to pass the time of their sojourning, exiles, strangers in fear. They are to listen carefully to the Word of God and they are to live carefully in this world. The importance of their walk of life is clearly set forth.

As those redeemed by Christ's blood — Now the Apostle uses a different argument to show them the need for a God-glorifying life. The readers of this epistle have been redeemed and they, to an extent, glory in this redemption. How was this redemption brought about? You have not been redeemed (purchased) with the price of the most costly metals which this earth has, such as gold or silver. These, though valuable, are corruptible — they are subject to loss and decay. It was a redemption from a vain manner of life which you had received from your fathers. A manner of life cannot be purchased with material things. No matter how much gold or silver were used they simply do not fit the need. They must be reminded of this. The redemption to another manner of life cannot be affected by the coin of the material world!

No, their redemption was purchased by the price of precious blood! To compare this price in any way with silver or gold is out of the question. This blood is not only more precious it is totally different. It is the blood of the perfect lamb as the law also demanded. It was the blood of Jesus Christ! God Himself indeed provided the lamb. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." God did not withhold His only-begotten Son! That was the price paid for their redemption! Silver or gold or all the riches of the world could not do it but the blood of the Lamb accomplished it. If so great a price has been paid for their redemption it certainly is not too much to ask that they set their hope perfectly on the grace which has been revealed to them and that they live a life of holiness before Him! Anything less would dishonor the God who called them and the Christ Who gave Himself for them.

This Lamb and what He would accomplish, was foreknown of God before the foundation of the world. God, of course, knows the end from the beginning, but He also **intended** Him to be the Lamb before the world was. The redemption of God's people had been on God's agenda even before men needed it! Therefore the whole revelation, Old Testament as well as New, speaks of the coming of the Son of God. The redemption of God's people was long promised and long planned. Now the fulness of that redemption has been revealed. Jesus Christ has come. The whole revelation and the ceremonies of Old Testament times pointed to Him. Now they see this salvation realized. How great is the blessing given them so that they

can now see what prophets and angels were not able to comprehend. They are living in the end of the times, i.e., the last time — the time after the last event in the history of their redemption has been completed. All the other times were preparatory for their salvation.

As believers — Through the Lamb that was slain they are believers in God. He has opened the way of communion with God. He has revealed God. That faith and confidence in God was not wrought by themselves, it was the gift given to them. Now their faith and hope are in God. They realize this, of course. They are believers and are clearly distinguished from their unbelieving neighbors. However, they had been blinded to the nature of their faith and hope by the difficulties experienced in their every-day lives. The Apostle simply reminds them of their riches. Being reminded of their riches they will also recognize their responsibilities.

In speaking of the Lamb which was slain for them to give them redemption, Peter does not only speak of the price which was paid by His death. We can glory in the cross only if we know what follows. Therefore the Apostle stresses the fact that the same One Who gave His life for them had also been raised to life again. The One Who humbled Himself to death was also given the highest glory. This makes it clear that He had earned it — that God had accepted the payment He made. Now all their faith and hope can be in God. They have been reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Seeing that the Christ has obtained glory, their hope in Him will never be put to shame. Their hope surely cannot be in the present life and in this world in the light of all he has told them.

No doubt, these people are going through trying times. They have suffered for the sake of Christ. They are pilgrims and strangers here on earth and they feel it. But, isn't their faith worth it? In the midst of a hopeless world they have a hope which is rooted and grounded in God the Maker of heaven and earth! They will experience that nothing shall separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Questions for discussion:

1. Do we have "to take ourselves in hand" sometimes? If we do not have assurance of faith can we do anything about it? Explain.
2. What do we emphasize most, proper belief or a godly life? Which is the more important, or can't we separate them?
3. What does it mean to be holy? Do we stress it enough?
4. What does it mean to "pass the time of your sojourning in fear"? Are we not to rejoice?
5. Are we living in the end-time? Does this mean that the return of Christ is close at hand?
6. How is our walk of life determined by our beliefs? Does the Calvinist lead a different life than the Arminian?

difficult decisions

PETER DE JONG

Current developments in the Christian Reformed Churches are rapidly driving those of us who are members of it toward having to make some difficult decisions. In last month's *OUTLOOK* Rev. Henry Van den Heuvel reported at length especially on the way in which the June Synod handled the matter of women's eligibility for church offices. From that account the reader may learn how the Synod majority ignored the plain teachings of the Scripture about who may hold governing offices in the church (I Tim. 2, 3; I Cor. 14:32-38) and its Confession of Faith (Article XXX on "The Government of the Church and its Offices") and proceeded to change the Church Order in defiance of Article 47 of that Church Order which states, "No substantial alterations shall be effected by Synod in these matters unless the churches have had prior opportunity to consider the advisability of the proposed changes."

Recent *Banner* editorials have also called attention to such irregularities in the Synod actions. When the Synod disregards the Bible, the Creeds and the Church Order, we must realize that it is destroying the bonds which tie us together as a denomination. According to that Church Order which binds our churches (and their consistories who alone have "original authority," Article 35) together, "The decisions of the assemblies shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the *Church Order*" (Article 29). When assemblies ignore that condition and their decisions violate the Word of God and the Church Order they forfeit the right to "bind" any Reformed church or Christian. Such decisions compel us who are conscience-bound before God to maintain the biblical faith and life to consider more immediately than we ever have before what course we have to choose.

Must we (1) for the present remain in the denomination to fight more uncompromisingly and militantly for the Reformed faith and against anti-biblical and anti-Reformed decisions and policies we see coming out of our Synod and church institutions? Must we (2) leave our denomination to seek fellowship with some other denomination or denominations which are trying to maintain and promote the Reformed faith and life? Or must we (3) move toward a secession and union of Christian Reformed churches who are determined, by the grace of God, to maintain the historic Reformed faith and practice?

As we are being driven, as other Christians have been, to decide between such courses, let us unitedly, prayerfully and studiously seek the guidance of the Lord's Word and Spirit to make the proper decisions.

four presbyterian assemblies at calvin

PETER DE JONG

A Unique Event

One wonders whether it has ever happened before that five denominations held meetings of their major assemblies at the same time and place. This occurred in mid-June when the assemblies of the member denominations of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) all met in Grand Rapids, Mich., on the campus of Calvin College.

While the Christian Reformed Synod, representing some 167,000 communicant members, met as usual in the Fine Arts Auditorium, the assembly of the fast-growing five-year old Presbyterian Church in America representing some 62,000 communicant members, but much the largest body because representation was directly from churches, was meeting in the Fieldhouse. The Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, representing some 19,000 communicant members, was holding its meeting in the Gezon Auditorium while the Orthodox Presbyterian, representing 10,000 communicants were meeting in the Seminary Auditorium, and the oldest and smallest denomination, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (Covenanters), representing a little over 5,000 communicant and baptized members, were in the Seminary Chapel. Accommodating some 1200 visitors in such a variety of meetings required a considerable amount of organization and high praise was expressed for the way it was done.

Although there was considerable intermingling of delegates there was only one large general meeting with a cappella psalm singing (evidently partly in deference to the Covenanters' conviction and practice) and Dr. Joel Nederhood as speaker. Much of the time delegates were kept busy as each of the assemblies followed its own full schedule so that there was much less united activity than one might have expected or than many might have desired. Even trying to keep up with what was happening in five simultaneous assemblies proved to be virtually impossible.

Significant Decisions

One result of the Grand Rapids meetings will be further consultations between three of the Presbyterian bodies as the Presbyterian Church in America, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church each decided to engage in discussions about their relations to one another. The RPCES and OPC have been engaged in such discussions for some years and in 1975 a merger proposal was approved by the OPC but not by the RPES. Now there will be three-way talks but the decision does not, according to a *Presbyterian Journal* report, imply a commitment to merge. In the PCA assembly the motion passed over substantial opposition. The three denominations will also establish a joint commission on chaplains and military personnel.

While the Christian Reformed Church's Synod at its June session opened the office of deacon to women, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod for the third time in three years rejected such a proposal, deciding to add to its Form of Government the statement, "Only men may be ordained to the office of deacon." That statement will now have to be approved by two-thirds of the presbyteries to become valid. Dealing also with this subject, the OPC decided to call for a joint study of the ordination of women deacons by all five denominations who are members of the Council.

The Orthodox Presbyterians also reaffirmed their membership in the Reformed Evangelical Synod. The Presbyterian Church in America expressed unconditional opposition to abortion and urged its members to work for right-to-life legislation. It voted to go into partnership with the RPES in operating Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, Tennessee. The PCA also approved the position regarding office in the church that "the Scriptures teach that there are but two ordinary and perpetual classes of office in the Church, elder and deacon; and there are within the class of elder two orders, teaching elder and ruling elder." It added also a recognition of the fundamental "office of all believers." A major part of the work of the RPCNA (Covenanters) was a decision to remove from the requirements for ordination a question demanding belief that public covenanting is an ordinance of God to be observed by churches and nations." Such "covenanting" is a Scotch tradition going back to 1643 and involves a formal confession of sin and promise to strictly observe God's law on the part of both church and government.

Ecumenical Effects?

What the effect of these simultaneous meetings of five denominations will be no one can predict. They may well have given some additional impetus to moving those who want to be Bible-believing, therefore Reformed Christians closer together. One can see some indication of that even in decisions that have been mentioned. It was a refreshing experience to meet many from a variety of churches whose Christian

convictions are the same as our own. Whether these historic meetings will draw the Christian Reformed churches, the host denomination, closer to these conservative Presbyterians appears to be questionable.

A Bible-believing Reformed Christian would often feel more at home in one or other of the Presbyterian meetings than in the CRC Synod and important CRC decisions such as those on women in office and the way they were made would hardly inspire the visitors' confidence or invite closer fellowship. The CRC and the others seem to be moving in opposite directions. ●

J. I. PACKER on the old and new gospel

PETER DE JONG

Today there is widespread interest in evangelism. That concern often seems to be directed more toward getting practical results than toward bringing the gospel message by the methods the gospel itself demands. When in this situation some are attacking the Reformed doctrines of the Sovereignty of God as hindrances to evangelism and many more are ignoring those doctrines, these observations made by Dr. James I. Packer may be especially helpful to set matters straight. They appeared 19 years ago in his introductory essay of the *Banner of Truth* reprint of the 200-year old book of John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*.

Dr. Packer wrote, "There are signs today of a new upsurge of interest in the theology of the Bible: a new readiness to test traditions, to search the Scriptures and to think through the faith." Packer felt that in this situation Owen's old book (on the extent of the atonement) might be helpful "in one of the most urgent tasks facing Evangelical Christendom today — the recovery of the gospel."

"There is no doubt that Evangelicalism today is in a state of perplexity and unsettlement. In . . . the practice of evangelism, the teaching of holiness, the building up of the local church life, the pastor's dealing with souls and the exercise of discipline, there is evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with things as they are and of equally widespread uncertainty as to the road ahead." "If we go to the root of the matter, we shall find that these perplexities are all ultimately due to our having lost our grip on the biblical gospel. Without realizing it, we have during

the past century bartered that gospel for a substitute product which, though it looks similar enough in points of detail, is as a whole a decidedly different thing. Hence our troubles; for the substitute product does not answer the ends for which the authentic gospel has in past days proved so mighty. The new gospel conspicuously fails to produce deep reverence, deep repentance, deep humility, a spirit of worship, a concern for the church. Why? . . . The reason lies in its own character and content. It fails to make men God-centered in their thoughts and God-fearing in their hearts because this is not primarily what it is trying to do. . . . It is too exclusively concerned to be 'helpful' to man — to bring peace, comfort, happiness, satisfaction — and too little concerned to glorify God. The old gospel was 'helpful' too — more so, indeed, than is the new — but . . . incidentally, for its first concern was always to give glory to God. It was always and essentially a proclamation of Divine sovereignty in mercy and judgment, a summons to bow down and worship the mighty Lord on whom man depends for all good, both in nature and in grace. Its center of reference was unambiguously God. But in the new gospel the center of reference is man." "Whereas the chief aim of the old was to teach men to worship God, the concern of the new seems limited to making them feel better. The subject of the old gospel was God and His ways with men; the subject of the new is man and the help God gives him. There is a world of difference. The whole perspective and emphasis of gospel preaching has changed . . . for the new gospel has . . . reformulated the biblical message in the supposed interests of 'helpfulness.' Accordingly . . . man's natural inability to believe . . . God's free election . . . and Christ dying specifically for His sheep are not preached. These doctrines, it would be said, are not 'helpful. . . ."

" . . . Part of the biblical gospel is now preached as if it were the whole of that gospel; and a half-truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth." "It needs to be said with emphasis that this set of twisted half-truths is something other than the biblical gospel." "To recover the old, authentic gospel, and bring our preaching and practice back into line with it, is perhaps our most pressing present need."

There is much more in this introductory essay of Packer as he deals with the "five points of Calvinism," the occasion for their formulation, their relation to the whole of Biblical teachings, and their implications and application in evangelistic activity that will prove very rewarding to the reader who will study his splendid 25-page essay. The churches' renewed faith and practice of this biblical gospel could be the means of bringing Reformation. That is the way the Lord has given it in the past.

Note: Although the Owen book is out of print the introductory essay by Packer is now printed separately and is available for 60¢ — a bargain — its title: *The Introductory Essay to John Owen's The Death of Death in the Death of Christ.* ●

Meditation

O YE OF LITTLE FAITH



REV. JOHN BLANKESPOOR

And he said unto them, Why are ye of little faith?
Matt. 8:26a

Storms, upheavals, catastrophes, adverse conditions, sicknesses and troubles are common in life. The result is another list of words and experiences: unrest, fear, turmoil, perplexity, suspense and anxiety, and many more.

Above them all the Christian can hear, if he listens very carefully words that are resounding throughout the world and the ages: "O ye of little faith, why are you so fearful?"

The Lord teaches the disciples and us "simple" lessons. He teaches by Word and example. Here we have a lesson "by example." In God's providence a storm arises on the Sea of Galilee. It must be an unusual storm on this comparatively little body of water, where storms can even normally become very severe. But this one is something special even for these veteran fisherman. How helpless they are! Finally there is nothing more they can do. And that's exactly where the Lord often wants His people to be.

What a "plain lesson" we have here, as a "picture" of the life of His saints. This storm, no doubt, symbolizes the storms which are always raging in this world against the church and God's people, both physically and spiritually. Sometimes we call them adversities. How severe they can be. With some people they last a life time.

But Jesus is asleep!

How impressive this is for us as we look at it from the outside. But it is still more so for those who are in the storms, or in the boats on the sea of life. How significant it is that Jesus is sound asleep. There is the howling wind in the darkness of the night, the terrible roar of the waves. But He is asleep. Likely the disciples can hardly hear each other talk above

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the noise of the sea, but He keeps on sleeping. The frail boat creaks and cracks as the waves dash against it, with the disciples holding on. And with the Lord likely not even a stir in His sound sleep.

No doubt He is tired. But there is much more here. He teaches important lessons even when sleeping. Here is perfect confidence. He knows His Father will care for them. This the disciples and we with them must learn.

They awaken Him. They're drowning. They even rebuke Him. Doesn't He care that they all are going to drown and perish? Isn't He concerned?!

Which tried Christian doesn't often feel that way? Is this the way of the Lord? Doesn't God answer prayers when they arise out of anxious hearts and troubled souls? Does God really answer prayers? Doesn't it often seem to us that the Lord is unconcerned about our problems and storms?! We struggle, we pray, we cry, with anxious and troubled hearts.

* * * * *

"O ye of little faith!" the Lord says to them. There are also other answers in the Bible. But here the Spirit speaks of our little faith. Jesus is not first of all interested or concerned about the storm, but about their souls and weakness of faith. Later He will still the storm. Speaking according to His human nature, the Lord is amazed at the smallness of their faith. Luke records it in another way, "Where is your faith?" The implication is that they reveal very little or no faith at all.

Try once again to imagine what this means for the disciples, how real this all is to them. The boat is already filled with water; they are actually sinking in the midst of these roaring waves. And it is so dark. And then to be rebuked because of their little faith? How can the Lord say such a thing? But the fact of the matter is that He does. And not only to them, but also to us. Who isn't afraid at times, or even often. Who isn't afraid when great adversities overwhelm us, when clouds of war threaten, or when the church apostasizes, when materialism and secularism seem to envelope the church and our country? Isn't fear a part of our lives, accompanied with unrest and anxiety? Is it wrong to be afraid? Of course not, but it is wrong to have little faith. We can easily sing, "Just the time I need Him He is always near." Surely all Christians confess that our great incomprehensible and merciful God controls all things in His love and wisdom for our good. But isn't it true that our faith is often, even most of the time weak? We also know that faith is a gift of God, but isn't it often weak at the same time?

No doubt the Lord would rebuke us, too, today, because of our weak faith.

* * * * *

The failure of the disciples is that they see only the storm, not the Lord with them in the storm. And that is a serious mistake and failure. For us the danger and reality usually is that we see the clouds and the storms, but fail to remember the great promises of the Word. Here the Lord admonishes us not to be controlled by the situations and circumstances. And also not to live first of all by feelings.

We have so much more than the disciples. We have the knowledge of the great experience they later have. After Jesus has "preached" this powerful, short "sermon" He gives them another one. By His word this wild sea is instantly quiet. We can hardly imagine such a miraculous change! Who wouldn't marvel at such power? Today we know that this Lord is with us with the same power and love. We are assured that all authority is given unto Him in heaven and earth, that nothing happens by chance but that all things work together for the believer's good. In the complete Word we have literally hundreds of promises. And the Lord says to us, "stand on those promises, and live by that faith." The Holy Spirit gives faith, but always through the use of the Word and prayer. What we need is more diligent, daily use of the Word. For this there has to be more persistent discipline of self with prayer that we may trust more in His faithfulness, love and promises. Turn to the Bible more when you are afraid and worried. Does this sound too simple? Or unreal? It's the Word of God that gives us this Divine prescription. And therefore it is true and will always remain true.

* * * * *

What we fail to see is that these difficulties are often brought upon us *because* of our weak faith and that *through* these ways of adversity God wants that weak faith to be strengthened and take deeper root. The Bible calls these trials of faith. Trials, the Lord says, are good for His children. They are a part of our discipline in this life. Scripture is full of references to trials. Look, for example, at the well known eleventh chapter of Hebrews. There we find that long list of heroes of faith. But don't fail to see that all these people first faced storms in life and endured great trials. Read the biographies of the great saints that lived on this earth and you will find that they experienced great difficulties and often faced insurmountable problems. These were their trials. Why the Lord brings more trials upon some people than others, He only knows. But be comforted with the assurance that behind them is the great master plan of our loving Father. . . . Let these truths sink deeply into your souls. In and through them all the Lord says, never forget that I am your Shepherd. And that the clouds which we so often dread are filled with mercy and love. Be strong therefore in the faith, trust and . . . wait. And never forget that the boat will *never* sink with the Lord in it. He will always be with His people. ●

FRANCIS SCHAEFFER'S MINISTRY

JOHN D. TANGELDER

Editor's Note: Francis Schaeffer has come to hold a very influential position among evangelical Christians throughout the world especially as a result of his evangelistic work from his base in the village of L'Abri in Switzerland. His books and more recently his films have gotten wide attention. In February, 1978, *THE OUTLOOK* reprinted his famous "Watershed" speech on the inerrancy of the Bible and in March, 1978, placed an article on his work by John Byker who had spent some time at L'Abri. In May and June, 1977, *The Reformed Journal* ran two articles by Jack Rogers under the title "Francis Schaeffer: the Promise and the Problem." Professor Rogers of Fuller Theological Seminary, received his doctorate from the Free University of Amsterdam, translated the book of Dr. G. C. Berkouwer on *Holy Scripture* with its weakening views on the Bible's infallibility, and has become prominent in the efforts at Fuller Seminary to defend its compromise of the Bible's inerrancy against the charges of Harold Lindsell who exposed that compromise. In the *Reformed Journal* articles Rogers, although speaking appreciatively of Schaeffer's influence as an evangelist, was highly critical of his whole line of thought, dismissing it as an unscholarly and dated carry-over of the old Princeton theology of Hodge, Warfield and Machen and utterly failing to do justice to the complexity of modern problems. Rev. John D. Tangelder, Christian Reformed missionary at Bacolod City in the Philippines responds to this criticism, giving his evaluation.

No, I don't have a picture of Dr. Francis Schaeffer hanging in my bedroom, which also serves as my study. I don't believe in hero worship, but I do have admiration for Dr. Schaeffer's ministry. His influence is widespread in evangelical circles through his books, articles, lectures, tapes and his film series, "How Should We Then Live?"

Yes, I thank God for Dr. Schaeffer's work and L'Abri. I have had the privilege of meeting with Dr. Schaeffer at the North-West L'Abri Conference, Calgary, Alberta, and listened to his introduction of his film series in a Toronto, Ontario, church. And some years ago, I spent three weeks at the Dutch L'Abri (Eck en Wiel). This was a spiritually enriching and intellectually stimulating experience. The fellowship was great. The lectures by scholars such as Dr. Bob

Goudzwaard were excellent. The tape library was well "stocked" and helpful. On the way to the Philippines, our family spent four weeks travelling through Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany. Our weekends were spent at the Dutch L'Abri. While at L'Abri I was shown Dr. Jack Rogers' articles, "Francis Schaeffer: the promise and the problem," the *Reformed Journal*, May, June 1977. After I had read them, I asked myself: "Is Dr. Rogers not painting a caricature of Dr. Schaeffer?" Sure, Dr. Schaeffer's ministry is not perfect. He will be the first one to admit this. The L'Abri workers are also aware of the weaknesses and limitations of L'Abri. They are realistic. But Dr. Schaeffer should have received a better treatment from the pen of Dr. Rogers. It is not my intention to give a detailed evaluation of Dr. Rogers' articles, but a few misrepresentations need to be exposed.

1. **Prophet.** What is the role of Schaeffer in the evangelical movement? He must be seen as a prophet calling our civilization and the Church herself back to God. As a prophet he paints with bold strokes the direction the Church should take. He is sharply different from the "stereo-type" fundamentalist by his cultural awareness, his intellectual alertness and his compassionate life-style. As a prophet he should be listened to. His warnings are urgent. "Today not only in philosophy but in politics, government, and individual morality, our generation sees solutions in terms of synthesis and not absolutes. When this happens, truth, as people had always thought of truth has died" (p. 163, *How Should We Then Live?*). Evangelical churches need to pay attention to life-style and attitudes. What kind of image does the world have of us? In his address presented at the International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland, Schaeffer said: "We have something to ask the Lord to forgive us for the ugliness with which we have often treated each other when we are in different camps. . . . We need two orthodoxies: first, an orthodoxy of doctrine and, second, an orthodoxy of community. Why was the early church able, within one century, to spread from the Indus River to Spain? Think of that: one century, India to Spain. When we read in Acts and in the Epistles, we find a church that had and practiced both orthodoxies (doctrine and community), and this could be observed by the world. Thus they commended the gospel to the world of that day and the Holy Spirit was not grieved" (p. 26, 2 Contents, 2 Realities).

2. **Evangelist.** Dr. Schaeffer does not claim to have the last word in evangelical scholarship. He wants to speak evangelistically to "modern" man with his great needs, and not "just" to produce a comprehensive, well-documented history of ideas. He simply desires to document his case persuasively enough for the non-Christian to see that the answer does not lie in modern-secular culture, but in the Christian alternative. As prophet-evangelist he appeals to the students and many are listening.

3. **Research.** Dr. Rogers claims that "Schaeffer has said that he would never quote any modern theologians. He does not want people to read them lest they become confused" (p. 15, May, 1977). This is news to me. I have heard Schaeffer encourage students to go to the original sources. He does this himself as much as possible. Of course at L'Abri you study Schaeffer's tape, those of other L'Abri workers and guest lecturers. L'Abri does not have a research library. It does not claim to be an academic center. It is a place where searchers can come with their questions; where Christians can receive fellowship and encouragement. Of course, Schaeffer encourages people to study Reformed theologians, but not only Warfield, Machen and Hodge, but also Abraham Kuyper, C. Van Til and many others. I encourage my students to do the same.

4. **Misrepresentation.** Dr. Rogers accuses Schaeffer of lack of scholarship. But is it scholarly to misquote and misrepresent your "opponent"? Dr. Rogers quotes Schaeffer as saying, "that it is a central purpose of the Bible to teach us what 'has occurred in the cosmos' (p. 135). He alleges: "The new liberal theology, because it says that the Bible does not touch the cosmos or history, has no real basis for applying the Bible's values in a historical situation, in either morals or law. Everything religious is in the area of non-reason, and since reason has no place there, there is no room for discussion; there are only arbitrary pronouncements' (p. 177)." The exact quote on p. 135 of *How Should We Then Live?* sheds a different light on Schaeffer's position. He did say: "Man, including science, is not autonomous. He is to take seriously what the Bible teaches about history and about that which it teaches has occurred in the cosmos. Yes, upon the base of the Bible's teaching, science and art are intrinsically valuable before both men and God." Rogers, after having misrepresented Schaeffer, tries to correct him by saying: "We must first set the historical record straight. It is not just the 'new liberal theology' which contends that the purpose of the Bible is to speak to matters of salvation, faith and life, and not to science and history. The major theologians of the Christian tradition have always held that position. Augustine, for instance, said about astronomy that 'although our authors knew the truth about the shape of the heavens, the Spirit of God who spoke by them did not intend to teach men these things, in no way profitable for salvation' (cited by Polman, *The Word of God According to St. Augustine*, pp. 59-60). Calvin in his commentary on Genesis 1:15, 16 recommends that we seek information about the stars from astronomers, not from Moses. . . . All of these theologians are reflecting the biblical position as expressed in John 20:30 and 31: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name'" (p. 17, June 1977). Dr. Schaeffer would say in response: "Dr. Rogers, what is your problem? You have misrepre-

mented my position. I agree with St. Augustine and John Calvin. I am standing in the historic Reformed tradition."

5. **Dr. Schaeffer's position.** What is Dr. Schaeffer's position? In his booklet *No Final Conflict. The Bible Without Error in all that it Affirms*. Dr. Schaeffer says that "God has given four revelations to man. The first two are general revelation, the second two, special revelation. The general revelations are, first the universe and its form, and second man and his mannishness. It should be noted that Paul stressed both of these in Romans 1. The two special revelations are the verbalized communication from God to man in the Bible, and second, the revelation of God in Christ. Rightly understood, these four revelations will always compose one revelation" (p. 23f.). And Dr. Schaeffer believes that "the verbalized communication from God to man in the Bible" is infallible, inerrant. He also insists on the historicity of Biblical events. God reveals "true truth" and not just teaching models. For example, we cannot speak about the fall of man into sin as religious truth. The fall has happened in space and time. He says: "The first half of Genesis is history, space-time history, the Fall is a space-time Fall, or we have no knowledge of what Jesus came to die for and we have no way to understand that God is really a good God. Our whole answer to evil rests upon the historic, space-time Fall. There was a time before man revolted against God. The internal evidence of Genesis and the external evidences (given in the New Testament by the way the New Testament speaks of the first half of Genesis) show that the first half of Genesis is really meant to be space-time history. We must understand that here we are dealing with history — that is, space and time, the warp and woof of history" (p. 10).

In *Genesis in Space and Time* Schaeffer writes: "If we take away the historicity of Adam, we are left breathless! If we tamper with this ordinary way of understanding what is written in the Bible, the structure of Christianity is reduced to only an existential leap" (p. 43).

What is the purpose of the Bible? Is it given to us to gain accurate information about science or mathematics? Dr. Schaeffer says: "We often hear the statement, 'The Bible is not a scientific textbook.' Should we say this or not? It depends on what we mean. Years ago, before I heard anyone else use this phrase, I used it, but I meant by it that we must remember what the central purpose of the Bible is. The central purpose of the Bible is to give us what fallen man needs to know between the Fall and the second coming of Christ. This is the theme of the book and is dealt with with great intensity and great uniformity throughout the Bible. It seems to me that everything else is secondary to this and is to be seen in reference to this central theme. . . . The Bible is not a scientific text book in the sense that science is not its central theme, and we do not have a comprehensive statement about the cosmos. . . . 'The Bible is not a scientific textbook' is true in the sense in which we

have just spoken. But many people today use the statement in a different way, that is, to say that the Bible does not affirm anything about that in which science has an interest. When the statement is used to mean this, it must be totally rejected. The Bible does give affirmations about that in which science has an interest" (p. 22f.). In *Genesis in Space and Time* he repeats the same argument. He says: "It is necessary for us to remind ourselves again just what kind of book the Bible is. As I have already indicated, the Bible is a book for fallen men. Wherever it touches upon anything, it does so with true truth, but not

with exhaustive truth. That is, where it speaks of the cosmos, science, what it says is true. Likewise, where it touches history with what I call true truth, that is, propositional, objective truth." For Schaeffer then, the central purpose of the Bible is, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

Dr. Schaeffer holds to a strong view of Scripture. He is not only orthodox, but also compassionate. I appreciate Dr. Schaeffer's emphasis on these two orthodoxies — truth and practice. ●



Dear Sir:

Please permit me to comment on the last part of the letter from Rev. J. Tuininga in the July issue of *OUTLOOK*. In that part Rev. Tuininga laments the fact that *OUTLOOK* and the Reformed Fellowship do not seem to have too much praise and commendation for such organizations as CLAC or CJL. I am astonished that Rev. Tuininga appears to be ignorant of the fact that the AACCS, CLAC, CJL, CSS, CDC, Wedge Publication and Patmos Galleries are about as different in commitment as six is from half a dozen. Each of these are separately incorporated and officially run by separate boards. Unofficially, however, personnel from each serve any or all of the other five. The address of all, except two, is the same, and for that reason also it's easy for those few men who really run all to keep a finger in the pie. The philosophies of one are the philosophies of the others. None of these organizations are the philosophies of the others. None of these organizations are really REFORMED, although they claim to be reformational, and thereby confuse a lot of well-meaning people.

Sincerely,
St. Thomas, Ont., Canada
H. NYMEYER

Dear Friends in Christ:

Please allow me to write a few lines, commenting on the "Letter to the Editor" from J. Tuininga in the July issue, "A United Reformed Church?"

I do not agree with J. Tuininga that the churches who received the apostle Paul's letters may be placed alongside of, and compared as though similar to our Christian Reformed Denomination. Paul was writing to "New" congregations, just recently called into God's Kingdom of Light. Paul was urging them on, and was encouraging them to be strong in their new found faith, and to put away the old works of darkness. The description of those churches and congregations can hardly apply to a Denomination that has been grounded in and established upon the infallible Word of God, has in past generations stood the test of persecution and hardship, and has now apparently arrived at a point of great spiritual and material affluence.

Rev. Tuininga's statement, that the Rev. John Vander Ploeg's proposal concerning a "United Reformed Church" is "unduly idealistic and largely illusory," is an indication of negative thinking, to say the least. I have the uneasy feeling that it is this kind of negative thinking which has led us into a "If you can't beat them, join them" kind of theology. We have only to look at our present tolerant attitude toward divorce and remarriage, our careless, often profane language, and our casual attitude toward keeping the Lord's Day, to see how far we have drifted.

We ought to thank our God again and again for the spiritual idealism and the courageous foresight (illusions?) of our forebears, and we ought to be praying that the same kind of God-given courage may be our portion today and in the days ahead.

To the Reformed Fellowship, and to editors and staff of *THE OUTLOOK*: May God continue to strengthen you as you carry on your often difficult and seemingly thankless work.

With Christian greetings,
DONALD BLAAUW
Holland, Mich.



THE NECESSITY OF FAITH, by Harvey M. Kuitert. Eerdmans, 1976, 159 pp., \$2.95. Reviewed by Professor William Young, Department of Philosophy, University of Rhode Island.

This little book is an index of the rapid and radical inroads of apostasy on the part of theological, ecclesiastical and publishing institutions which only a few decades ago were reputed to be strongholds of orthodoxy. In fact it is an apology for apostasy, for modernism of the extremist school that is distinguishable from atheistic humanism only by the vague employment of a minimum of traditional Christian language rendering possible an attack on Christianity from within rather than from without.

Christianity is reduced to one among the religions of the world, and religion as such is reduced to a human invention. Underlying the writer's outlook on religion is an uncritically assumed sceptical relativism: "it is we ourselves who contrive the world of God and salvation, and at the same time it is not we ourselves" (p. 37). "Christian faith too . . . consists of projections, words, and customs which were dreamed up here on earth, and not in heaven" (p. 40). A more outright atheistic denial of revelation could scarcely be found in Feuer-

bach or Marx. A chapter on the uniqueness of Christianity boils down to "it is impossible to express in one fixed way what is unique in Christianity" (p. 50). We need not be surprised that the historical Christ is eliminated from the "faith" proposed by the Amsterdam theologian. "Jesus cannot be confined to the interpretations which men have attached to him up to the present. . . . Thus, in the stories about Jesus, Christianity has its own account of origins, somewhat akin to the myths of primitive religions" (p. 62). The term "myths," not in the Dutch text, appears to be a provocative gloss of the translator.

To go through the remaining chapters on the church, morality and theology would be superfluous. It must suffice to note that moral standards as well as doctrinal creeds are relativized to the changing fashions of the times. Christian morality is misrepresented as "bourgeois morality" (p. 94), and between the morality to Hippiedom and Calvinism, "The problem is that one group does not tolerate the pattern or conduct of the other group" (p. 99). Morality is analogous to a promiscuous "playboy" (in the Dutch text, "Morall' 'scharrelt'"); its approach is trial and error" (p. 101). Is it really unfair to conclude that the Professor of Ethics at the formerly Reformed Free University is permissive toward Playboy morality, even when allowance is made for the translator's license?

Feeble is the effort to disarm the critic who calls attention to the underlying relativism. "People generally begin to speak of relativism only when they first come to realize that they themselves no longer have a monopoly on the truth . . ." (p. 148). A college sophomore could hardly give a more naive subjectivistic exhibition of relativism. May the watchmen on the walls of Zion, scorned by the writer and his translator (pp. 5, 130), be on the alert to speak and act faithfully.

CHRIST'S CHURCH, THE BIBLE AND ME, by Alexander C. De Jong. 46 pp., \$1.00. Published by Paracletos Press, 12940 Western Ave., Blue Island, Ill. 60406. Reviewed by Rev. Peter De Jong, Editor.

Dr. Machen 55 years ago began his illuminating little classic, *Christianity and Liberalism*, by observing that within the churches two radically opposed religions were in conflict although both claimed the name Christian and used the same terms, and that one of the most pressing needs of the time was to have the radical difference between the true and false brands of "Christianity" exposed. The same situation again confronts us today. The value of Dr. Alexander De Jong's booklet is that it sets out to show clearly the difference between two incompatible religious views, both existing within our churches, regarding the Bible. Are we to believe that the Bible is inerrant or to believe that it is full of mistakes? That is the question which must be faced.

The last 14 pages of the booklet help the reader understand why it came to be written. Spearheading the attack on the inerrancy of the Bible in the Christian Reformed Church is Dr. Harry R. Boer. His little book, *Above the Bible? The Bible and its Critics*, appeared in 1977 (although most of it had previously appeared in the *Reformed Journal*). This book was critically reviewed by Dr. Alexander De Jong in the September, 1977, *Banner* in a review reprinted on pp. 32-35 of this booklet (cf. also another review in the Oct., 1977 *OUTLOOK*, pp. 7-11). Dr. De Jong concluded his review by observing that the views expressed in the book are "contrary to the Bible's teaching concerning its own nature and authority as well as contrary to the confession of the Church as articulated in Articles III-VII of the *Belgic Confession*." This observation elicited an angry retort from Dr. Boer in the February 10, 1978 *Banner* (pp. 36-42 of the booklet) charging that in it De Jong had attacked "the legitimacy of" his "ministry of the gospel." He argued that De Jong could not properly attack his view in this way because the Christian Reformed Church was "ambiguous" (or two-faced) in its view of the Bible, arguing both for and against inerrancy in its notorious "Report 44." He further argued, in the same way as he did in his book, that the Bible often contradicts itself proving that it is not "inerrant" and that we ought to frankly recognize and tolerate the existence of the two contradictory views of the Bible within the same church.

De Jong replied in the same *Banner* (pp. 42-46 of the booklet) denying that he had endangered "the legitimacy" of Boer's "ministry of the gospel" and stating that he was for the present still "willing" to "treat" him "with acceptance in our denomination" but pointing out that he and Boer took radically different starting points in their faith in the Bible and that he and many others could not in good conscience continue to pay Boer and others like him to attack the Bible's teachings.

This public demonstration of the conflict about the Bible within the church drew considerable attention. Dr. De Jong was asked to speak on this subject by the consistory of the First (C.R.) Church of South Holland, Ill., on April 13, 1978. It is this address which forms the body of this booklet. It attempts to explain in a way that any ordinary, concerned person can understand what the issues are in this conflict about the Bible in the Christian Reformed Church. It shows the way in which the conflict began, how notorious "Reports 36 and 44" tried to compromise it, and why we must quit trying to "straddle the fence" on this important matter and insist on an inerrant Bible. Beginning with the claim the Bible makes concerning itself we must face the "problems" with which the critics have always attacked that claim in faith that God does not lie, as the faithful church has always done. It suggests that we should seek to have

"Report 44" which is used to support the liberal attack on the Bible rescinded, try to support only what is faithful to the Bible and if one CR church will not hold such a position, join one which will.

This little booklet is to be welcomed and recommended to many who would like to understand more clearly what is happening to our churches and what we ought to do about it. The book is not inflammatory. Even the criticism of Dr. Boer's book which began the discussion was not excessive. Rather, views expressed in that book deserve less gentle treatment than they were given. Dr. Boer's book defended Bible criticism against the words of our Lord Himself with the arguments that Jesus did not know everything and that we do not know what He really said or taught (pp. 95-97). Are such views "legitimate" for any Christian minister? Let us pray that the Lord may correct such errors and deliver His church from them.

THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON THE ROLE RELATIONSHIP OF MEN AND WOMEN, by George W. Knight III, Th.D., Grand Rapids, Baker, 1977, 76 pages, \$3.95. Reviewed by Thomas Vanden Heuvel of Chino, Calif.

Dr. George W. Knight III is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and professor of New Testament at the Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. Dr. Knight holds degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary and the Free University of Amsterdam.

This book is a very important contribution in the continuing discussion about the place of women in the church. Dr. Knight has a very high and orthodox view of Scripture. This determines his position on the place of women in the church and in the home.

He speaks of the relationship of men and women in the teaching and ruling offices of the church, in public worship, and in the marriage and family. He speaks of this relationship as a role relationship.

The theme of this book is that the role relationship of men and women is not determined by the culture or society in which one lives, but is determined by the creation order of God and ordained for all cultures and societies and times.

This is the strength of the book. Dr. Knight defends his excellent position with abundance of Scripture which he believes is authoritative. The teachings of Paul, Peter and Christ are dealt with as normative for today. He crosses swords with all those in the evangelical community, including our own reformed community, who regard Paul, Peter and Christ to be reflecting the culture of the day and the rabbinic exegesis of that time in their treatment of the place of women and the early chapters of Genesis, and hence of little value to us.

In years to come there will be increasing pressure from the unbelieving and liberal mind to convince the church that the teachings of Paul, Peter and Christ

regarding the place of women in the church are time conditioned and hence basically irrelevant. This book will prove to be tremendous asset to every Christian's library. It helps to buttress the Biblical position on the place of women in the church, home and society.

Dr. Knight rightly sees that the issue of the place of women in the church is not a sociological issue, but at bottom, it is a theological issue, which finally is decided by the view of Scripture one has.

THE AMSTERDAM PHILOSOPHY: A PRELIMINARY CRITIQUE. Papers by John M. Frame and Leonard J. Coppes. Copies may be obtained from Harmony Press, R.D. 2, Philipsburg, N.J. 08865, at the price of \$1.00. Reviewed by John De Pater, Escalon, California.

This booklet is quite valuable and its reading can help us to gain a somewhat better understanding of what is popularly called the *Amsterdam Philosophy* or *Dooyeweerdianism* which has shaped to a large extent the thinking of those who are associated with the A.A.C.S. and gained a foothold among many people of Reformed persuasion in Canada and the U.S.A. The writers of this booklet have provided a critique of the ideas found in the school of thought mentioned above and attempt to alert the reader to some of the implications involved in accepting them. It is of course impossible to do justice to a system of thought as involved as the Dooyeweerdian School in a mere 61 pages. An analysis of this way of thinking among Reformed people is long overdue because of its widespread influence. The authors have done this in terms within reach of the intelligent laymen as well as philosophers. Serious questions are raised about this system but not in a simply negative way. This little book can well serve as an introduction to what the Amsterdam School stands for and what is involved in some of the ramifications of this system as they are set forth by scholars on the American continent, so that we may come to a better understanding of it. The system has quite an appeal to many young Christian scholars. The question is, does it lead us in the right direction? We owe those who follow it at least the serious consideration of their system. We cannot afford to neglect its careful study and are obligated to scrutinize the directions in which it could lead us. The Critique under review can serve as a starting point for discussion and study that could lead to a proper evaluation of the Amsterdam School and its implications. By all means get the booklet, read it carefully and try to find out what is at stake.

THE LORD OF GLORY, by Benjamin B. Warfield. A paperback reprint of a 1907 study of the Designations of our Lord in the New Testament with a special reference to His Deity. Pub-

lished by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan at \$3.95. Reviewed by John De Pater, Escalon, California.

Baker Book House performs a valuable service to the church by making such a wealth of textual and exegetical material available to assist her in the defence of the Deity of Christ. Teachers and students of the Bible will find it to be an invaluable tool. B. B. Warfield in his own time took a decisive stand for the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture against the onslaught of Higher Criticism. Even as such the book is a great help when we face current Biblical scholars. The discussion is carried on with dignity and at a high academic level. The tone could strike one as being a little dry. Don't be discouraged but try to assimilate the textual material provided and you will find yourself well equipped to meet and oppose the Jehovah Witnesses and others who deny the Divinity of Jesus Christ. The work in compiling the textual material must have been immense and it was painstakingly done. Reading the book one becomes aware of the fact that the evidence of Christ as God is spread over every page of the New Testament. B. B. Warfield gives of his talent to structure it for you. If you read this book well you will discover that you have made progress in truly searching the Scriptures. The fact that it was written 80 years ago does not reduce its usefulness. *The Lord of Glory* is a book well worth having.

COMMON GRACE AND THE GOSPEL, by Cornelius Van Til. 237 pp., \$4.50 (or, recent catalog \$3.50). Published by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Philadelphia. Reviewed by Rev. Peter De Jong, Editor.

This is a collection of the writings of Professor Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Seminary over more than a quarter century dealing with the subject of "Common Grace." The first three chapters appeared as a book in 1947 under this title and the six chapters which follow were printed at various times later except for the last which appears in this book for the first time. Although they do not form a unified whole, they all deal with the one theme of Common Grace and its relevance to the gospel.

Light on a Live Subject

Although the book deals with a subject which has been discussed repeatedly over the years it may be helpful to many in our Reformed family at this time, as many long-held Reformed doctrines and practices are now being discarded or called into question, we are being compelled to face anew the question whether we have good, Biblical reasons for holding them. Especially we in Christian Reformed churches are being compelled to do this. Regarding the subject of "Common Grace" we are being told from time to time by our friends in Protestant Reformed churches that the current apostasy within our churches is traceable more or less directly to the acceptance

of this erroneous doctrine of common grace by our Synod of 1924. To confuse matters further, we may be told by the followers of Professor K. Schilder in the Canadian and American Reformed Churches that our churches have taken the wrong turn in these matters since 1944 as we have followed the lead of our mother churches in the Netherlands instead of espousing the cause of those who were "liberated" from them.

As we in this situation must try not only to stand against errors, but also to hold and promote a genuinely Biblical Reformed faith and life, Dr. Van Til's writings on this subject can be very helpful to us.

He has over many years established a reputation of maintaining and defending the Reformed faith that is second to none in our time and no one can plausibly accuse him of being naive or compromising toward the current liberal or "neo-orthodox" apostasy from the Christian faith. It is more than worth the effort needed to listen to what he has to say about the controversial doctrine of "Common Grace."

The "Three Points"

What were the "three points" about which debate has centered since the CRC Synod formulated them in 1924? Early in the book Dr. Van Til in 4 pages of quotations cites them together with the arguments the Synod advanced from the Bible, the Creeds and the Reformed fathers for holding them (pp. 19-22). They are (1) the existence of "a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to his creatures in general," (2) a "restraint of sin in the life of the individual and in society" and (3) that "the unregenerate, though incapable of any saving good . . . can perform . . . civic good."

The Bible's Teaching

Again and again throughout these discussions Dr. Van Til refers to the Bible passages cited by the 1924 Synod. Psalm 145:9 says, "The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works." Our Lord commanded (Matt. 5:44-48), "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you: That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Van Til finds these and other passages plainly teaching us that there is as the Synod said, "a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to his creatures in general." Despite his admiration of both Rev. Herman Hoeksema and Dr. K. Schilder he finds that they erred in denying this. "When Schilder argues that we cannot legitimately reach a conclusion about God's attitude from the facts, we reply that we are specifically told that God's attitude is revealed in these facts" (p. 32; cf. pp. 29-33). "To say that the facts of rain and sunshine in

themselves do not tell us anything of God's grace is to say in effect that the world and what is therein does not speak forth the revelation of God." "The fact that the unbeliever who eventually turns out to have been a reprobate adds to his punishment because of his misuse of the gifts of rain and sunshine about him is not a proof against the idea that these facts are the gift of God's favor to him. On the contrary it were impossible that his punishment should be increased by his manipulation of the facts about him unless these facts were evidence of the undeserved favor of God in relation to him" (p. 115).

The Synod of 1924 had cited such passages as II Kings 10:29, 30 in which God said of the generally wicked Jehu that he had "done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes" and the Lord's words in Luke 6:33, "If ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye: for sinners also do even the same" as showing that unregenerate men do what the Lord in some sense calls "good." This obvious teaching Dr. Van Til also defends, "The case is similar with respect to the knowledge of unbelievers and their ability to do what is relatively good." Although "in principle opposed to God," "in spite of this, because of God's common grace they can discover much truth and do much good" (p. 16).

God's Word Must Govern Our Thinking

Confronted by such Bible teachings, why should anyone object to the doctrine of common grace? The answer is that it seems to conflict with other teachings of the Bible.

"Hoeksema and Danhof argue that it is inconceivable that God should be in any sense, and at any point, graciously inclined to those who are not His elect." "Moreover the idea of common grace, Hoeksema and Danhof contend, virtually denies the doctrine of total depravity" (p. 18). What is Van Til's answer to these objections? "How can God have an attitude of favor unto those men whom He so obviously has not included in the number that could possibly be saved through the gospel of the blood of Jesus Christ? Well the answer is that we cannot comprehend how it is possible, but the Scriptures reveal it to be true. And so we must learn to say to ourselves and to take seriously the words . . . 'Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?' (p. 134). "Against both Hoeksema and Schilder I have contended that we must think more concretely and analogically than they did, allowing ourselves to be led only by scriptural exegesis. All the truths of the Christian religion have of necessity the appearance of being contradictory." "We do not fear to accept that which has the appearance of being contradictory. We know that what appears to be so to us is not really so. So also in the case of the question of common grace. We are not to say that God cannot have any attitude of favor toward a generality of

mankind, including both reprobate and elect, because our logic seems to require us to do so. In the case of common grace, as in the case of every other biblical doctrine, we should seek to take all the factors of Scripture teaching and bind them together into systematic relations with one another as far as we can. But we do not expect to have a logically deducible relationship between one doctrine and another" (pp. 165, 166).

"We make Scripture the standard of our thinking, and not our thinking the standard of Scripture" (p. 167).

The missionary implications of this Biblical way of dealing with these difficult matters should not be overlooked. Dr. Van Til finds and defends the fact that both the old orthodox Reformed thinkers in the Netherlands and the faithful Presbyterians at Old Princeton "were not deterred by those who would impose 'logic' upon Scripture either by way of rejecting election in favor of the sincerity of the general offer of the gospel, or by way of rejecting the sincerity of the general offer of the gospel in favor of election. They thought concretely and scripturally rather than abstractly and deductively from one aspect of revelation" and so "both preached with conviction the universal or general offer of salvation to men as a class" (p. 188).

The average reader will not always find this book easy to read, but if he will thoughtfully work through the discussion he may find the guidance of this veteran Reformed leader extremely profitable not only in dealing with immediate questions about common grace, but in learning how the Lord would have us proclaim and defend His gospel in today's confused and confusing world.

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN MISSIONS by J. Herbert Kane; 452 pages; Baker Book House; \$9.95. Reviewed by John Vander Ploeg, Grand Rapids, Mich.

To suggest that, in the event of a second printing of this 452-page book on missions, a complete index would be a real asset to make it even more valuable, is intended as commendation rather than criticism. Kane's *Understanding Christian Missions*, so chock-full of current statistical information, so extremely well-organized throughout, and also so easily understood because of the author's ability to communicate in an engaging and down-to-earth style, is a volume that deserves a prominent place on the bookshelf of any serious student of Christian Missions as a reference to be consulted often.

The author, Dr. J. Herbert Kane, has served for fifteen years as a missionary in China, serves presently as professor of Missions at the School of World Mission, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, and is also the author of other books on Christian missions: *A Global View of Christian Missions* (Baker) and *Winds of Change in the Christian Mission* (Moody).

The extensive coverage Kane gives Christian Missions is suggested by the ten chapter headings: 1. The Making of the Missionary; 2. Matters Relating to Recruitment. 3. Theological Issues [here and there the Reformed reader may raise an eyebrow while nevertheless finding himself, in large part, appreciative of this section also]; 4. Historical Development; 5. Cultural Penetration; 6. Political Involvement; 7. Methodological Imperatives; 8. Christianity in the Third World; 9. Recent Developments; 10. Future Prospects. This wide range of topics and the thorough treatment each one receives leaves no doubt that the author is highly knowledgeable and a master in the important field of missions.

"Is the task of world evangelization completed?" is the author's final question. His answer: "From all four corners of the earth comes a resounding *No!* Far from being completed, we have hardly reached the halfway point. To quit now would jeopardize the entire enterprise."

GUIDELINES FOR URBAN CHURCH PLANTING, Roger S. Greenway, Editor. Baker Book House, Publisher, 1976, 76 pages, \$1.95. Reviewed by Frank De Jong, Ripon, California.

In the Spring of 1975 an important meeting of the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association was held in Los Angeles. Leaders from a variety of Protestant churches were confronted with the problems dealing with the widespread changes in Home Missions throughout the entire world. Of these problems it was recognized at this assembly that the planting of churches among evangelized urban people is one of the most urgent and important. The editor of this valuable book states it plainly, "cities must be regarded as the modern frontiers of Christian missions and they must be given high priority in terms of strategy and the assignment of resources."

This high priority became evident at this Los Angeles meeting. On the last day the morning and afternoon sessions were devoted entirely to this study of this important subject. The outcome of this was that the papers presented at these meetings were published under the heading, "Guidelines for Urban Church Planting." This valuable material is thus available for wider circulation and can serve missionaries throughout the Christian world to guide them in their urban ministry.

The guidelines given in this book are based upon a book written in 1965 by Dr. Donald A. Mc Gavran of the Fuller Seminary titled, *Understanding Church Growth*. In it he sets forth eight "Keys to Church Growth in Cities." The papers presented at the last meeting of the EFMA used these eight keys as a guide to examine models of what is being done today in the work of Urban Church Planting. Every Home Missionary, in fact all who are interested in the great cause of Urban Missions, should read and study these guidelines.

ANNUAL MEETING

OF

REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1978

AT

Dutton Christian Reformed Church

DUTTON, Michigan (Hanna Lake Ave. and 68th St., S.E.)

2:00 P.M. BUSINESS MEETING and ADDRESS

by DR. P. Y. DE JONG of Sheldon, Iowa, on:
"OUR NEEDED REFORMED MANIFESTO"
(for all members and wives)

6:30 P.M. BANQUET (Punch Bowl at 6:00)

Order your reservation for Banquet no later than
September 28, 1978 by writing to:

REFORMED FELLOWSHIP
4855 Starr St., S.E.
Grand Rapids, Mich. 49506

Tickets: \$6.00 each

8:00 P.M. INSPIRATIONAL MEETING (Dutton Christian Ref. Church)

Speaker: REV. IAIN MURRAY of Edinburgh, Scotland
Editor of the "Banner of Truth" magazine and publisher
of Calvinist-Puritan books

Topic: "NECESSARY INGREDIENTS OF BIBLICAL REVIVAL"

**EVERYONE
INVITED**