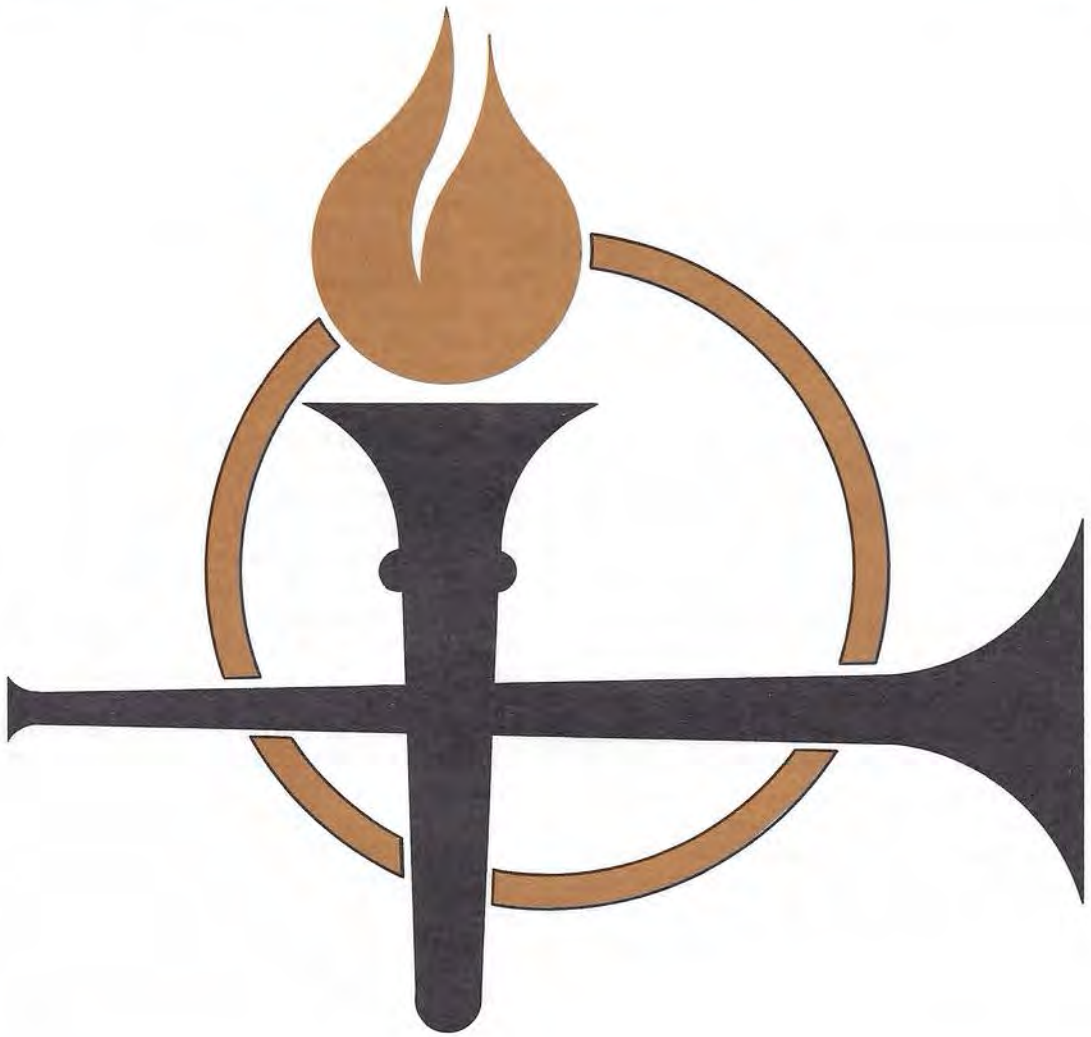
THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

OCTOBER 1983



FUTURE OF THE JEWS
MID-AMERICA CONVOCATION ADDRESS
FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

A Musical Tribute to the Reformation

Christine Van Halen-Faber

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809-1847) was a member of a well-known Jewish family. Grandfather Moses was a famous philosopher, father Abraham was a wealthy banker, and mother Lea (secretly!) read Homer in the original.

In the early eighteenth century, Jews lived in attics and cellars of the houses within a special section of German towns. It was not until the reign of Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, that the Jews were treated more humanely. King Frederick needed lots of money for his wars and personal enterprises. He soon discovered the Jewish financial experts, and quickly enlisted their help. He appointed Veitel Ephraim as court banker or Minister of Finance. Ephraim bought gold and silver coins from various European countries. He then melted these coins and added baser metals before returning them to the respective countries, claiming full value. One solution to economic difficulties! It's no wonder that the Berliners sang:

"Outside silver, inside tin
Outside honesty, inside sham
Outside Frederick, inside Ephraim!"

Soon Berlin became an important Jewish community. One of its bankers was Abraham Mendelssohn, a respected name within the circle of the Jewish upper class. In spite of their wealth and social standing, Abraham and Lea feared for the future of their children. In 1816, the four Mendelssohn children were baptized, thereby "purchasing tickets of admission to European culture" (Heine). Abraham and Lea Mendelssohn had decided to educate their children as Christians, as Protestants, as Lutherans.

Culture was very important to father Mendelssohn. He wanted to educate young Felix as a truly Renaissance prince. Carefully selected private teachers came to the house in order to instruct the pupils. Felix started at five o'clock every morning. His curriculum included Latin, Greek, German, and foreign literature; geography and European history; drawing and painting; French, Italian, and English; political philosophy (with Eduard Gans); esthetics (with Hegel); and, last but not least: music. A heavy daily schedule! Only on Sundays were the children allowed to sleep in until six o'clock! It wasn't easy!

Conversion to Christianity had not changed the outward appearance of Felix. He still looked a typically Jewish boy. In 1819 during a *Judensturm* in Berlin, the last real pogrom before the days of Hitler, Felix was ridiculed and jeered. "Hep hep, Jew-boy!" they shouted. In spite of all this, the Mendelssohns stayed in Berlin.

In 1821, Zelter, who taught Felix composition, took his student to Wittenburg where a statue of Luther would be unveiled. From Wittenberg they travelled to Weimar where they visited old Goethe. Felix was asked to play the piano for the famous poet. Goethe was so happy with the young musician that he compared his relationship with the boy with that of King Saul to David, "When I am sad, come and cheer me with your playing."

In 1825, Abraham Mendelssohn bought a large estate in a suburb of Berlin. The mansion had a large concert area which could accommodate several hundred people. During one of the summer concerts, the seventeen-year-old Felix enthralled his audience with a new composition: the Overture to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was truly a masterpiece.

Young Mendelssohn received many invitations to perform and conduct his own compositions. Fortunately,

he loved travelling and could afford to do it. He went to France, Italy, Scotland, and Switzerland. He preserved his impressions in paintings and compositions. We may think of the "Scotch" and the "Italian" Symphonies. Felix Mendelssohn was received well wherever he went. When the first edition of the famous *Grove's Dictionary of Music* appeared in England in 1880, the longest article was devoted to Felix; sixty-eight pages! Quite something, when we consider that Bach received only eight!

While he was still in England, Mendelssohn began to compose a work to commemorate the anniversary of the Augsburg Confession (1530-1830). But upon his arrival in Berlin he was in for a disappointment. Once the rehearsals of the Symphony had started, the members of the orchestra were not very enthusiastic, to say the least. They thought the work was rather boring and dry. In addition to all this, the authorities decided to cancel all festivities surrounding the tercentenary of the Augsburg Confession in June 1830. They feared mass demonstrations at a time of social and political unrest.

Poor Felix! When the Symphony was finally performed in 1832, it was taken out of context and quite disappointing. Mendelssohn never did publish it.

Since we hope to observe Reformation Day on the last day of this month, let us listen to the Reformation Symphony in context. The first movement is indicated as Andante-Allegro con Fuoco. The slow introduction is rather solemn and hymn-like in character: a perfect beginning for this symphony. A nineteenth-century Lutheran audience would recognize the theme immediately. Mendelssohn used a melody of a hymn. The hymn was used in the Kreuzkirche in Dresden at the end of a worship service. Hence the name of the tune: "Dresden Amen!" Once the last notes have sounded, we are immediately transported into the fast and fiery Allegro section. Allegro con fuoco: fast and with fire. Some critics have suggested that Mendelssohn tried to depict a bitter, religious warfare. Perhaps he did. These same critics suggest that the second movement is a haven of joy and tranquility, an expression of uncomplicated happiness of a simple believer. It is indeed true that the movement has a liltingly buoyant touch. The third movement is once again a slow one: Andante. It reminds us of a song without words. Typically Mendelssohn! The final movement is a complete contrast. We immediately recognize the opening melody played on the flutes: A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. The majestic tones of "Luther's" chorale have often been labelled as the battle hynm of the Reformation. It is only fitting that Mendelssohn used it in his ode to the Augsburg Confession, the bulwark of the Lutheran church. Once the melody has been stated by the flutes, we can hear it spread slowly throughout the entire orchestra. The first two lines of the hymn are used as basis for the many variations. Additional tunes are added as well, until we finally return to the original starting point: A Mighty Fortress Is Our God!

A jubilant ending for a musical tribute to the Reformation. ●

This article is reprinted from the October, 1982, issue of *Reformed Perspective* published at Box 12, Transcona Postal Station, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R2C 2Z5.

THE OUTLOOK

(USPS 633-980)

"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).

JOURNAL OF REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

Send all copy to Managing Editor, Rev. Peter De Jong, 4985 Sequoia Dr., S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508. Phone (616) 698-6267.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE: Arthur Besteman, John Blankespoor, John Engbers, Harlan Vanden Einde, Henry Vanden Heuvel, Syburn Voortman, Clarence Werkema.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Henry Vanden Hauvel, President; Clarence Werkema, Vice-President; Arthur Besteman, Secretary; Ronald Van Putten, Treasurer; Peter Wobbema, Jr., Assistant-Secretary-Treasurer; John Blankspoor, John Engbers, Paul M. Ingeneri, John H. Piersma, Berton Sevensma, Harlan Vanden Einde, John Vander Aa, Syburn Voortman, Jay A. Wesseling.

Assistant to the Editor: John Vander Ploeg.

Production Manager: Peter Wobbema.

Business Manager: Mrs. Mary Kaiser.

This periodical is owned and published by Reformed Fellowship, Inc., a religious and strictly non-profit organization composed of a group of Christian believers who hold to the Reformed Faith. Its purpose is to give sharpened expression to this Faith, to stimulate the doctrinal sensitivities of those who profess this Faith, to promote the spiritual welfare and purity of the Christian Reformed Church particularly and also of other Reformed churches, and as far as possible to further the interests of all Christian action and institutions of Reformed character.

The publishers of this journal express their adherence to the Calvinistic creeds as formulated in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

All contributions represent the personal views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the members of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Subscription Policy: Subscription price, $7.50 per year, $13.50 2 years (Canada rates $11.50 per year, $23.00 2 years). Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your Zip Code.

EDITORIAL AND CIRCULATION OFFICES

THE OUTLOOK
4855 Starr Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506, Telephone 948-5421
Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9-11 a.m.
After Office Hours please call: 452-9519
Mailing Address: 4855 Starr Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506

Contents:

October 1983 Volume XXXIII No. 10

the doctrine of the last things
WHAT OF THE JEWS?

Jerome M. Julien

At this point in our study of amillennialism we should move on to what has been called "Satan's Little Season" — the loosing of Satan and the events connected with it. However, since there is so much being said about the Jews in current literature and so-called Bible teaching we must stop and ask, "But what of the Jews in all of this?"

As we have already seen, some of the views of Christ's return direct special attention to the Jews. And even many Christians who have never considered the Biblical teachings of Christ's second advent with much deep concern believe that the Jews will have a special place or function in the working out of God's plan, especially in relation to the signs of Christ's coming. Therefore, our question: "But what of the Jews?"

Have Jews a Special Future?

There are two basic approaches to this question. One believes that the Jews are to return to their homeland and that some, if not many, of them will be saved. The other approach sees the Biblical emphasis as being only on the salvation of the Jews.

The dispensational belief of the events of Christ's return includes the expected return of Israel to the land of Palestine. In fact, Israel has a central place in dispensationalism. Older dispensationalists taught that the day would come when Israel in faith would return to the homeland. In *faith*, mind you. This would be during the Millennium, or during the seven years before the Millennium. The days of rebellion against God would be over. Israel would see her error, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and once again seek the fulfillment of the promises of restoration. However, since the birth of the State of Israel this view has been somewhat modified. It has had to be modified since there is no way that the return to Palestine can be viewed as being in faith, nor is it during the Millennium. The return to the homeland has been the result of a nationalistic movement—a Zionistic movement—but not one basically religious, and certainly not one which is the result of the Jews believing in Christ. Dispensationalists are now saying that all of this is merely preparatory to the time of the necessary turning of the Jews to Christ in faith. The establishment of the nation of Israel, itself, is highly praised. It is seen as a fulfillment of prophecy. But it is only preparatory to the Millennium.

It must also be noted that there are non-dispensationalist believers such as the Rev. Erroll Hulse of England, who stand in the Puritan tradition, who see the return of Israel as preparatory to the salvation of the Jews. This he discusses in his *The Restoration of Israel.*

Are the Jews Still Promised the Land?

But the question is: Is the establishment of the State of Israel the fulfillment of prophecy? Or, to put it another way, does the land of Palestine still belong to Israel according to Scripture?

When we begin to search through the Bible it seems as if we find ample evidence that would make the answer to these questions: *yes*. Let's look at only a few of the many passages that could be called upon.

In Genesis 12:7 we read that God said to Abram, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." Genesis 12, you remember, is about God calling Abram to leave Ur in obedience to Him; and Abram went to Canaan. However, "the Canaanite was then in the land" (v. 6), a fearful truth for Abram. Of course, Abram had many in his party, but how do they prevail over so many Canaanites? Then God comforted Abram, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." "Abram, in spite of the presence of Canaanites, this land belongs to you and your family." Abram and his family didn't stay long. They went to Egypt in search of food, driven by a famine.

When again Abram and his family returned to Canaan, the Lord spoke very similar words to Abram, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed forever... (Gen. 13:14-17)." Now, however a new word is added: *forever.*

The word *forever* is very important here. Because of this word the view of Israel's return to Palestine is said to be unquestionably Biblical.

In the Hebrew, the word *forever* is actually two which, when translated, literally mean "for a long

time." The idea in the original is that this is an indefinitely long season. The word is used in several ways in the Old Testament. It is sometimes understood as meaning an eternity. Other times it is used as meaning "the rest of a man's lifetime," as in Exodus 21:6. If, indeed, we choose the first meaning "eternity" then we say far too much. No material possession is eternal. After all, in Christ we look , as did Abraham, for a better land. Canaan was only a visible token of the eternal commonwealth on which his hopes were set. Canaan was not to be the true rest of God for His people (Heb. 11:9-10; 4:8-9). With this in mind, we best understand *forever* as "an indefinitely long season."

Besides, in Joshua 21:43, 45, we read that all that Jehovah had promised—even relating to the land—"came to pass." In Nehemiah 9:7-8, in a public confession of sin made by the Levites, concerning God's giving of the land of the Canaanite to Israel, we read, " ... and hast performed thy words." *Performed* means *carried out* or *fulfilled*.

All this being said, there are still passages in the prophets that dispensationalism claims teach a restoration of the Jews to Palestine.

They point to Isaiah 11:11 where we read that "the Lord will set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people." The "first time" which is implied here, is referred to in verse 16: the deliverance from Egypt. In verse 11, Isaiah refers to the gathering of God's elect from among the Jews and then in verse 12 to the gathering of the elect from among the Gentiles. Isaiah 11 speaks of the gathering of the fulness of the church through the deliverance brought about by God's Son, the Messiah.

It may be said that what we read in verse 11 was foreshadowed in the return to the land following the Babylonian Captivity. Canaan would be a picture of that eternal rest which they would know *only* through Christ. The same point is made in a similar passage, Isaiah 14:1.

Likewise, Jeremiah 23:5-8 does not have to be understood as referring to a restoration of Israel as a nation. True, "and they shall dwell in their own land" can be seen again in the light of the restoration after the Babylonian Captivity. However, there is more: it is related to the "Righteous Branch," or the Redeemer. Thus a physical thing, the land, becomes an expression by which Israel could understand something of Jehovah's loving kindness, just as the Temple, the sacrifices and the priesthood also pictured divine mercy.

It is not necessary, nor even possible, to look for a restoration of Israel as a nation on the basis of these texts.

Salvation of the Jews

Now we turn to the second basic approach to the question: "But what of the Jews?" That, you remember, envisions the salvation of the Jews. The classic text on this subject is Romans 11:25-26 where we read: "For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved. . . ."

Exactly what is being said?

Paul is writing about salvation in Romans 4-11. After explaining the wonder of God's grace in salvation he turns to Israel (chapter 9). He is deeply concerned about the salvation of his own people, his "kinsmen according to the flesh (9:3)." He knows that God's way is sovereign and that God is not unrighteous in His election and reprobation. Further, he knows that Israel is guilty of rejecting Christ. Yet God has not rejected all of Israel (11:1ff). He still has His people from among Israel. And while those who are of physical Israel and not spiritual Israel have been cut off, through faith, elect Gentiles are grafted in so that the fulness of the church is brought in, for God has His church in every nation.

Now come the words of Romans 11:25 and 26. The truth that God works in this way is called a "mystery." A mystery in Scripture has to do with salvation and therefore, something which must be revealed. What is this mystery? 1) "A hardening in part hath befallen Israel." Not all the Jews are hardened, but many are. 2) "Until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." "The fulness of the Gentiles" refers to the sum of God's elect from among the Gentiles who are to be brought in. 3) This hardening is *until* the fulness of the Gentiles are brought in. Here we again meet that little word *until*. Does this verse mean that the Jews are hardened while the Gentiles believe, and then will cease to be hardened so that "all Israel shall be saved"? If that were so the verse 26 would begin *and then* all Israel shall be saved, rather than *and so*. Instead, this verse simply means that while some Jews are hardened, others are not. The word *until* could also be translated *while*. As they hear the gospel and have it applied by the Holy Spirit the elect Jews believe, just as the elect from among the Gentiles believe in the same way.

"And so all Israel shall be saved (11:26)," or *"so, in this manner, thus* all Israel shall be saved."

There are three basic ways the words *all Israel* are understood by believers. 1) "All Israel" is the nation of Israel. 2) "All Israel" is the church, Jew and Gentile alike. 3) "All Israel" is the elect from among the Jews.

The first of these views is to be rejected because certainly not all who are of Israel are really Israel (9:6). Besides the *and so* means *thus*. This, therefore, cannot be understood as a future event.

The second view would be perfectly in order theologically since elsewhere in Scripture the church is called Israel (Gal. 6:16). Nevertheless, in this section a distinction is constantly being made between Israel and Gentiles. In these verses we see "all Israel," versus "the fulness of the Gentiles."

This of course, leaves the last view as the only possible one.

What of the Jews? There is no special sign of Christ's coming related to the Jews *except* that when "all Israel"—all the elect from among Israel will have been brought it, along with all the elect from the Gentiles, then shall the fulness of the church have come in and Christ will come again. In this sense God is not finished with the Jews. From their number are those who are yet to believe.

Until then, as we live in this present age—the Millennium—the gospel must go forth and God's Spirit will work. As the Word is preached, the church—all Israel *and* the fulness of the Gentiles—will be brought in. ●

Will Mid-America Reformed Seminary Do Better than Harvard and Yale?

Timothy Monsma

Introduction

Harvard University, the oldest and most prestigious university iu our country, was founded by the Puritans in 1636. The purpose for its founding was stated as follows:

> "After God had carried us safe to New England, and we had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our liveli-hood, rear'd convenient places for Gods worship, and setled the Civill Government: One of the next things we longer for, and looked after was to advance *Learning* and puputuate it to Posterity; dreading to leave an illirerate Ministry to the Churches, when our present Ministers shall lie in the Dust." (*American Higher Education, A Documentary History, p.6*)

It is evident that the need for a well trained and godly Ministry was uppermost in the minds of the founders of Harvard. In the seventeenth century, most graduates of Harvard became ministers and school teachers, serving the Puritan or Congregational communities of New England.

Nonetheless, when Yale University was founded in 1701 as "The Collegiate School of Connecticut, some in Massachusetts supported a new "school of the prophets" as they called it, because of liberalizing trends already present at Harvard.

The hope that Yale would prove more conservative than Harvard was short-lived. Forty-four years after Yale was founded, the well known evangelist, George Whitefield wrote concerning both Harvard and Yale: "As for the Universities, I believe it may be said, Their Light is now become Darkness, Darkness that may be felt" (*op cit*, p. 64).

Neither Harvard nor Yale were able to defend the churches of New England from unitarianism, the teaching that denies the divine trinity, and consequently also denies the deity of Christ. Unitarianism worked a great desolation in the churches of New England following the American Revolutionary War.

Still another theological school, Andover Seminary, was fonnded at Andover, Mass., in 1808, in order to do the job that the existing schools were failing to do.

Today both Harvard and Yale have departments of religion. They both are well known as academically sound and prestigious universities. But the approach followed in the average classroom is wholly secular and the religious departments of these two universities are strongholds of Liberal Christianity.

I had the privilege of spending three weeks in New England last May. One gets the impression that most New Englanders are almost embarrassed by their religious roots and wish to remove themselves from these roots as far as possible. Even the church founded by the Pilgrims in Plymouth, Massachusetts, became unitarian and a rival church has arisen to carry on with trinitarian teachings.

What has happened in New England illustrates that which has occured in the history of the Church again and again. Colleges and seminaries that were founded to advance the faith, in a short time began to attack the faith from within, and all the good intentions of the founders went down the drain.

An Important Question

This fact poses a very important question! How do we know that Mid-America Reformed Seminary will be any different from other schools of higher learning that have been founded in the past? What guarantee do we have that we at Mid-America can keep the faith? People have already asked that question of me. Some have even made of it a rhetorical question, for they believe that there is no way that an educational institution can remain true to the vision of its founders.

Can we keep the faith? That's an important question and I hope to address that question this evening.

What is it that causes institutions of higher learning, both colleges and seminaries, to forsake the faith? I have no absolute answer to that question, but I know at least part of the difficulty, and that is this: Any Christian College or Seminary must handle non-theological knowledge as well as theological knowledge. Or, in other words, they must deal with knowledge about the world as well as knowledge about God. Somehow Christian scholars must unite this worldly knowledge with their theological knowledge, *and that's not easy*.

In the days before tractors became common, farmers and others worked with horses and mules. I am told that it was easier to get two horses to work together or two mules to work together, than to get a horse and mule to pull one wagon or to pull one plow, side by side. Yet it could be done if a farmer knew his animals and worked with them patiently.

Combining knowledge from the world with knowledge from the Bible is like trying to get a horse

and a mule to work together. It can be done but the person in charge must know what he's doing. There is always a danger that knowledge from the world will crowd out theological knowledge, until the theological knowledge is twisted out of shape or shrunk so much that it becomes useless.

That possibility is clear in the case of a college, where from the world, knowledge in the form of history, philosophy, physical science, social science, and other subjects must be taught. But is that danger also present in a seminary? Why not forget the knowledge gained by studying the world around you and study only the Bible in seminary?

It would be nice if we could do that but there is no way that we can. For example, there are certain Greek words found only once in the New Testament. If we are to know what these words mean, we must study secular Greek literature to find their meaning. The same goes for Hebrew. We must not only study the Greek and Hebrew languages; we must also study the culture of Biblical times in order better to understand the Biblical message.

Can the findings of physical science also guide our interpretation of Scripture? Science tells us that the world is round. We keep that knowledge in the back of our minds as we read the Bible, don't we? But what about our reading of the first 3 chapters of Genesis? Where does science enter here? You see how quickly the questions get to be rather sticky.

Take another area. In seminary we teach apologetics, the defense of the faith against unbelief. But apologetics is dependent on philosophy, which is taught in college. Systematic theology has also been influenced by philosophy, and we had better know what that influence is. We come to ethics. How are God's people daily to live lives pleasing to their Lord? That's a very earthy question isn't it? One needs knowledge of contemporary life in order to answer it properly.

In short, there is no way that a seminary can be a monastery that seals itself off from the world and studies only the English version of the Bible. Seminary professors as college professors, are *teamsters* who have to get the horse of biblical knowledge and the mule of secular knowlege to pull together at the same time in one direction. And I'm suggesting to you this evening that it is precisely at this point that many seminaries begin to go astray.

Seminaries can easily go astray if their professors do not establish the proper relationship between general knowledge and sacred knowledge, or in other words, the proper relationship between information that is gathered from the world and information that is given to us in the Bible. The Bible itself defines the ideal relationship in two important passages, to which we now turn.

Transformation

In Romans 12:2, the Apostle Paul speaks of *transformation*. He says, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (RSV). Romans 12 begins the ethical section of the book of Romans. When Paul penned these words Christian behavior was uppermost in his mind. But here, as everywhere, doctrine and ethics, theory and practice, go together. You can't really separate them.

"Do not be conformed to this world," says Paul. Has it ever occured to you that seminaries are very much tempted to conform to this world? They are sometimes under pressure from both state and federal governments to conform to certain standards. (This, by the way, was one of the problems already faced by Harvard in the 17th century. In its case the colonial government of Massachusetts and the imperial government of the British Empire gave cause for worry.) Seminaries can also be pressured by accrediting agencies to set up programs or appoint professors that they otherwise would not set up or appoint. Seminaries are also pressured by their own students. Prospective students ask, Does this school have academic respectability? Existing students demand a sound academic program and are often less concerned about the spiritual quality of that program. Seminaries felt the need to appoint professors who have advanced degrees, and this need may unduly influence their choice.

If a professor does not have an advanced degree, he is encouraged to get one. This is a problem especially for Christian colleges. Christian professors go to secular universities to get their degrees and then are expected to know how to teach in a Christian way. It takes people of exceptional character to do that and do it well. Even on the seminary level, the choice of conservative seminaries offering the doctorate is very limited. There is no automatic assurance that one who goes for an advanced degree will hold to the same conservative position when he has completed his studies, that he did when he began.

Seminaries and seminary professors are under constant temptation to conform to the world. Aside from the matters I have just mentioned, virtually every seminary and every seminary professor has a desire for recognition. We like to be known as scholars, as leaders in our field, as people to be reckoned with. This desire for recognition, though legitimate in itself, can easily pervert one's vision and twist his understanding, so that the fort of conservative Reformed Christianity he intended to defend, he abandons in favor of views that appear to be more easily defended.

This can be illustrated in our approach to the Bible. It is well-known that seminaries and entire denominations begin to go astray when Christians begin to chip away at the authority of the Bible as God's infallible revelation to man. Princeton Professor L. A. Loetscher has nicely documented that process in his book, *The Broadening Church*.

Why then do Christian leaders even begin the process of chipping away at the Bible? They will often describe it for you in terms of "academic respectability" or "mental honesty." Often when you pry a bit, you will find a desire for acceptance by those whose approach is more liberal than theirs. And as they pursue this goal of acceptance, the need for Christian, child-like faith is lost from sight.

"Be not conformed to this world." That's a directive that we who do theology must ever keep in mind. The Christian world view bears an antithetical relationship to the secular or compromising world view that many in Western academic circles have adopted. There is much that we can and must learn from non-theological

scholarship, but we must always be vigilant lest the tail of non-theological scholarship begin to wag the dog of biblical study.

"Be not conformed," says Paul, "But be transformed by the renewing of your mind." That word "transform" mean literally, "Change the form," Some Christians have read this and concluded that their style of living must be so different from the world around them that people can pick them out a mile away. The Amish, for example, reject modern means of transportation, and dress very simply. They still travel by horse and buggy, and dress in black and white.

But when Paul wrote, "Be transformed," it was not his intention that Christians reject the outward trappings of their culture. Paul said, "But be transformed *by the renewal of your mind.*" All change in outward behavior must be preceded by an inward change that permeates all our thinking. In Jesus Christ we have new hearts, but we also have new minds. Many Christians believe that their heart belongs to the Lord but their minds belong to the secular world. They live in a dualistic world in which their heart is Christian but their mind is secular. They shuttle back and forth from one world to the other, and while in the secular world they accept uncritically many of the conclusions of secularly oriented scholarship.

Even in seminary training we can fall into this trap. I believe that we have done just that when we define preaching in terms of contemporary communication theory rather than in terms given to us in the Scriptures. In the area of pastoral counseling, we may choose to use the secular psychology to solve spiritual problems, but when we have chosen to do this we are living in a dualistic world that shuts out the Bible from solving the practical problems of everyday life.

When our minds have been born again or renewed, we will know what truly Christian ethics is. We will be able, in the words of Paul, to "prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Transformation and a knowledge of how it takes place — this will help a seminary to chart its course and stay on the course it has charted. But transformation alone is not enough. There are many plants which when they stop growing, start dying. The monks and nuns of the Middle Ages who fled the world around them in order to live behind the walls of monasteries and cloisters, thought that they were drawing closer to the Lord. But often they neglected His commands to be of service out in the world, and they soon discovered that when they entered the monastery there was no way that they could leave their sinful hearts at the door.

As we seek to be transformed by God's powerful work in our hearts and minds, our goal is not a small community of Christians that is isolated from the world. If this were our goal, we would be advocating a sort of Protestant monasticism and we would have lost the power of the gospel to touch and redeem every aspect of life in this sinstricken world.

Propagation

Paul advocates transformation. But he also advocates propagation. He does this very clearly in I Corinthians 10:5, where we read: "We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ."

Paul makes clear in this passage that Christians must never be content with a rear-guard defensive action that seeks to build the walls high enough so that the enemy cannot get in. He makes clear that the "laager mentality" that draws up the wagons in a circle because this is the best defensive position when one is under attack is not the normal Christian outlook. We must rather press the attack on the enemy.

When Joshua captured the city of Jericho the city itself was destroyed and all those living in it, except for Rahab and her family. But the gold and silver and the vessels of bronze and iron were put into God's house to be of service to Him. In the Christian encounter with the world there are some ideas that must be destroyed because they are flatly opposed to God's Kingdom. But there are others that can be taken captive and put to the Master's use.

Paul makes clear that some ideas are to be destroyed when he says, "We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God." Let us look at some modern examples. The Puritan churches of New England were an easy mark for divergent teaching because of their loose denominational structure. But during the 17th and 18th centuries they also did battle with a wave of rationalism that swept in from Europe. Rationalism makes man's reason the final judge of what is true. Rationalism crowds out faith and cannot live with an infallible Bible. Christians ought to expose and destroy rationalism wherever it seeks to govern Christian thought.

Here's another example of an idea that must be exorcised by Christian theologians. Ever since the days of Immanuel Kant, Western Society has tended to divide life into two great compartments: the religious and the secular. Not only that, Western Society in general has caused the religious side of life to shrink and the secular side to expand. Such compartmentalization is an unbiblical approach and Reformed Christians particularly ought to oppose it with all their strength. We must tear it down wherever we can.

A third idea follows from the second: Many Americans now believe in ethics determined by court decision. If the courts sanction homosexual practice, it must be O.K. If the courts do not punish adultery or sexual perversion, there is nothing wrong with it. If the courts allow abortion, it's permissible. The move to legalize euthanasia is already gathering steam and who knows what might be next. Laws for human behavior are no longer given by a God in heaven, but by the United States Supreme Court which has power to declare even those laws backed by the majority of the people to be null and void, if these laws don't happen to coincide with the pagan world view of those who sit on the bench. Here is a stronghold that Christians must destroy if at all possible. As I said earlier, there is an antithetical relationship between Christian thought and pagan thought, and we gain nothing—in fact we lose profoundly—if we try to blurr the distinctions between these two systems.

Taking Captives

The idea of propagation is pressed by Paul in still another way in II Corinthians 10:5. He says, "And take every thought captive to obey Christ." When you take captives in war you don't kill them. You take them with you and sometimes you use them to help you win the

victory, as the American Air Force did with certain Japanese captives who willingly cooperated after they were prisoners.

Paul, of course, is not talking about people but ideas. He has his eyes on the horizon. He is carrying out a cosmic struggle with the forces of evil in the world. He says in I Corinthians 10:3,4: "For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds."

Christians cannot simply withdraw from the society in which they live and permit it, as the common expression goes, "to go to the dogs." They must take captive all that which can be redeemed; they must turn it around and put it to use in the service of the King. Some have said that we must seek to establish a Christian counter-culture, but the term "subculture" would be a better term. The Amish have established a counter-culture because they have rejected much of the education and the technology of contemporary society. That's not our intention. We intend to be in the world but not of the world. For that reason the term "sub-culture" is a better term.

In this connection the Dutch missiologist, J.H. Bavinck, uses the Latin term *possessio* to describe a Christian's relationship to the world around him. *Possessio* means "to take possession" and has been described by Bavinck as follows: "Christ . . . fills each thing, each word, and each practice with a new meaning and gives it a new direction" *(Introduction to the Science of Missions,* p. 179).

Here is an example of how this might work in practice. We know that there is a great deal of sex and violence on television, not to mention the gross materialism of many of the ads. We could react to this by saying: TV must be destroyed. We will begin by tossing out all the TV sets we have in our homes. Furthermore we will bend every effort to close down as many television stations as we can.

But there is another way. We can recognize that the evil of television does not lie in the technology of television, but the way in which it is used. We can take advantage of the fact that cablevision has made it possible for alternative broadeasts to find their way into the home. Not broadcasts that preach at people day after day, but broadcasts that analyze the news from a Christian perspective, broadcasts that use drama as an art form that provides wholesome entertainment whether the themes are religious or secular. Rather than destroying or attempting to destroy this primary method of communication in America today, we must capture as much of it as we can and make it obedient to Christ.

For those who say that this is too much to expect, I would like to remind you that when Christian schools were founded, some said that it couldn't be done. Nonetheless people with vision stuck to their guns and insisted not in applying some cosmetics to a system they couldn't control, but in making the schools their captive in order that they might serve the living God. We must continue to make captives for the Lord in every area of society today.

At Mid-America Reformed Seminary we are training ministers of the gospel. It is important that church officers do not leave their teaching and preaching ministry in order to be immersed in political activism, social welfare, or business ventures. At the same time we must know what is going on in the world and we must encourage church leaders to give instruction to God's people regarding their behavior in the midst of a culture that does not recognize the supremacy of Christ.

Paul does not say "Take *some* thoughts captive to obey Christ." He does not say, "Take *religious* thoughts captive." He says that his aim is to "take *every* thought captive to obey Christ." And that ought to be our goal as well. We ought to destroy that which is diametrically opposed to the gospel, and that which is not, we ought to cleanse, to baptize, and to incorporate into our own system in order that it may serve that system. In this way, we will not simply defend the faith; we will propagate the faith. We need transformation; we also need propagation, that the knowledge of the Lord may cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, that all whom He has chosen to everlasting life may begin to enjoy this life while it is still the day of grace.

Conclusion

Harvard was founded to train ministers of the Gospel during the 17th century. Yale was founded, partly to make up for problems at Harvard, at the beginning of the 18th century. Andover was founded to make up for problems at both Harvard and Yale, at the beginning of the 19th century. Gordon-Conwell Seminary was founded also in New England during the 20th century in order to carry on an evangelical tradition that the other schools had abandoned.

But even Gordon-Conwell is not having an easy time of it. According to a recent report in *Christianity Today* a Gordon-Conwell professor has recently resigned under pressure because of his views on Scripture. And so the struggle goes on. It is not an easy struggle. The problems are complex. But our God did not call us to spend our time on this earth lying in a bed of roses. He rather calls us to put on the full armor of God and do battle with the forces of evil wherever they might be found. Rest assured that our efforts will not be in vain, for Jesus has assured us in John 16: 33: "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Will Mid-America Reformed Seminary do better than Harvard and Yale? When it comes to size and prestige, these are large and influential Ivy League schools, and even the attempt to compare Mid-America with one of them is presumptuous. But when it comes to a robust, Reformed, evangelical, view of Scripture and its application to contemporary society, I trust that Mid-America Reformed Seminary will do much better than Harvard and Yale.

Will she continue to do better as the years go by, or will she also go the way of so many other schools? That depends at least in part on whether her professors take seriously what Paul says in Romans 12:2 about transformation and in I Corinthians 10:5 about propagation. Pray for us, brothers and sisters in the Lord, that the word of God may run and abound and that this school may serve its purpose for many generations to come. ©

(This is Dr. Monsma's convocation address Aug. 31, 1983 at Sheldon, Iowa. The school of which he is the academic dean is at Orange City, Iowa.)

For Time and Eternity

Jack M. Gray

"The thrill of victory and agony of defeat." How ABC's Wide World of Sports has added that expression to the English language! It is also a good description of where we have been going. We began with the thrill of victory—victory in Christ when we have a Christ-centered courtship. We learned the thrill for those who meet God's ideal for dating. Then we also looked at the agony of those who struggle with the mistakes of the past. Now we come to the conclusion—back to the thrill of victory. The victory is in Christ Jesus our Lord; the victory is that of a marriage centered in Him. Today's title, "For Time and Eternity," reflects the teaching of God's word that marriage can be a pinnacle human experience of this life, and it is the way God prepares us to celebrate forever with Him the eternal marriage feast of the Lamb and His bride, the church. In marriage we have the Bible's most beautiful expression of what God's love is like, and in marriage we truly have a "foretaste of our eternal home." Christian marriage is the thrill of great victory.

Bible Teaching

Usually when we think of marriage passages we first think of Ephesians 5:22-33. That is a beautiful passage on marriage. Another excellent passage is Colossians 3:18-20. Here Paul states the teaching on marriage briefly and pointedly. There is no mistaking what he has in mind. Besides, it is easy to memorize and to carry with you each day of your life.

Heavenly-Mindedness

The whole idea with which Paul begins this chapter is that we should set our minds on the things that are above where Christ is seated on the right hand of God. What a thrilling thought! If our minds and hearts are truly set on that, then we will see all of life in the proper light. If our minds and our hearts are set in heaven at the right hand of God, if we live each hour as if we were living for eternity—which we are!—then how true that this marriage advice is for both time and eternity. Yet the eternity dimension comes first, for finally everything that we are is shaped by the eternity beyond us. With that background, Paul proceeds to give some short, practical advice about marriage and the home.

Notice the three paragraphs that precede the commands about marriage. First, Paul tells us what we should put aside. That is true of all Christians, married or single. In these verses Paul describes the life of the world which we are to shun. Then in the next two paragraphs Paul tells us what we are to do. Notice those commands: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Then later, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." In this context of Christian living, Paul sets the ideal of the Christian home. In the Christian home those things are first learned. Now that Paul has set the context of his comments about marriage, he is ready to make those commands specific.

Submission ... in the Lord

"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." In our age, that hardly sounds like reasonable advice; nor did it in Paul's day. The Greek Stoics said that they should endure everything, and marriage was often seen as "endurance" as the wife submitted to the unreasonable demands of her husband. That advice had failed. It had failed to bring them the kind of relationship that Paul described in the opening 17 verses of the chapter, and failed to bring them the foretaste of the eternal home. But Paul went a step further, "As is fitting in the Lord." Now the submission is not seen as blind obedience, as in Greek Stoicism, but obedience that arises out of a mutual commitment to Jesus Christ.

This submission is in the context of each partner's allegiance to Jesus Christ and each partner's desire to make their marriage here on earth a picture of the eternal feast with God.

Living in the age of women's liberation, it is difficult for us to recapture that concept of submission that was so clear to St. Paul. Perhaps it is easiest seen in the creation order. When we go back to Genesis 2 we notice two remarkable things about the creation of Eve. First, she was created last. In God's creation pattern He had moved from the simple to the complex, from the basic to the more advanced. This was the progressive pattern of creation. In that pattern Eve was created after Adam making her a crown of creation. We still see that today—women live longer, are able often to cope better—they still reflect something of that final eptiome of God's creation.

The second thing that we see is that she is a "help meet for Adam." That was her role—help her husband. As a pinnacle of God's creation pattern she is to be the helper who assists God's man to function as he ought. The old adage that behind every great man there is a great woman goes right back to God's pattern in creation. That is the kind of submission that Paul has in mind here—a correct understanding of "help," of submission in the Christian sense of the word, there is the basis for a solid and happy marriage, the kind that truly pictures the love of God and prepares the partners for their eternal relationship with Christ, the great Bridegroom.

Demand of Love

"Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them." Again our minds drift back across the centuries to the creation. We saw in "The Carriage of Marriage" what Adam's ecstatic reaction was when he first saw Eve. To this Paul adds a warning, "Do not be harsh with them." Apparently, as Paul looked at the marriages in Colossae he saw that a most common error was that men were harsh with their wives. How typical of modern American society! We have more battered wives than we have ever had before. It has gone beyond "harsh" to horrible. Why is that?

It is easy to say that is the result of sin in the world. Of course, that is true. But there is more to it than that. You must remember that God made woman to be a "help meet" for man. The man needs that. When the wife no longer is in that supportive role, then the husband loses his own emotional balance and begins to strike out at the wife and possibly the children. Battered wives come from families in which the husband does not understand his role as leader, or is unable to exercise it because the wife does not allow herself to be submissive. Of course, there are exceptions to that pattern, but the prevailing reason for harsh husbands in Colossae and today is the failure of husband and/or wife to function in the God-assigned role.

It is also clear that a husband's love for his wife must be expressed in the context of all the things Paul has said about Christian living—the don'ts of verses 5-11, and the do's of verses 12-17. Those verses define what love is. In the intimate relationship of husband and wife, in the daily living together as a couple, their Christianity can come to clearest expression—but it must always do so in the context of God's creation order.

Children

Every Christian couple that is able to have children, ought to have children. Marriage is not only for convenience, mutual pleasure, or to have a life-long companion. The Bible never tells a couple how many children they should have or how they should plan their family, but it does teach that Christians who marry in the Lord should plan to have children. This is part of the covenantal character of marriage. This is why Paul also speaks of children in the context of the marriage.

"Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged." Children, you are commanded to obey your parents because it pleases the Lord. If you are living the kind of life that Paul describes in this chapter, then you will obey your parents. If your parents ask you to do something, you may ask, "Why?" Sometimes parents say, "Because I told you to." Paul says that is not the reason you do it. You do it because God asks you to obey them. When you hear your mother's voice say, "Clean your room," God says, "Clean your room." When you hear your father's voice say, "You must be home at midnight tonight," God says "You must be home at midnight." Remember, you intend to be spending eternity with the God who is giving these commands through our parents. That is an awesome teaching of the Bible. That is what Paul taught the children and teenagers of Colossae.

Parental Responsibility

There is more. Just as husbands may not be harsh with their wives, they may not embitter their children. While it is true that when children and teenagers hear a command from their parents it is really a command from God, it is also true that God wants parents to give no command that He also would not give. If parents expect their children to obey then because God is speaking through them, then parents must speak like God. That too is an awesome responsibility, one we parents cannot take lightly. When we speak the voice of God, when our children obey us because in our voice they hear the voice of God, then we truly have the beautiful Christian relationship that Paul describes in those opening verses.

It is a continual struggle in our society to have this kind of Christian marriage. It requires effort every day. It takes constant reminders of what God Himself established at creation as the pattern for marriage. Yet the rewards of such an effort are enormous. How great that in our own homes we can be preparing for eternal life in the family of God. How great that what we do as parents is like the voice of God Himself. What a stunning truth that is!

That truth can be lived only when our homes are truly Christian, when each day is centered in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then we do not avoid the agony of defeat because we are so good, but we enjoy the thrill of victory because Christ is so great. None of us today can boast of marriage that is great because the victory is not in ourselves, but in Christ Jesus our Lord. How I yearn for that to more fully be true in my own home, and how I pray for that in yours!

Rev. Jack M. Gray is the pastor of the Fairlawn Christian Reformed Church of Whitinsville, Massachusetts.

Faith of Our Fathers

Cornelis Pronk

Faith of our fathers! living still,
In spite of dungeon, fire and sword.
O how our hearts beat high with joy,
Whene'er we hear that glorious Word!
Faith of our fathers, holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death.

THAT's a beautiful hymn, isn't it? But do you know what that faith of our fathers is? I'm afraid that many who lustily sing this beautiful, soul-stirring hymn, don't have the slightest idea what our fathers stood for; what doctrines they preached, lived, and died for. It is my contention that the majority of our evangelical, conservative churches are not preaching the Faith of our fathers. Of course, some of the things our fathers taught continue to be preached. But still I maintain that there is today a wide-spread softening down, or even a denial of the basic truths which formed the heart of the message of the Reformers and Puritans and their successors.

THAT this is so can be readily seen by comparing their sermons with those of today. You will discover, not only a difference in style (that, of course, is not important), but also a difference in content, in message.

OUR fathers not only preached about the divine inspiration of the Bible, the Trinity, the need of personal salvation, and the reality of heaven and hell, but they also taught man's total depravity, God's sovereignty in election, a limited atonement, the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and the perseverance of the saints. These things formed the heart of the message of such giants as Luther, Calvin, Knox, Edwards, Whitefield, Spurgeon, and many others.

I'm not saying that every Christian in the past held to the so-called five points of Calvinism, but that it was the position of mainline historic Protestantism, there can be no doubt.

IF you don't believe what I say, just read the great Confessions of Faith drawn up by the major Protestant denominations. Are you a Baptist? Read the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, or the New Hampshire Confession. Are you Reformed? Look up your Belgic Confession or the Canons of Dort. And my Presbyterian friends, I would refer you to the Westminister Confession. And you Episcopalians will find these things in the Thirty-Nine Articles. If you take the trouble to read these Confessions you will discover what the Faith of your fathers was. And if you then compare that faith with what is preached today from the average pulpit, you can't help but see the difference. In many cases you will find it is the exact opposite.

WE are told today that man, far from being unable to repent and believe, is quite capable of doing so by the power of his own free will. Election is either not mentioned at all, or it is given a totally unscriptural meaning by insisting e.g., that God elects those who elect themselves. Christ is presented as having died for everyone in general, but no one in particular. Regeneration is made to depend on man's decision and the evidence of being a Christian is that we have made a decision for Christ.

BUT this is not the Gospel the apostles preached, or the Reformers and Puritans. Dr. J.I. Packer says:

> "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 itself 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? We would suggest that 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. . . . Whereas the chief aim of the old gospel was to teach men to worship God, the concern of the new seems limited to making them feel better."

Packer goes on to explain that from this change of emphasis has sprung a change of content. The Biblical message has been re-formulated to supposedly make it more helpful to man. Accordingly, the old doctrines which stressed man's depravity, God's sovereign election, etc., are not preached. These doctrines wouldn't be helpful because they tend to drive sinners to despair, and this must be avoided at all cost. That such despair might possibly be a good thing is not even considered; it is taken for granted that it is bad because it is so shattering to man's self-esteem.

SO the new gospel appeals to men as if they had all the ability to receive Christ at any time. God's love has become a kind of general willingness to receive any who will but turn and trust. The Holy Spirit is depicted, not as sovereignly active in drawing sinners to Christ, but as waiting in quiet impotence at the door of our hearts until we are good enough to let Him in.

THIS is the message of the new gospel. But as Packer says: "this set of twisted half-truths is something other than the biblical gospel. The Bible is against us when we preach in this way; and the fact that such preaching has become almost standard practice among us only shows how urgent it is that we should review this matter."

ONE thing is plain to all Christians, preachers and lay workers—the church has lost its hold upon the masses of the people.

BUT what is the solution? According to many, our first duty is to reach the people. We must get the Gospel across to them, using all modern methods such as campaigns, advertisements, new translations of Scripture, films, etc. But such proposals, I'm afraid, have arisen out of a wrong view of the nature of our problem and an under-estimation of its seriousness. Our need is a much more fundamental one than the need of new methods. The real cause of our spiritual impotence is the absence of the powerful operations of the Holy Spirit. But it is to be feared that many are too active to stop and recognize this. There are some indeed who realize that our need is a spiritual one, and they recommend as a remedy more prayer. But they forget that there are times when God is angry with the prayers of His people and refuses to hear them. Just ponder such passages as Psalm 80:4 and Isaiah 59:2.

WHAT is the true cause of our low spiritual condition? I think Luther had the answer when he said: "While doctrine flourishes, everything in the church flourishes also."

And therefore, when we find that everything in the church is not flourishing, is it not high time to look first to our doctrine? Nothing brings down God's wrath more than when we twist His holy Word to suit the taste of modern man. Scripture itself warns us many times to take heed unto doctrine (I Tim. 4:16). Yet, today it is taken for granted that all's well with our doctines, but that we don't live up to them.

NOW I agree that there is always a great danger that we don't practice what we preach. It is possible to have very sound views of the Truth, and yet to be strangers to its power. On the other hand, I believe there is also an inseparable connection between the views we hold and the life we lead. Doctrine *does* influence our outlook on life and our conduct too. But this applies to false as well as true doctrine. False doctrine also has its impact on the life of a church and the individual member of that church. Therefore, the greatest need of the hour is to rediscover the doctrines of the Bible as these were preached by the Apostles, Reformers and Puritans.

I am aware that to emphasize doctrine is not popular today. Doctrine generally leads to controversy and who wants that? Yet, as Bishop Ryle says: "There are times in which controversy is a positive duty. Peace is an excellent thing, but it can be bought too dear. Unity is a mighty blessing, but not at the expense of truth." It was this conviction, namely that God's Truth must be proclaimed regardless of what man thinks, that led Charles Haddon Spurgeon to say in a sermon:

> The old truth that Calvin preached, that Chrysostom preached, that Paul preached, is the truth that I must preach today, or else be a liar to my conscience and my God. I cannot shape the truth. I know of no such thing as the paring off the rough edges of doctrine. John Knox's gospel is my gospel. That which thundered through Scotland must thunder through England again. The great mass of our preachers are not sound in the way they preach the faith of our fathers. Election is not mentioned once in the year in many a pulpit; final perseverance is kept back; the great things of God's law are forgotten, and a kind of mongrel mixture of Arminianism and Calvinism is the great delight of the present age.
>
> And hence the Lord has forsaken many of His tabernacles, and left the house of His Convenant; and He will leave it till again the trumpet gives a certain sound. For wherever there is not the gospel we shall find 'Ichabod' written upon the church walls ere long. The old truth of the Convenanters, the old truth of the Puritans, the old truth of the Apostles, is the only truth that will stand the test of time, and never needs to be altered to suit a wicked and ungodly generation.

Don't you think it is high time we returned to the Faith of our fathers? Is it not time we sought the Lord, confessing that we have departed from that faith? Should we not be on our knees daily, pleading with God to return to His Church again in power and blessing?

Preachers, *that* faith should be believed and preached by you.

Church members, you must insist that your ministers expound *that* faith. It is living still, and we need it in our day as our fathers needed it in their day; and our children will need it tomorrow.

O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years. Lead Thy Church back to the Faith of our fathers. ●

Rev. Cornelis Pronk is the pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. This material was delivered as a radio address, of which copies may be obtained by writing the Banner of Truth Radio Broadcast, 950 Bali Ave. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503.

The Parables of Our Lord

Henry Vander Karn

THE SEED GROWING IN SECRET.

Lesson 3 **Mark 4:26-29**

This parable is found only in Mark's gospel. It teaches a very important truth and is not to be confused with several other parables which Jesus taught concerning seed which produces a harvest.

In distinction from the parable of the sower, the emphasis does not fall on the sower nor the seed. The sower has cast his seed on the earth in the past. The Lord now deals with the present germination and growth of this seed until a harvest is attained.

There are some who conclude that this parable shows a farmer who neglects the seed which he has cast into the earth. This is not true. There is no neglect—the story teaches the necessity of infinite patience until the laws of God have run their course.

How the Kingdom Comes

Jesus introduces this parable by telling the people who were listening to Him: "So is the kingdom of God." None of the other parables which our Lord uttered are introduced in quite this way. This parable will, therefore, give a picture of a certain aspect of the kingdom of God. This is the kingdom in which they are interested, and they had better listen carefully *how* this kingdom manifests itself. This kingdom of our God has been in the process of coming for a long time. They, and we, had better listen closely to this parable so that we may realize the laws which operate in the coming of that kingdom. God had already given His promise in the garden of Eden and reiterated that promise in various ways throughout the Old Testament—and still it has not come! Jesus now comes on the scene. They want to make Him King! God the Father had worked carefully throughout the ages. They will now experience that the Son works in the same way. He sowed the seed in tears while He was here on earth. The time will come when He will gather the sheaves with rejoicing (Psalm 126:6). But, others must not seek to set the time for Him. He tells those who are healed to keep quiet. He counsels those who would make Him a king now, to desist. He will set the time, but, the harvest will come!

The Growing Seed

The picture which is drawn in this parable is of a farmer who has sown the seed and then does nothing to it until harvest. Instead, he sleeps and rises night and day (night mentioned before day in true oriental fashion) and goes about other work but does not bother about the seed which he has sown. We must also bear in mind that the growing season in Palestine is short. Little field work, such as cultivating, had to be done. Most crops were ready in four months. He does not leave that field alone because he is not interested in it; he realizes that when he has prepared the seed-bed, has sown the seed, nothing more can be done because the earth brings

forth of itself—automatically, says the text. He does not know how it does it—this is the law of God laid down in nature! If he should seek to find out if the seed is sprouting; or if he should seek to find out if the plant could grow faster; he would kill the plant! He must leave it alone in order to obtain the harvest which he desires!

Indeed, he doesn't know how the earth is able to bring forth by itself. He is standing before the mystery of life! The seed, though it looks dead, has the germ of life within it. In the earth this germ of life is stirred, it comes to greater expression. If he disturbs the small shoot which comes out of the kernel of seed, he kills it. If, later, it doesn't grow fast enough to suit him, he pulls it up, he kills it. He knows he must leave it alone. In James 5:7 the Apostle teaches the same thing. The seed is in its rightful place. The former and latter rains must go over it. It has to receive the proper amount of sunshine. Then, and then only will a harvest be assured.

As the laws of nature operate, so do those of the kingdom of God, says Jesus. He has caused the seed to be sown. He has spoken the word Himself in the very beginning. Later He sent the prophets to declare His word. His truth was made known in all the symbolism found in Israel. Now He is speaking through His Son. He will still send Apostles and others to proclaim the word—to sow the seed. The harvest will come! If God works, who can stop that work? The Spirit of God has worked silently throughout the ages causing the seed to germinate, to grow, to give promise of a great harvest to come. The earth brings forth of itself! Time is going to bring forth of itself when it has received the life-containing word and it is brought into its proper environment! Israel had looked for the harvest for at least 6000 years. Another 2000 have now been added. Peter must tell the people to whom he is writing that God is not slack concerning His promises (2 Peter 3:6). They are growing very impatient. Paul warns his readers that it is not so important who does the sowing, or who does the watering, but the most important Person is the One who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:7)!

Stages of Growth

The growth of the grain comes in stages. First is the blade, then the ear then the full grown grain in the ear. When it is in the stage of the blade, for example, it is not ready to be harvested. Of course, everyone knows these things in the sphere of nature—but so is also the kingdom of God! There is even a growing under ground before it appears above ground. Much time is required before the seed has died and the plant has gone through all its stages and finally the time for harvest has come. The people of Jesus' day were impatient. Why could they not have Him as king now? Even the apostles thought the time was ripe for the establishment of the kingdom when He was risen from the dead. Each time the answer is: Wait. Wait upon the Lord. He seems to work very slowly, but He does very thorough work.

The Harvest

Everything in this short parable points to the harvest. It is indeed a marvel how seed will grow in the earth, but that is not the end of the matter. The important thing is always, the harvest. On this earth there may be a crop failure so that there is not a harvest. That, however, is excluded in Christ's teaching in this parable. In the kingdom of God the harvest is assured. The work which the Triune God has performed from the earliest day to the end of the world will not be without result. He will bring in His harvest. He shall come with joy bringing the sheaves into His storehouse. When the end of time has come and all the "full grain in the ear" is ripe, He will send His sickle into the harvest. The time of harvest is very important. A day too early there are too many unripe kernels. A day too late too many kernels have already fallen on the ground. Timing is so important! The great "Harvester" knows the exact time. The day of harvest has come, the day for which everyone waited, the day for which all the labors were performed, that day has come. Then straightway He sends the sickle. Now there is no time to be lost. This is the day of days. The harvest is sure and it is bountiful!

Is this parable given to teach us how the laws of God operate in nature? Jesus is not giving a course of instruction in agriculture to the people who are here listening to Him. He is concerned that they shall learn to understand the nature of the kingdom of God. He uses various illustrations to make clear to them how the kingdom of God operates and how it will come. Let this people, and all who hear this parable later, realize that He is here instructing the church of Jesus Christ in some fundamental principles. They must be taught that the principles which are normal in the natural realm are also true in the kingdom of God.

Faithful, Hopeful Sowing

Throughout the ages, and especially in our time, the church is concerned with methods of approaching people in order to bring them into the kingdom of God. One method is discarded because the results are not what were expected and others are adopted which will fail in a short time. This is not a question of methodology. It is a question of faithfulness! Sow the seed. Sow it faithfully! Leave the growth to God! God doesn't count so much as weigh! Quality is always preferable to quantity! It must become clear to the church that she is only able to do so much and must then wait for God to finish the action begun. The church has her task. That task has been spelled out very clearly in the Bible. She must preach the word. She must administer the sacraments. She must exercise discipline. She must "mother" those who have come to the faith. Then she must be willing to wait patiently for the time of God to come. This is the way a harvest is assured!

Not only is this true regarding the church, this is also true regarding individuals. A parent must sow the word in the life of his child. Everything must be done which is humanly possible for that seed to come into an environment which is conducive to bringing forth a harvest. However, the time comes when there is no more to be done in the sense that life and growth are not in the hands of the parent. He must now leave it in the hands of God. As the farmer prays daily for a harvest, so the parent also prays daily for the fructifying power of the Spirit of God. But, he must not seek to do the work of God!

This takes an enormous amount of patience—much more than we usually have. However, we may not

go contrary to the laws which obtain in the kingdom of God. Many errors have been made in this area during the years. We must listen carefully to the master instructor, Jesus Christ, when He teaches us by means of parables concerning the nature of the kingdom of God. Much of it is out of our hands! We would like to have it in our hands, but He builds His kingdom. Only in His way is a harvest assured!

Questions for discussion:

1. Would you say that this parable agrees with the words of the prophet Zechariah (4:6) that it is not by power nor by might? Is that the way the kingdom comes?
2. What is the task of the church? Does the church attempt things today which do not belong to her mandate? Is this harmless or dangerous? Explain.
3. A parent would like to see how far the Spirit's work has progressed in his child. Is this wrong?
4. What happens to our view of the covenant on the basis of the teaching of this parable? When it is said that, "A child of so many prayers cannot be lost," is this true?
5. Is patience more difficult in the realm of the kingdom than in the realm of nature?

THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

Lesson 4 Matt. 18:23-35

This parable is of an entirely different kind than the two we have discussed. This must be borne in mind to come to the proper interpretation. In the parable of the sower, our Lord gave His own interpretation and emphasized almost every part of the parable. The parable of the seed growing in secret is also virtually self-explanatory. The kingdom of God is like that which you find in nature, says Jesus. This parable is more easily misunderstood. The king forgave—and then revoked his forgiveness! Can this ever be charged to God? Such questions rise again and again. In order to safeguard ourselves from wrong and strange interpretations we must listen carefully to the things which were said just before this parable was spoken.

The Setting

Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem for the last time. He is going the way to the cross. There is a debate going on among the disciples as to who will be the greatest in the kingdom of Jesus. This is not a proper question when the cross will be the central point of the kingdom! To show that their question really has no proper place, Jesus sets a little child before them and tells them that they must become as little children to enter His kingdom.

He then teaches them forgiveness. Everything possible is to be done in order that there "be nothing between" brethren. His children are always to be ready to forgive. Peter then asks his famous question: How often shall I forgive my brother? Seven times? Jesus tells him he must forgive seventy times seven times. It is in this context that He now speaks this parable.

Forgiveness is not common to this world. It is based on love. This world doesn't really know what love is. God is love, and the world doesn't know God! There is indeed a love shown among the people of this world toward those to whom they are closely related, a mother's toward her child, for example. But, when the Bible speaks of loving enemies, the world doesn't understand what it is speaking about. If someone sins against me—it isn't a question of *how often* I will forgive him, but rather, whether I will forgive him! That unforgiving worldly attitude is still far too prevalent among God's people. This parable will instruct regarding love.

The Debtor

Our Savior is the Master Instructor by means of parables. This parable is a work of art. Jesus draws the contrasts effectively and beautifully. A king is contrasted with a servant, and a huge debt with a paltry sum. The teaching becomes clear when one carefully follows Jesus's reasoning. The king mentioned is the typical oriental despot. He has power over life and death and holds the life and welfare of his subjects in his hand. As king he will also be able to sit in judgment in the last part of the parable. The amount this servant owes is stupendous. It is always foolish to try to set a present-day value on these sums named in Scripture because the values are so changeable. But, 10,000 talents, whether of silver or of gold is one of the largest sums used in Scripture. The Book of Revelation speaks of 10,000 times 10,000. A talent was about the largest piece of money used. Only 29 talents of gold were used in the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 38:24). The costly temple which Solomon built used 3000 talents of gold and seven thousand talents of silver (I Chron. 29:4-5). This indicates clearly that the debt owed by this servant was indeed overwhelming.

The question naturally comes to mind: Who can be so deeply indebted to another? Only a "servant" who has high position so that he can collect taxes which belong to the king. This king would now reckon with his servants! This man is brought to him—he doesn't come willingly because he knows how great the debt is and is afraid. The king orders him and his family and his belongings to be sold. This is, of course, not to pay up the enormous sum owed because it would not begin to approximate that figure. But, it is punishment for debt! Such punishment was common in that day, especially among the gentiles. Even in Israel people were sold because of debts they owed, but the laws of Israel forbade them to become slaves and on the year of jubilee they were to be set free. Nothing unusual takes place here.

However, when this servant realizes what is happening, he falls to his knees, beseeches his lord for time and promises to pay the entire debt. This would be an impossibility. No matter how hard the man might work, no matter how many years would be given him, such a debt simply becomes *larger* with time because of the interest! There is no possibility that he will be able to keep this promise.

The King's Mercy

The king realizes this. He now goes far beyond what his servant had asked. He doesn't ask repayment but

forgives that entire debt! It is as though it had never been. It is erased! It is marked paid in full! That is forgiveness! We speak about this matter too lightly. He forgives out of his *compassion*. There is nothing in the servant to move the king toward forgiveness. He is kind and is moved with compassion. He is merciful.

Having experienced this forgiveness on the part of the king, this servant should also be filled with a spirit of compassion. He should now exhibit a forgiving spirit to anyone who would owe him anything. Surely, one who has received mercy should be able to show mercy. Surely, one who has been forgiven much will love much. But, this man is the *exception*.

The Unforgiving Servant

This servant now finds a fellow-servant. Notice, here the relationship is entirely different than between the other two. There it was a king—servant relationship here it is servant-servant. While his own debt was almost incalculable, his fellow servant owes him only 100 shillings—a very small sum. No man owes another man a great sum! Instead of being moved with compassion toward this poor man he takes him by the throat. He chokes him and demands immediate payment. How is it possible? This poor man using the same words he himself had used to the king, asks for time and promises that he will pay him all. This is true! He will be able to do it! But, he has no patience with him and casts him in prison.

The other servants of the king have come to know what has transpired. News travels fast. Especially such astounding news that the king has forgiven him ten thousand talents. Now they see what this man has done to his fellow-servant. We do not read that they are angry, but that they are exceeding sorry! They let the king know what has happened.

The Judgment

Once more the man is brought into the presence of the king. But, now the situation is quite different. Now he is greeted by the words, "Thou wicked servant!" It was required of him that he should show some of the spirit of the king to his fellow servant. He did the opposite! As a result, he is now cast into prison, into the inner prison. He is given over to the tormentors. This is the only time this expression is used in Scripture. The catholic church has seen in this a reference to purgatory. He is not only kept in ward, he is severely punished. This is to go on until he has paid all. That will never happen!

There are many pitfalls in the interpretation of this parable. We must realize that every part may not be explained. Even though Jesus says at the close that His heavenly Father will do as this king has done, it does not mean that He will ever revoke the forgiveness He has once granted His children. The other servants bring the deeds of this servant to the attention of the king. They represent no one. No one has to bring anything to the attention of our God.

The main point of this parable is to teach men to forgive one another, which has been made possible through the forgiveness they have received of their God. Must I forgive my brother seven times? This is the answer.

The Forgiven Must Forgive

The answer is given in a graphic way in order that we realize how important it is that we have a forgiving spirit. Christ taught us to pray: "And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." Seemingly this needs elaboration. Jesus now teaches in unmistakable language how important it is. If we do not forgive one another, God will not forgive us.

But, is this the picture of the child of God? Is the child of God like this servant who refuses to forgive a fellow-servant? Do we act as though we are not the recipients of grace? We may resemble David when he had sinned against Bathsheba and her husband. He was indeed a child of God, but, when Nathan told him the parable of the rich man with many sheep and the poor man with one lamb which the rich man stole; David said: Such a man is worthy of death! Where was his demonstration of the grace which he had received? That grace must be renewed to us again every day. If it is not, we look more like the world than the people of God.

The picture of the debt which our Lord gives us in this parable is also telling. There are those who believe that our debt cannot be great seeing we are the children of God. These understand neither the law nor themselves. Our debt is enormous! Our sins are more than we can count. "Ten thousand talents" does not overstate our indebtedness. At the same time, the amount owed us is small. It is scarcely worth mentioning. It is spoken of in the parable as "a hundred shillings." We think others owe us so much! This makes it difficult for us to forgive. This parable puts things in proper perspective.

Let no one be amazed at the enormity of his debt to his God or the smallness of the debt which his fellowman owes him; let us always stand amazed at the mercy and grace which has forgiven us all of our debt! We cannot pay. We need not pay. He paid it for us! Let us then forgive seventy times seven times. Long before we have reached 490 we will have lost count and will keep on forgiving. If we do not forgive those who sin against us, the God and Father of Jesus Christ will not forgive us! If we take this parable to heart it will bring a reformation in the church!

Questions for discussion:

1. Can we ever understand a part of the word of God without taking the context into consideration? What would happen to the explanation of this parable if we did not emphasize the prior teaching in this chapter?
2. Why is forgiveness difficult for a person to practice? What do you think of the Christianity of a person who refuses to speak to his fellow-Christian?
3. How great is our natural debt before God? What happens to our theology if we consider our indebtedness smaller than it really is? Do some do this?
4. Is our asking for forgiveness often the real desire of the soul or is it more often the usual way of concluding our prayers? Do you think we would be able to forgive others more easily if we felt the need for forgiveness?
5. Can people jeopardize their eternal welfare by their lack of love and consideration for fellow believers?

Removing the Ancient Landmark

Simon Viss

"Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set" (Proverbs 22:28).

The words of the text mean, literally, that if you have a piece of land and there is a corner post that marks the boundary line between your and your neighbor's property, you may not move it.

To the west of our home, on a clear day one can see a conspicuous peak, Mount Diablo. It was first observed by Spanish explorers in 1772, but for 500 years before that the Indians had been using it as a landmark. In 1851 it was selected as the initial point for land surveys of Northern California and Nevada. Base and meridian lines originated at that peak and it is a reference point in all property deeds. Mount Diablo is an important landmark.

Using "landmark" as a figure of speech, we mean by it a fundamental principle. In general, the landmark for the Christian is the Bible. Although we may speak of secondary landmarks, such as the doctrine of the covenant, in the broadest sense, the Bible is our landmark.

The text says, "Remove not the ancient landmark." Of course, one couldn't actually remove this landmark, but one can abandon or ignore it, and many are doing that. Therefore this subject is an important one in our time.

ARE WE IN DANGER?

Are we in danger of removing the ancient landmark which our fathers have set? Yes, that danger has always existed and is present today. Recall some facts of history. Read the second chapter of the book of Judges. The families of Israel occupied their assigned possessions. No doubt every plot of ground had its landmark. Joshua had died and the elders of Israel who had seen the mighty works of Jehovah were gone. As a new generation arose, the people forsook their covenant God and served false gods! The same thing happened again and again. It happened in the New Testament church. At the time John's gospel was written, a false religion threatened the church. We read about Demas who forsook the faith and went to Thessalonica. Paul wrote to Timothy, "But the Spirit saith expressly that in the latter times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (I Tim. 4:18).

The voice of history speaks to us! Our thoughts turn to the Reformation, especially at this season. Then too the Church had forsaken the landmark. But the Bible was again discovered. It disclosed that salvation is by grace through faith without works. Did the church remain steadfast on that landmark after the Reformation? No, the church again drifted from the landmark and succumbed to rationalism. Throughout the world, in country after country, we see evidence of current departure from the landmark. Consider the Netherlands, from which many of our forefathers came. The Reformed churches there long stood firmly and solidly on the Biblical landmark. Christian principles, like leaven permeated various facets of society—labor, politics and education. Then there was a drift from the landmark, slow at first but ever gaining momentum. If you want to know how far the churches there have drifted from the landmark, ask some of your friends who may have visited there recently. The same thing has happened and is happening in our United States. In 1924, in the large Presbyterian Church a document known as the Auburn Affirmation, was signed by some 1300 ministers. This document affirmed that belief in such doctrines as the virgin birth, the miracles and the physical resurrection of Jesus, were not essential to salvation. More importantly, it stated, in effect, that the infallibility of Scripture was not the ultimate landmark. A great church had departed from the landmark.

Can It Happen To Us?

Is it possible for the Christian Reformed Church to follow the same course? Do we see signs that indicate that we are beginning to forsake that landmark? I do not like to call these facts to your attention, but they are of public record. The changes have not come overnight. Thirty or forty years ago a protest was made to the denomination's synod that a prominent man on the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary, publically stated that he did not believe that Eve was formed from the rib of Adam. The protest urged that this man should not serve on the Board of Trustees, but nothing came of it. Some professors of Calvin College do not hesitate to espouse theories of creation, contrary to what we find in the Book of Genesis. Several years ago, a minister expressed his views in writing about the so-called contradictions in the first three Gospels.

Because he couldn't reconcile these differences he concluded that there were errors in the Bible. Though these may be somewhat isolated instances of departure from the landmark they are nevertheless reasons for concern.

It is one thing for individuals to have these divergent views of Scripture, but it is quite another matter when a church takes an official stand that opens the door to divergent and questionable views of the Bible which are a departure from the church's historical position. I mentioned the Auburn Affirmation. This constituted the official position of the Presbyterian Church USA. It was a departure from the landmark. The result was tragic as that church went down hill fast. It reminds one of a Biblical example. Although the Old Testament Church before the reign of Ahab was shot through with idolatry, when Ahab, with his wife Jezebel, took the throne, Baal worship officially replaced Jehovah worship and apostacy soon reached a new low. Elijah struggled valiantly to stem this tide.

So far, nothing in our church has happened comparable to what happened in the Presbyterian Church. Thank God for that. But I fear the ominous direction of the church's course.

Some years ago Synod approved a document known as Report 44, which was intended to clarify our stand on the Bible. Although many good things are found in Report 44, in dealing with the first chapters of Genesis, it opens the door to different interpretations. The consequences of this appeared in later synod cases. A number of years ago, a man who questioned whether the serpent spoke to Eve was admitted to the ministry although at the resurrection of Jesus, we read that there was a great earthquake, this man also questioned whether this was a real earthquake. It seems that he thought that it might have been some sort of "inner earthquake."

Two years ago another man applying for candidacy in our church revealed his doubts about the opening chapters of Genesis. He wouldn't answer unequivocally whether Adam was a historical person, gave ambiguous responses to questions about whether there was a real serpent that spoke, etc. Synod turned him down. Although a number of people were disappointed, we think Synod did right. But it must be pointed out that the majority of the Board of Trustees and the majority of the faculty of the Seminary recommended that this man be declared a candidate.

It is important to observe that some of our church leaders contended that "within the framework of Report 44" this man could be accepted. The approval of Report 44 has indicated a change of direction, or, as the saying goes, been a "straw in the wind." In it I see a drift away from the landmark. The full impact of this official statement of the position of the church is yet to be felt. The soundness of a local church will not long remain at a higher level than the position taken by its Synod. The adage that water finds its own level is applicable here too. If a member of a local church denies the factuality of parts of the opening chapters of Genesis and then if the consistory seeking to maintain that factuality appeals to Synod, it will lose out because Synod has taken a stand that can be interpreted in different ways. Thus the appeal process is largely vitiated because of the stand a Synod has taken.

Something else has developed as a result of this hazy view of Scripture. It is alleged that the Bible is culturally conditioned, or time conditioned. We are told by some that one must consider the times in which the Bible was written. People believed certain things then, but in this enlightened age we now believe differently. People had a certain lifestyle then, but times have changed. We must adjust to present conditions and lifestyles. We must fit the Bible into our present mold. Such arguments raise the question, "Is the Bible as landmark still the touchstone of truth?" Regarding, for example, the issue of women in office, we have been influenced by the women's liberation movement. Even though there isn't a single example in the Old or the New Testament of a woman who was officially appointed to an office, we have opened the door to that and are trying to open it wider. The creation ordinance regarding the relationship of the man to the woman is being ignored or denied.

Let me use a final example that indicates that we are drifting from the landmark. Have you noticed the vast difference in our attitude toward what we used to call worldliness? A recent synod's stand on the dance was hailed by some people as meaning, "Hurrah! Now we can dance!" Let's look beyond the dance at the principle that underlies this issue, for the dance is more of an effect than a cause. What is the cause? We have lost sight of the biblical teaching of the "antithesis," that is the God-ordained cleavage between the children of light and the children of darkness. I said the antithesis was God-ordained. It originated in Paradise when God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed...." The seed of the woman, in Christ, has been redeemed. The seed of the serpent remains in darkness. The idea of the antithesis stems from the doctrine of sin and grace. God has maintained the antithesis from the beginning and He will maintain it until the end, but Satan has always tried to wipe out the line of demarkation. When did God decide to destroy the old world? When the "sons of God" began to marry the "daughters of men." Our adoption of various practices of the world is evidence that we are losing sight of the importance of the antithesis. Listen to what Paul says about the lifestyle of the believer, " ... we once walked according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience; among whom we also all once lived in the lusts of the flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest—but God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, (by grace have ye been saved) and raised us up with him and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:2-6). Many more references could be given to indicate that the child of God, rather than copying the world, has risen above the things of the world. We are in the world, but not of the world.

In 1928, the Synod took a position on three common forms of amusement: dancing, card playing and movies. Many, today, make a joke of these pronouncements. Instead of dismissing them, we ought to examine these pronouncements in relation to the Bible's doctrine of the antithesis. About card playing, let me say that many of us waste too much time playing cards. Many sound

reasons were given why we should avoid the movies, but today, reviews of movies are given in our periodicals. Some have reported that recommended movies are not only immoral, but convey an anti-Christian way of life. Have the movies improved over the last fifty years? Is the dance more acceptable today than fifty years ago? No. We have changed and become less conscious of the antithesis. We have lost our spiritual sensitivity. We have drifted from the landmark.

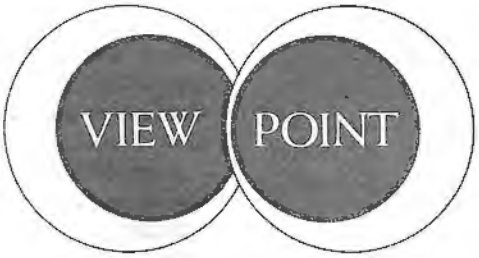
Have I painted a dark picture of the situation as we commemorate the Reformation? If the picture is dark, there can be light.

Earlier in this article I referred to Mount Diablo. In California, every acre of land, every section, every township is laid out from the lines that have their beginning in this peak. Mount Diablo can be compared to the Bible. There is something about Mount Diablo I haven't told you. Many years ago, when we were kids, there was a huge beacon light on top of this mountain peak. At night, even at a distance of 100 miles, you could see that light flash as it turned. Before the coming of radar and other sophisticated instruments it guided airplanes to a safe landing. That beacon light has disappeared long ago. But the light of God's Word still shines. It will never go out. It is a lamp unto our Feet and a light upon our pathway. That Word tells us of Jesus the True Light. Have no doubts about the landmark. Jesus didn't. He said, "It is written—it is written—it is written." He said, "The Scriptures cannot be broken." He said, "Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass away from the law until all things be accomplished."

Commemorating the Reformation (and the 125th anniversary of our church) is a time of thanksgiving and praise to God. It must also be a time of examination, confession and repentance. And it must be a time for a new resolve to let Scripture and Scripture alone be our landmark.

"Remove not the ancient landmark which thy fathers have set." ●

Note: This article by Rev. Simon Viss, a retired Christian Reformed minister at Ripon, California is from a Reformation Day sermon presented at the First Church on Oct. 24, 1982.



Heresy in the Marriage Form?

A Heresy Charge

The July 18, 1983 *Banner* features a special article by Dr. Louis A. Vos, professor of religion and theology at Calvin College, charging that the Christian Reformed churches' traditional marriage form (which is still permitted and widely used in the churches) teaches "heresy." One is a little surprised at such a charge appearing in and from quarters where that term is almost never used in our time. ("Heresy-hunting" is usually a reproach reserved for "conservatives.") What occasions this remarkable charge?

The occasion for it is found in the form's introduction in which we call to mind the institution, purpose, and obligations of the marriage state.

> The holy bond of marriage was instituted by God Himself at the very dawn of history. Making man in His own likeness, He endowed him with many blessings and gave him dominion over all things. Moreover, God said; *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.* Thereupon God created woman of man's own substance and brought her unto the man. *Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.*

Now it is observed that the summary in the marriage form quickly proceeds from Genesis 1 which in broad outline tells of the creation ending with that of man created in the image of God (vv. 26ff.) to Genesis 2:18 ff. which speaks of the creation of Eve and institution of marriage.

> The paragraph flows from the creation of man in the likeness of God to the creation of woman as a help meet for man and finally to the institutional statement of marriage. This sequence, in which woman is mentioned for the first time in the middle of the paragraph, *leaves the impression that she is not included* in the opening statements of the paragraph.
>
> This attempted harmonization of Genesis 1 with Genesis 2 likewise *leaves the impression that woman was not included in the Genesis 1 statement about likeness (image of God) and dominion* (italics mine).
>
> ... the heresy in this wedding form is that it does not give woman her biblical due. Its very opening and instructive paragraph belittles woman, excluding her from God's image and

from her call and responsibility to exercise dominion over the earth on God's behalf.

Is this Heresy?

What is a "heresy"? Webster defines it as, in the first place, "religious opinion opposed to the authorized doctrinal standards of any particular church, and tending to promote schism." The Biblical use of the word appears especially clearly in 2 Peter 1:19 - 2:2. After the classic statement about the inspiration of the Bible, "that no prophecy of the scripture is of private interpretation, for no prophecy ever came by the will of man; but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit," in conflict with that, we read of "false teachers, who . . . bring in destructive heresies." Lenski in his commentary on the passage observes that a "heresy" (from the Greek word meaning "to choose") "means a view, an opinion, a doctrine that one chooses for oneself, thereby separating oneself from the whole body. . . ." The question we now face is whether the old marriage form, as the article alleges, teaches a view that contradicts the teaching of the Bible. Does the old form deny that woman as well as man ("male and female," Gen. 1:27) was created in the image of God? Even the article does not claim that much. It only charges that by proceding from Genesis 1 to Genesis 2 it *"leaves the impression that she is not included."* In other words, in the charge of "heresy" the fact that the form *does not explicitly state this* is stretched into implying that *it denies* it! Has anyone in our circles ever claimed, on the basis of the wedding form, or otherwise, that women were not made "in the image of God"?

But is this failure of the old form to state explicitly that women as well as men were made in the "image of God," if not amounting to a "heresy," at least a weakness in it? That all depends on what the form is intended to do. Its aim was not to give a general survey of the doctrine of the "image of God," but to briefly "call to mind the institution, purpose, and obligations of the marriage state." That is much more fully developed in the details of Genesis 2 which speaks of Eve being created later and brought to Adam than in the summary statements of Genesis 1, and the form therefore proceeds at once from the first to the second chapter.

The writer admits that he had never thought of this sequence of the old form as a heresy until "male/female relationships in this current age—and the ongoing discussions of these relationships—have sensitized our reading of Scripture, helping us to see more clearly beyond the insights of the past to the Word of God for the present." It is plain that what is at most a weakness, inbalance or excessive abbreviation (usually not considered a fault in our time) has only become a "heresy" when viewed from the perspective of the current women's liberation movement.

Today's Real Heresy

We note that the article finds fault with the old form for its "attempt to harmonize the Genesis 1 creation account with that of Genesis 2." Someone might ask "What's wrong with that?" "Don't we always have to understand any statement in the light of its context?" "Hasn't it always been especially a principle of Reformed interpretation that we must use Scripture to interpret Scripture?" The writer does not explain his criticism. But we should observe that today the common-sense principle that we do not expect a man to contradict himself, and the Reformed principle that we do not approach the Bible expecting God to contradict Himself often have to give way to the "scholarly," "higher critical" approach that seeks to find or create contradictions everywhere in the Bible. On that principle Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are taken to be two contradictory accounts. Pursuing it, one may take Genesis 1 which speaks of woman (as well as man) as created "in the image of God" "to have dominion," as Divine revelation, but criticize or discard Genesis 2 (and with it Paul's citation of that account in 1 Tim. 2:13, "For Adam was first formed then Eve") as reflecting antiquated "cultural conditioning."

After condemning the old marriage form as heresy the article recommends the new form adopted by the 1979 synod as reflecting the new and better insights of our time, (while deploring that the old one is still tolerated). That new form plainly does reflect prejudices of the current women's liberation movement. As presented in 1977, although it contained a loose allusion to Ephesians 5, it had carefully eliminated the offensive, "Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (v. 22; *Acts* 1977, p. 407-8). Although after criticism from the churches, this note of "subjection" was introduced in the form as revised in 1979 (*Acts,* p. 368) in the explanation, the new form continued to be so intimidated by the woman's liberation movement that the vows to be made by bride and groom acknowledge no distinction whatever between the role of man and woman! Could any prejudice be more ridiculous (let alone heretical) than the one that currently would allow us to recognize no distinction between the sexes even in their marriage vows? Victorian prudishness was never carried to such lengths as this!

Some who follow the current feminist heresy (for it is a heresy when it opposes the Divinely created and revealed difference between the sexes) a bit more consistently, such as our old mother churches in the Netherlands, now condone homosexual relationships as well as homosexual "marriages." Others, some in the National Council of Churches, still more consistently, are rewriting the Bible to delete from it all "sexist" language. In such a version even the Lord's Prayer "Our Father," would have to go. Some, even more consistently, frankly detest the hopelessly "chauvinistic" religion of Christianity.* C.S. Lewis in his essay on "Priestesses in the Church" *(God in the Dock,* p. 238) aptly pointed out that in dealing with this drive to place women in office in the church we are not dealing with a question about their competence, but with a different kind of religion, one which exchanges divine revelation for the old paganism.

The charge being made is that our tradional wedding form teaches "heresy," a self-chosen opinion held in opposition to God's Word. The old form, whatever its weaknesses, does no such thing. While we may not be able to say or have to determine just how far the adherents of the current women's liberation movement among us follow that movement, it becomes increasingly obvious that movement wherever it comes into conflict with God's Word, reveals its hostility. No movement in today's church world is demonstrating itself to

be more obviously destructive to the unity and morale of our churches than this current feminist heresy. Are we going to have our opinions and practice determined by it or by God's Word? PDJ ●

**In this connection, it is interesting to observe a little news item in the June, 1983 Dutch magazine* Getrouw *that German Theologian Dr. Dorothee Solle, despite protest from within Germany because she denies the Diety of Christ, is being welcomed as a participant at the Vancouver World Council of Churches assembly as "representative of the feminist theology."*

Church Assemblies

At this time of the year many of our readers may be interested in a few developments in various denominations of our traditionally Reformed family of churches whose assemblies meet in summer.

Reformed Church in America

An especially conspicuous decision of the RCA's June General Synod was a stronger stand against abortion then any this body had previously taken. The action was taken against a rather strong effort to avert it by delaying tactics.

A comparable move by conservatives against the denomination's involvement in the World and National Councils of Churches was less successful. Those councils, as our readers know, have been getting a lot of adverse publicity because of their support and funding of communist guerrilla organizations. Eight of the denomination's forty-four classes had submitted overtures asking that membership in one or both councils be dropped. These efforts were defeated by over two-to-one majorities. Dr. Arie Brouwer who has been general secretary of the denomination is becoming deputy general secretary of the World Council of Churches. The denomination is also to look into joining the National Association of Evangelicals, despite that body's opposition to the other two councils.

A Philadelphia congregation, desiring to leave the denomination to join the new Presbyterian Church in America had its request denied.

Big Presbyterian Churches Merge

The (northern) United Presbyterian Church USA and the (southern) Presbyterian Church US officially merged in an atmosphere of celebration at their assembly meeting in Atlanta, after 122 years of separation first caused by the Civil War. The 890,000 member southern body is now absorbed by the 2.3 million member northern denomination to form a total of about 3.2 million members. Despite this imposing number, the *Presbyterian Journal* editor observed that "the new denomination is steadily losing members—the total now, after merger, is fewer members than the UPCUSA alone reported 15 years ago."

Although the assembly left incomplete many important decisions about the shape of the new organization, a clear indication of its (Liberal) temper was given by its early resounding support of abortion on demand and specifically of the U.S. Supreme Court's actions in defending it.

Presbyterian Church in America

The decade-old Presbyterian Church in America continues to experience growing pains as it seeks to recover a consciously Reformed church organization. From bitter experience many of its people had come to know the evils of denominations becoming heirarchical bureaucracies and to feel keenly the need to forestall such developments. At its general assemblies there has been opportunity for each congregation to be directly represented. The growth of the denomination to 805 congregations has accordingly produced some very large, expensive and unwieldy assemblies. The 11th such assembly, at Norfolk, Virginia, considered but rejected a recommendation to change to a delegated or representative arrangement which would result in a smaller and more deliberative body. Reacting against the all too common tendency of churches toward hierarchical clergy-control, the PCA has also sought to recognize and enlarge the role of elders (who were not ordained ministers). W. Jack Williamson, who was the first moderator of the PCA, observed that "We've watched the role of ruling elders continue to decline as our Assemblies have grown. In this Assembly there are fewer than 300 elders registered and more than 700 ministers." Rev. George Knight, according to the *Presbyterian Journal* report, observed that a delegated assembly would be the only way to preserve equality between the ministers and elders. The PCA assembly renewed its invitation to the Orthodox Presbyterians to join it.

Orthodox Presbyterians

The Orthodox Presbyterians at their 50th General Assembly in Philadelphia faced among other matters a proposal from their Foreign Missions Committee to allow a joint missionary effort with the Christian Reformed Church in the Middle East. Rev. Victor Atallah, an OPC missionary, is already partially employed by the CRC's Back-to-God Hour for radio follow-up work among Arabic-speaking people. Several commissioners opposed a more extensive joint mission venture, expressing their apprehensions about doctrinal laxity in various areas of the CRC. A decision on this

controversial matter was avoided when word arrived that CRC missions representatives had cancelled the proposal.

Missouri Lutherans

Christian News reported that "Conservatives made almost a complete sweep of elections" at the Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod held in St. Louis early in July, electing almost every nominee listed in their election guide. "The convention reaffirmed a conservative stand in almost every area of doctrine." Since the conflict in that denomination a few years ago in which the conservatives gained the upper hand, many of the most outspoken liberals have left it to form another denomination, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. That (liberal) organization is now about to become part of a larger New Lutheran Church formed by a merger of the liberal Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church expected to be completed by 1988.

World Council of Churches

Much attention is being focussed on the Sixth World Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Vancouver B.C. July 24 to August 10. Although some are claiming that this body is "becoming more conservative both religiously and politically," Dr. M.M. Reynolds is quoted in the July 18 *Christian News* as calling attention to official evidence that "exactly the opposite is true." Despite the Council Assembly's theme, "Jesus Christ, the Life of the World," its book, *The Feast of Life,* prepared for the assembly (pp. 8,9) states "From a Christian theological point of view it would be said that the Word of God is not confined to the church of Christ, but the Holy Spirit is active everywhere. The resonances of the Word are to be heard throughout the whole of creation, and across the wide spectrum of faith. In this growing encounter and mutual discovery between Christians and peoples of other faiths may be discerned again the first shoots of a springtime from God. If the future of the world lies in coming together, then women and men of faith should somehow lead the way. This is the context and the challenge of the Vancouver theme. It does not proclaim an exclusive Christ to the world, but states what Christians can offer in the human search for God's presence and purposes for the world."

In the program for the assembly various religions will be honored by featuring native Indian dances and presentations by a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Muslim and a Jew. Dr. Reynolds commented further that "Those who have carefully followed the World Council's theological statements and positions since its inception in 1948 know that it has become more radical, not more conservative. It is true that conservative, evangelical language is often found in various documents and reports but this is only 'window dressing' to deceive the uninformed." "Bible words like redemption, salvation and peace have been stolen from their spiritual settings and given secular, political connotations." "Every indication is that the World Council of Churches—the entire ecumenical movement is preparing the way for the actualization of the harlot church of the anti-christ."

As we take notice of these church developments around us, we may profitably bear in mind the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith (XXV, Of the Church, section V).

> The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall always be a church on earth to worship God according to his will. PDJ ●

News and Views

Elco H. Oostendorp

"THE HISTORIC SHIFT IN AMERICA'S LARGEST DENOMINATION" is the title of a long article in *Christianity Today* (8/5/83). The denomination referred to is the Southern Baptist Convention which has 14 million members, 36,000 congregations, 6,630 career home and foreign missionaries and baptized almost half a million people last year. It has six seminaries and 52 colleges. Its Publishing House and Sunday School Board has 1,500 employees. These are only some statistics among many given in the article. The Church has also grown from its original limits in the old South and become nation-wide, even into Canada. As in all denominations liberalism has made inroads, especially in the schools. But in the case of the SBC, efforts to turn the tide and put conservatives in key positions are increasingly successful. The article details the history of the past few years. Although in many ways a very democratic organization, the SBC gives much authority to the Convention President. Largely as the results of a prominent lay member's

REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.
4855 Starr St., S.E.
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49506

SECOND CLASS
POSTAGE PAID AT
GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

work, efforts to elect conservative presidents have been successful and these are slowly swinging the denomination back to its original confessional stand. An interesting statement of the author made parenthetically is, "It is a fact, however, that Southern Baptist churches, as all Protestant churches, tend to grow if they are conservative in doctrine, and tend not to grow if they are liberally inclined."

THE CHURCH IN CHINA is the subject of a news item in *Christianity Today* (8/5/83). It made me think of the way many good causes have been defeated by the tactic, "If you can't beat them, join them!" The officially recognized Three Self Patriotic Movement is the liaison between the government and Protestant churches. Its chairman, Bishop Ding Guanxun, has been travelling outside China asking Christians in other countries to recognize this movement as representative of between 2 and 3 million Chinese Christians. Other sources of information, however, put the number of Christians much higher, because many in the so-called "house churches" do not recognize the TSPM leadership. The article lists seven resolutions "aimed at implementing the (Communist) Party's policy of religious freedom." These resolutions seem rather designed to curtail the growth of Christianity and compromise its message than encourage it. This is especially apparent from the seventh resolution which reads: "All Christians are called to uphold the basic principles. These are (1) the socialist road, (2) the people's democratic dictatorship, (3) Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong thought and (4) the leadership of the Communist party."

MORE ON PREDESTINATION AND REPROBATION. In the *Outlook* for July, 1983, I called attention to an article in *The Reformed Journal* for February, 1983, by Thomas Talbott in which he attacked the Reformed doctrine of reprobation. This resulted in an interesting exchange of articles in subsequent issues. In the *Journal* for July, 1983, Dr. John Piper, pastor of the Bethlehem Baptist Church of Minneapolis, takes issue with Talbott's universalism in an article entitled "Universalism in Romans 9-11?" He gives a careful exegetical study of Paul's argument in these chapters and refers to his book *The Justification of God, An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23* (Baker Book House, 1983). It is very encouraging to have such a forthright defense of the position on the interpretation of this passage adopted in our Reformed Confessions advocated today when so many also in our circles question it.

LIBERATION THEOLOGY, AN EVALUATION is the title of a two-part series of articles in *The Reformed Journal* (June and July, 1983) by C. Rene Padilla, pastor at La Lucia Baptist Church in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In the first article he gives a survey of the movement known as liberation theology, which has become very popular especially in Latin America among both Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians. While he is sympathetic with these men in their concern for the terrible social conditions in these countries and their conviction that the Church has a message for the poor and oppressed, he shows in his second article that Liberation Theology does not have the answer, but rather tends to compromise the truth of the Gospel. His four points of criticism are: "1. Liberation Theology rightly emphasizes the importance of obedience (praxis) for an understanding of the truth, but is in danger of lapsing into mere pragmatism. 2. Liberation Theology rightly emphasizes the importance of the historical situation but it is in danger of succumbing to historical reductionism (i.e. letting the historical situation determine the message, E.H.O.). 3. Liberation theology has rightly emphasized the importance of the social sciences but it is in danger of becoming exclusively sociological. 4. Liberation theology has rightly emphasized the importance of recognizing the ideological conditioning of theology but it is in danger of reducing the gospel to an ideology." The danger is that Liberation Theology is unduly influenced by Marxist sociopolitical views.

TAX BENEFITS FOR SCHOOL COSTS RULED CONSTITUTIONAL. The Supreme Court has ruled in a 5 to 4 decision that a Minnesota law permitting parents to take an income tax deduction for tuition expenses for either public or private schools is constitutional. Justice William H. Rehnquist, writing for the majority, emphasized what he called the "facial neutrality" of the 28 year old law, that is, the fact that it does not distinguish between private and public or religious and secular schools. Supporters of the Reagan Administration's proposal for income tax credits on Federal taxes for private school tuition, now before Congress, said this decision helped their cause, but admitted there remain unsolved problems (Evangelical Newsletter 7/22/83).