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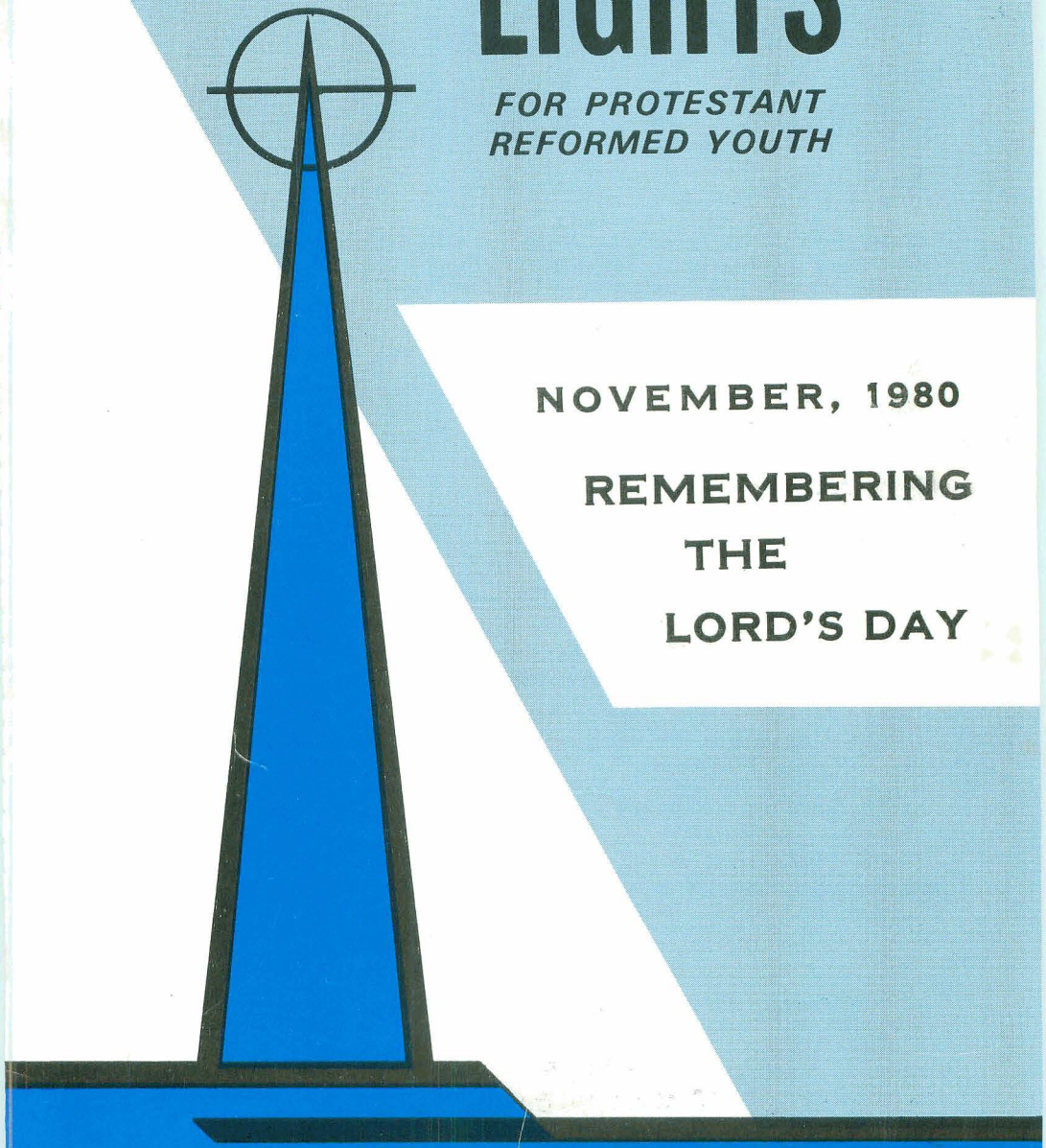
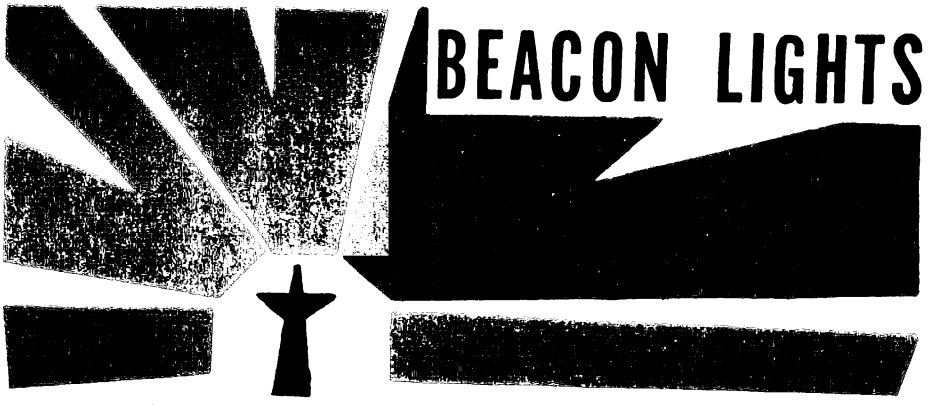


NOVEMBER, 1980

REMEMBERING THE LORD'S DAY



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c/o O. P. Bookshop
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All material for publication should be addressed to:
Dave Moelker 4625 Juleon S.W.
Grand Rapids, Mi 49504
News Editor: Linda Kaiser
3364 New Castle S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508
Michigan subscription dues to Grace Faber
4190 Burton S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506
Subscribers outside of Michigan please forward subscription dues to
Jan Dempsey
3519 Senora S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508

Forms 3579 should be returned to:
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EDITOR'S NOTES

Two short articles are printed in this issue to serve as an introduction to a series of articles from various Protestant Reformed teachers. In this series they plan to relate their views as to how they as Protestant Reformed teachers must present their subjects from a distinctively Reformed point of view. The first is taken from Covenant Christian High School's "The Crier" and is written by Mr. Vern Huber. The second is by Mr. Fred Hanko and is taken from the Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School's (Walker, Michigan) "Memo" of November 7, 1979.

Of special interest will be the article by Rev. Engelsma on Remembering the Lord's Day. This originated as a speech given by him to the Mr. and Mrs. Societies League meeting in First Church, Grand Rapids and it was also used in South Holland by Rev. Engelsma. In our day when increasingly the "holy day" is used for a "holiday" we may well profit from this interesting article.

In connection with the many attacks leveled against the Sabbath day the article "Signs of the Times" should be noted. As we near the end of the age we need to be reminded of our calling in the midst of the world. John Veldman is a member of our Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, Michigan.

1981 SINGSPIRATION SCHEDULE

February 15	Hope
April 19	Hudsonville
May 17	Faith
Summer	Pre-convention
September 20	Hope
November 22	Faith
December 20	Hudsonville

Editorial

A LETTER ABOUT TWO LETTERS

by John M. Faber

Dear Grandchildren of junior high and high school age,

There was once a young family whose father lived in a far country. From there he wrote two letters telling all about himself. That first letter they received was awfully hard to read; in fact, they couldn't decipher it all in some places. Some of the pages were so water-soaked that they had stuck together, and those that could be separated were still hard to read because the ink had run. Those pages that were not water-damaged were puzzling because they had suffered a revision that they did not understand. It was all so confusing that the family left the letter lying around for anyone to read.

Then they received another letter from their father which was very clear to read and understand. This letter mentioned the first letter and even explained the water-soaking it had suffered; and even explained the earlier revision it had undergone before the soaking. But the young family was so busy with their social life that they had forgotten the first letter and it had found its way into the village. The mail man, the milk man, the trash man all read it; and finally it fell into the hand of the school teacher. Naturally these snoopers had no real concern for the man who had written the letter and were not at all concerned about his reputation. So, many and varied opinions were offered about the absent man and his way of living that his reputation suffered shipwreck at the hand of the villagers, especially in the mind of the school teacher. But the great pity was that the family did not care enough about their father to try to learn as much as they could, and did nothing about the talk that was going on about him. You will agree, I'm sure, and say with me: "Shame on those lazy children who would allow their father's reputation to suffer at the hand of the village tradesmen."

Are you wondering why I am telling you about that lazy family? Because you and I are that family! We are the family of God. Our Father has written us and told all about Himself. That first letter He wrote was His creation. We still see it all about us in the starry heavens and in the earth upon which we so casually stroll. The second letter is the Bible—the Holy Scriptures in which He revealed Himself to us in His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Now we have read the second letter time and again. We can recite chapters of it. But the first letter we have allowed to lie about for the ridicule of the villagers, and have accepted their explanation of it. The strangers who have read it—and especially the school teachers—have interpreted it in many ways.

And (shame on us), we have accepted many of those interpretations.

You have probably heard a lecture by one of the National Park guides; you have read many articles in the newspapers full of theories, and wild guesses as they talk about "Nature," so called. Those lecturers and writers sit in judgment over the Biblical account of creation and miss the truth completely! Because "through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God" (Hebrews 11:3). Those writers cannot read the letter of nature correctly because they do not take into account the two important revisions thereof: the Adamic curse and the Flood.

Between them and us there is a great controversy about the age of the earth. The village school teacher took the case up with his university friend, the geologist. (That's the fellow who studies rock formations.) In turn he conferred with his friend, the conformist, (he is the fellow who claims all things happen at a constant rate), and they look at the Grand Canyon and figure how many years it would take for that river to cut its way through hard rock so many feet down. Our park guide will tell you how many million years that was, without a blush! Simple, is it not? A matter of arithmetic.

In all public high schools and colleges you will find a geologic time table. It is arranged in layers of rock, each with an impressive label on it. At one side you will find the names given to periods and ages; at the other side are pictured the different fossils found in each layer. They have conveniently named some layers, "old", and others "younger" according to their own invented time schedule based on their own invented theory of evolution! Now, if those smart fellows believed the Second Letter we have they would have to agree with us that all those rock layers (and their self designated fossil remains) all have their origin in the creation week!

You know their trickery, don't you? They say that life evolved from "lower" form to "higher" and still "higher" forms. So, if one finds remains of a "lower" form, the place where it is found is "older" than another place where a "higher" form is found. The *big* trouble with that theory is there is no place on earth where such a time-table-arrangement is found! In fact, in one place in England some fossilized tree trunks are piercing layers of rock in the *wrong order!* But there, you see, the theory of that dumb smart geologist is found false because it is based upon his own invented theory of evolution. If I were so dumb smart, I would give you a reason for the different skin colors of the human race. Like this: (1) A million years ago all people were black-skinned. (2) The next million they faded down to the red race, like the American Indians. (3) The next million years they all faded still more and became yellow, like the Chinese. (4) The next million years they all faded to their final state and became white. Conclusion: Wherever you find pictures of black people, the place where it is found is over three million years old. Where you find pictures of red Indians, it will be over two million years old. Pictures of yellow people will be over one million years old. And, of course, the places where you find pictures of white people will be in the past 999.999 years. Simple arithmetic. I have simply shut my eyes to the fact that I can see on t.v.

a picture of all colors of people living today in one crowd at a political mass meeting! That's dumb smart.

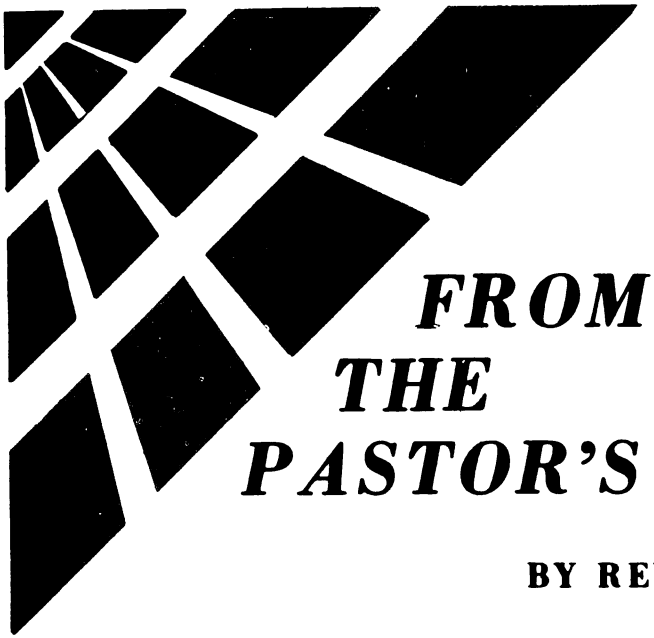
Now let's take a better look at that Second Letter. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Verse 31: "And God saw all that He had made and it was very good." Then of the first revision of that letter some scant days or weeks after we read in the third chapter: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake." That revision stood for some 1656 years when God destroyed that first letter almost completely. For forty days and nights the earth suffered unimaginable contortions and metamorphisms. For 150 days this globe suffered the rest of the catastrophy. In 150 days the huge amount of the flood waters must seek its own level by gravity. That is when the Niagara Gorge and the Grand Canyon were excavated—not in the millions of the Conformists' years—but in the 150 days when "the waters assuaged from off the face of the earth." Oh, it did not all go into the huge ocean basins at once! Between Cheyenne and Denver there is unmistakable evidence that a huge lake remained until the last few centuries. Don't believe the school teacher, who with the geologist and the conformist, and the paleontologist (that's the smart fellow who studies the fossil remains and comes up with such fantastic numbers as one hundred million years) who try to teach school children that those water-laid layers were laid down in successive millions of years! We say that they were laid down in one year—the year of the flood.

We believe that the Bible is not a textbook on geology, but whenever it speaks of knowledge belonging to that category it is reliable, and not merely a poetical or allegorical representation of the naive views current at the time of its writing. It is the inspired Word of God correct in every detail, also when dealing with natural phenomena.

So what does the study of Geology and Paleontology tell us? Does it tell us to be concerned with the extreme old age of the earth? Not at all. It very simply tells us that at one time in the recent history of the earth, there was a universal flood—the judgment of God upon a wicked world to destroy it; and the Second Letter tells us that He will do so again at the last day, only at that time He will do so with a purifying fire instead of the use of cleansing water. Matthew 24 and II Peter 3 gives us a terrifying description of that destruction. And the Apostle Peter warns us what manner of persons we should be. He speaks of the coming of that day as the coming of a thief in the night—unexpected. We do not know when it shall come. True, but neither do we know God's manner of count-down. The missle count-down goes: 10-9-8-7-etc., but God's count-down might go: decades, years, seasons, fortnights, weeks, days,—and the last count-down might be seconds! Don't you see that that method would bring the end closer and closer until events pile up upon one another?

Peter asks what manner of persons we ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness. Conversation is our walk, our talk, our testifying, our actions in the light of the coming day. You know the answer. My prayer is that all my grandchildren may have the grace so to walk as grandchildren of the light, and not as the children of the dark.

Love, Gramps



FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

BY REV. G. LUBBERS

Binding Our Parental Instruction Upon Our Hearts

"My son, keep the commandment of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother; bind them continually upon thy heart, tie them about thy neck" Proverbs 6:20, 21.

Timothy was a godly young man. His father was a Greek and his mother was a Jewess. However, he was well informed in the Scriptures. He had enjoyed the instruction and teaching of his grandmother, Lois, and of his mother, Eunice. (II Timothy 1:5).

Timothy, even as an evalist in the church, must not turn from the instruction of his childhood. He must always remember that he had known these Scriptures from his early childhood at his mother's knee; that these Scriptures are able to make him wise through the faith which is in Christ Jesus. For these holy Scriptures are God-spirited, and are profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work. (II Timothy 3:16, 17).

This is no mere mushy sentimentality which Paul pens here concerning Timothy's instruction by his maternal forbearers. It is a reiteration of the basic commandment, which children and young people hear directed to them each Sunday morning in the service, when the Decalogue is read, as the rule for a life of gratitude, and works of faith which are wrought by love. It is the commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother, that it may go well with you, and that you may live long on the earth." (Exodus 2:12). This presupposes a very serious relationship in which parents represent God in Christ to their children, as viceroys of God. Parents have the right and duty to rule, and place their children under the nurture and fear of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4b). It presupposes parents who take their calling seriously; parents who have something of the spirit and temper of Phinehaz in them, of a Phinehaz who stopped the terrible plague upon Israel at Peor, by entering in the tent of the adulterous prince of the house of Simeon, and the harlotrous Cozbi, a daughter of Zur, a Midianitish woman. (Numbers 25:6-9).

The text above our essay presupposes such a father and mother in Israel, who know that folly must not be perpetrated in Israel, and who will warn, teach, and discipline their children with the word and with the rod. Notice, that Solomon is directing his Proverbs to the sons in Israel, and not to the sons in the world. He is writing within the commonwealth of Israel, to whom are the promises and the covenants and the law-giving. Today this word is very much up-to-date in the church, in our own churches and others. And it is very much in line with our calling to instruct our sons and daughters and ourselves to keep, not only some, but all of God's commandments, out of faith and unto God's glory. These parents are our first instructors; parents they are who spoke vows that they would teach their children to the utmost of their ability, when the children were baptized into Christ and under the operation of the Holy Spirit, which Spirit is no less promised to the children of election than to the parents. Hence, also in the children, the fruits of faith, the fruits of election must be seen!

These fruits of election, fruits of redemption are our "part" in which to walk out of thankfulness; yes, out of thankfulness for such a great deliverance from sin and death, hell and destruction.

Yes, in all covenants there are "two parts"!

As those who have been washed and cleansed (I Corinthians 6:11) and justified in the blood of Jesus, we are to walk in our "part", in a new obedience. Yes, young people, we are "by God through baptism admonished of and obliged to a new obedience, namely, that we trust in him, and love him with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature and walk in a new and holy life." (Baptism Form, page 55, in Psalter).

This part which is ours by grace makes for a walk as a spiritual pilgrim, to walk as one of the saints in the earth, as the faithful church, whom God loves. Do you know this, my young reader? Must you say, as did a young boy, when I asked him this question said, "My father and mother never told me that I was

baptized?'' Does your father ever call attention to your ''part'' in the covenant of grace in Christ? Does he ever speak to you about the fact that he strives himself to walk in this ''part'' of the covenant; that he does not pretend to have already reached perfection, but that this is an intense reaching out all our life-time for the mark, the prize of the upward calling in Christ Jesus? (Phil. 3:13). Does your father tell you that the great incentive to reach perfection is the hope of seeing God in Christ in all His glory of grace? (I John 3:1-3). Does your father and your mother talk to you about the love which is perfected in us when we walk in our ''part'' of the covenant, in newness of life? And do they stress to you at every opportunity that only thus can you walk without ''fear'' of God's judgment, so that you may stand before God in that day? Do your parents stress that you must not merely be good moralists, who do not have God and His grace in mind at all, but that you must fight against sin in the free and good conscience of a justifying faith, and that only as *justified before God in the blood,* can you be a Christian, who fights against sin and Satan in this life, and who afterwards will reign with Christ over all things? Do they themselves walk as children of the light who make their calling and election sure, and who do not trifle with the grace of election? (Lord's Day 12, Ques. 32).

You will need to walk in the narrow way of justifying faith, and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit! Do not forsake the law of thy mother which she has inculcated into you when she cuddled you on her knees. Bind these things continually upon your heart.

O, God's people are in themselves so very weak. Left to themselves and their own strength, they cannot stand a moment. We all have daily to strive with the weakness of our faith, and evil lusts of our flesh. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to ''create a clean heart in us'' (Psalm 51:10). He must make us steadfast in working out our salvation with fear and trembling, according to His good pleasure. And for that we must constantly pray. We need this unwavering purpose in the battle against sin. That constancy is from God alone! O, the renewed confidence of persevering in the faith made David, after his lamentable fall with Bathsheba, committing adultery with her, and ordering her husband, Uriah, killed by the sword of the enemy, to *ask God* for a steadfast spirit, to walk in his ''part'' of the covenant of grace. And this renewed confidence made David, ''more careful and solicitous'' to continue in the ways of the Lord, which He has ordained, that, they who walk in them, may maintain an assurance of persevering.'' (Canons V, 4). David was afraid ''to fall into more grievous torments of conscience'' (C.V. 13 idem).

Yes, children of God, walk in your ''part'' of the covenant. Do not walk in them as if you were ''under law''. That is *denying* the covenant. That is trying to make the Cross of Christ of none effect. (Galatians 5:3, 4). But walk as those who are ''under grace''. You have the love of God shed abroad in your heart? You have the Spirit and are one of Christ's redeemed ones? You are not reprobate in your attitude? You do not talk about election, and yet trifle with the grace of election? Then walk in your ''part'' in the covenant and stay in the

instruction of your father, your mother, your elders and minister.

So easily one can begin to talk about "antinomism" when one tries to stem the tide of sin. Remember, antinomism is a *teaching,* a false *doctrine!* This must not be equated with the weakness of the saints, nor with the licentious lives of individuals who trifle with the grace of election, who live sinful and unthankful lives, and therefore, ought to be under Christian discipline. The *teaching* of the antinomists is: let us sin that grace may abound. Such was the teaching of the Jezebel woman in the church at Thyatira. It is the teaching that in order to taste of grace one must have "known the depths of Satan".

There is the sin of David. He was not an antinomist, but he was a weak saint, who loved the Lord! In this love he could not sin as do the wicked. God's seed remained in him (I John 3:9).

But how to account for David's sin? For Peter's sin? For mine? How to account for the grievous sins of the saints? Did they leave the ways of God, so that they are utterly fallen from grace? God forbid! Our fathers face this question and give the comforting and warningful answer,

> "Although the weakness of the flesh cannot prevail against the power of God, who confirms and preserves true believers in the state of grace, yet converts are not always so influenced and actuated by the Spirit of God, as not in some particular instances sinfully to diviate from the guidance of divine grace, so as not to be seduced by and comply with the lusts of the flesh; they must, therefore, be constant in watching and prayer, that they be led not into temptation. When these are neglected, they are not only liable to be drawn into great and heinous sins by Satan, the world and the flesh, but sometimes by the righteous permission of God actually fall into these sins" (Canons of Dort, V, 4).

Against such sins Proverbs warns. It warns against the sins of touching another man's wife, committing adultery with her. Yes, then we go after the wicked woman suddenly, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to correction in the stocks. Yes, then a dart strikes through our liver; it is a mortal blow! That is what happened to a David. And the Lord visited it upon His house!

God is not mocked!

Let us then walk in our "part" of the covenant as baptized children, confessing His name in the midst of the world; may His Name not be blasphemed because of us!

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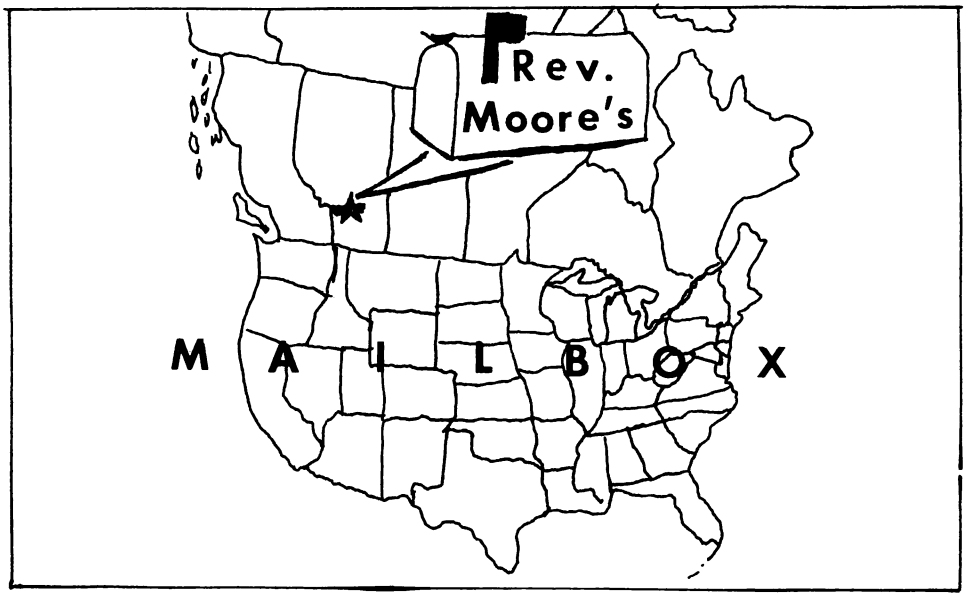

Send **que**stions to:
Rev. Richard G. Moore
12324 - 134th St.
Edmonton, Alta. T5L 1T9

From a reader in Edgerton, Minnesota comes the following question: "In Amos 9:11-12, what is meant by the phrase, 'called by my name'?

At first glance this prophecy in Amos may seem to speak of no more than a literal restoration of Israel to their land after the captivity, and to the subsequent possession of the heathen.

However, in Acts 15:13-17 we read, "And after they had held their peace, James answered saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things."

It is evident that the Spirit of Christ applies the passage in Amos to the restoration of the tabernacle of David as fulfilled in the new dispensation, by the fact that the Gentiles enter into the fellowship of Christ. And in Acts 15:17, it is evident that the phrase in Amos, "called by my name", refers to "the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all Gentile, upon whom my name is called."

Those called by my name are the elect remnant gathered by Christ by His Word and Spirit from the Gentile nations, and this according to God eternal counsel.

REMEMBERING

THE LORD'S DAY

by David J. Engelsma

The Dutch have called Sunday, "God's dike." In the Netherlands, the dike keeps back the threatening seas and, thus, preserves the Hollanders from watery destruction. So, the Lord's Day holds back the raging waves of materialism, earthlimindedness, and pleasure-madness that threaten to engulf the Church and the Christian.

There are leaks in the dike. There are leaks in the dike among Reformed Christians, where once the Lord's Day was honored and the Sabbath remembered. It is necessary that we stop up these leaks; we certainly must not allow these leaks to be enlarged, much less co-operate in tearing the dike down.

The matter of remembering the Lord's Day is one of urgency, as the figure of a dike and the angry waves indicates. First, remembering the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments, indeed, a commandment that belongs to the first table of the Law—not a minor matter, therefore.

Secondly, the day in question is the "Lord's day" according to Rev. 1:10, i.e., the day that belongs to the risen, glorious Lord Jesus Christ. In remembering, or forgetting it, we have to do with Jesus Christ Himself.

Thirdly, our remembering the Lord's Day results, by the Lord's grace, in the greatest benefit for us: rest—the pricelessly precious benefit of rest. The Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27). The good of man that God had in mind is rest. Is there anything that we need more? Everywhere, there is unrest. There is unrest in the church; there is unrest in the family; there is unrest in the soul of the believer. Apart from every other consideration, it is sheer folly to forfeit rest by forgetting, and even abandoning, the Lord's Day.

The importance of the Church's remembering the Lord's Day was clearly seen, and stated, by one of the fiercest enemies that the Christian religion ever had, the Frenchman, Voltaire: "If you want to kill Christianity," he said, "you must abolish Sunday"—advice that the French Revolution carried out.

A Special Day

There is one, simple truth that is fundamental to Sabbath observance—the very foundation of the dike is the Lord's Day. If this truth is confessed by the Church and if it lives in the hearts of the people of God, all will be well as regards remembering the Lord's Day. But if this truth is questioned or denied, we have not merely punched a hole in the dike, but we have demolished the dike. The basic question is this: Does Jehovah God, in the Fourth Commandment of His Law, still today set apart one day of the week as a special day; and does He still today, in the Fourth Commandment, require His people to remember this day by ceasing from their ordinary work and play, in order to devote themselves to the worship of, fellowship with, and special service of the Father of Jesus Christ?

The answer to this question is an emphatic, unequivocal "Yes". God still sets aside one day in seven as a special day for us and requires us to observe this day in a special way. In this sense, the day is holy, i.e., it is set apart from the other days by God for the special service of Himself. In this sense, we hallow the day, or keep it holy, i.e., we use it in the special way God wants us to use it, thus consecrating it to God.

God sets the day apart and requires us to remember it *in the Fourth Commandment*. Remembering the Lord's Day is not a matter of Christian liberty, i.e., something neither commanded nor forbidden by God. Rather, it is law, the law of God, just as are the matters of having no other gods, honoring our parents, and not stealing. It is the commandment of the Redeemer to His saved people. It is a commandment that at once teaches us to know our sinful nature more and more, so that we fly to Christ for righteousness, and directs us in the way of pleasing our Deliverer and of living a happy life. It is a commandment that the thankful believer gladly obeys, as a child willingly obeys the father whom he loves.

This is fundamental! Deny this, and you pull the dike down; for if the dike of the Lord's Day is not grounded in the good, solid, divine will of God, it cannot possibly withstand the pressures of worldliness and earthlimindedness exerted against it.

Another view, steadily gaining ground in Reformed churches, is that the Fourth Commandment was wholly ceremonial—"Jewish"—and was, therefore, so fulfilled by Christ that it no longer holds for the New Testament saint. The observance of the first day of the week is merely a custom of the New Testament Church (albeit a good custom, it is usually admitted), based upon a decision of the Church herself. Use of the first day of the week for public worship is not due to any binding law of God, but to the free choice of the Church; she could have chosen some other day of the week. The keeping of the first day is strictly a matter of Christian liberty.

Confessional Proof

What proof is there, for the Reformed saint, that remembering the Lord's Day is the will of God?

First, there is the decision of an important church assembly, the Synod of Dordt. Unfortunately, it is not well known that among the other actions of this great synod was the adoption of a doctrinal statement on the Sabbath. In his *Tractaat van den Sabbath* (*Treatise on the Sabbath*), Abraham Kuyper informs us that the formulation and adoption of this statement took place in about three hours on May 17, 1619. Dordt's position on the Sabbath was expressed in six points:

1. In the Fourth Commandment of God's Law there is a ceremonial and a moral element.
2. The rest on the seventh day after the creation, and the strict observance of this day with which the Jewish people were charged particularly, was ceremonial.
3. That a definite and appointed day has been set aside to the service of God, and that for this purpose as much rest is required as is necessary for the service of God and for hallowed contemplation; this element is moral.
4. The Sabbath of the Jew having been set aside, Christians are in duty bound to hallow the Day of the Lord solemnly.
5. This day has always been kept in the early Church since the time of the Apostles.
6. This day must be so considered unto the service of God that upon it men rest from all servile labors, except those required by charity and present necessities, and likewise from all such recreations as prevent the service of God.

Secondly, there is the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 38, Question 103: "What doth God require in the Fourth Commandment? First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; and that I, especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, to hear his word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a christian. Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by his Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal sabbath."

The Catechism has a unique, beautiful slant on the Fourth Commandment. It deliberately safeguards the Reformed believer against the error of a legalistic observance of the Sabbath. Legalism identifies obedience to the Fourth Commandment with mere external behavior, especially the behavior of doing nothing on the Sabbath. It stresses the scrupulous keeping of petty, man-made regulations, especially negative regulations. The Pharisees of Christ's day, for example, forbade the picking of grain while travelling on the Sabbath, even though it was for the satisfying of hunger (cf. Mark 2:23-28). Others thought it unlawful to eat an egg that the hen had laid on the Sabbath. The purpose of legalism, in this observance of the Sabbath, is to earn righteousness. This was the error into which the Jews of Jesus' day had fallen and against which our Lord contended. This was the error that was prevalent in the Roman Church at the time of the Reformation and against which the Reformers, Luther and

Calvin, reacted strongly in some of their writings on a proper keeping of the Sabbath.

We must appreciate and maintain the viewpoint of the Catechism. But we misunderstand and misrepresent the Catechism if we explain it to mean that in the Reformed tradition the day is disregarded; all mention of observing a day must be banned; and, therefore, our practice of Sunday-keeping is merely the liberty of the New Testament Church.

On the contrary, this creed teaches that there is a day of the week set apart from the other days; there is a special day. According to the Catechism, there is a "day of rest," a "sabbath," distinguished from "all the days of my life." The reference, of course, is to Sunday. On this day, special behavior is required of the child of God, namely, that he rests, which behavior consists primarily of diligently frequenting the church of God. It is God Who sets this day apart, and He does so in the Fourth Commandment—it is the Fourth Commandment, after all, which the Catechism is here explaining.

We may sum up the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism thus: the Fourth Commandment still holds in the New Testament; it still sets one day apart as a day in which believers are to rest in their God, under the Word of the gospel. Because of this act of God, all days are not the same for Christians, even though we cease from our evil works all the days of our life. Because of this act of God, the Christian remembers and hallows a day. Our Lord's Day—Sunday—corresponds to the seventh day of the Old Testament; indeed, it is the New Testament Sabbath Day.

Biblical Proof

This teaching of the creed is Biblical. For it is the doctrine of the Fourth Commandment itself. The Fourth Commandment is part of the moral law of God, and the moral law of God is perpetually valid. No more is this commandment done away with than is the commandment against taking God's Name in vain. Like the other nine, it was engraved in granite by the finger of God. If it were the case that the Fourth Commandment was entirely ceremonial, we would now have only nine commandments, not ten, and should speak of the "Ennealogue," not of the Decalogue. The Fourth Commandment, perpetually valid, requires that we remember a day to keep it holy and, in connection with this, that we cease from our work.

The New Testament Scripture does not abolish the Fourth Commandment. Jesus did not abolish this commandment; nor did He have a lax view of Sabbath-keeping, in comparison with the Pharisees. This is the notion that is sometimes found in the Church, so that those who are careless about remembering the Lord's Day are regarded as good Christians, whereas those who are careful about observing the Sabbath are suspected of Pharisaism. It is true that the Pharisees charged our Lord with laxity regarding the Sabbath. They accuses Him of breaking the Sabbath (John 5:18). They said, "He keepeth not the sabbath day" (John 9:16). But this charge was false.

What was Jesus' teaching? What was the teaching of His behavior, first of

all? Where did the Sabbath Day find Him, and what did it find Him doing? Was He in the field harvesting the crops? Was He taking scenic tours of the Mediterranean? Was He in the stadium watching the Nazareth Bobcats play the Capernaum Bears at some game of ball? Not at all, but He was always in the synagogue preaching the Word; and He was always doing good to distressed saints, healing them and destroying the power of the Devil.

What was the teaching of Jesus' words concerning the Sabbath? Did He ever admit that the Pharisee's charge was true? Did He ever say, "I am come, and, therefore, the Sabbath is no more"? Not at all, but He taught that remembering the Sabbath does not consist of idleness; it rather consists of working. He taught that this work must be the worship of God and the help of the needy brother. He taught that the Sabbath was made for man, for man's great good. And He taught that He is the Lord of the Sabbath. Note well, Jesus does not call Himself, "Destroyer of the Sabbath," but "Lord of the Sabbath."

As the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus fulfills the Sabbath, creating the perfect rest by His atoning death and resurrection. That the Sabbath is now fulfilled Jesus shows by changing the Sabbath Day from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week. Not the Church, but the Lord Jesus set the first day of the week apart as the day of rest for the New Testament people of God. The Church has no authority to change the Sabbath Day or to require believers to observe the first day of the week. The Church does not make laws; she only proclaims the will of her sovereign Lord, as that will is revealed in Holy Scripture. The Lord of the Sabbath Himself ordained the first day of the week as the day of rest for the Church come of age. He did this by rising from the dead on the first day (Luke 24:1); by meeting with His disciples on the first day prior to the Ascension (John 20:19; John 20:26); by coming back to the Church in the Holy Spirit on the first day (Pentecost was a Sunday); and by directing the apostles and the apostolic Church to gather for worship on the first day (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:1,2).

Therefore, the Spirit of Jesus Christ calls the first day of the week, "the Lord's Day," in Revelation 1:10: "I (John) was in the Spirit on the Lord's day..." This one, brief text is a mighty, a conclusive Word of God for the whole Sabbath-question. All by itself, it utterly refutes the position of Seventh Day Adventism regarding the day of rest and worship for the New Testament Church. What is of greater importance to us is that it clearly teaches that one day of the week, the day on which Jesus arose in glory, is a special day and must be especially observed by those who love the risen Lord. Even though it is certainly true that all the days of the week belong to Christ; nevertheless, it is also certainly true that one of them is "the Lord's day" in a unique sense.

The Church after the apostles saw this from the very beginning. Ignatius, the most ancient church father, wrote: "Let every one that loveth Christ keep holy the first day of the week, the Lord's Day."

How We Remember the Lord's Day

Description of the day of rest as the Lord's Day indicates how we are to

remember the day. We remember it by devoting it to the Lord Jesus. We remember it by worshipping, knowing, fellowshipping with, and enjoying the crucified and risen Christ. We remember it as John did: by being in the Spirit; hearing Jesus' great Voice (the preaching of the gospel); and seeing Him (by faith) walking amidst the candlesticks (in the Church).

Specifically, we are to observe the Sabbath by diligently attending the worship services of Jesus' Church. This, according to the Heidelberg Catechism, is the first requirement of the Fourth Commandment. Remembering the Lord's Day is diligently attending church; willful absence from church, or attendance without diligence, is the grossest violation of the Fourth Commandment. The Catechism is Biblical, here. On the first day of the week, the apostolic church gathered for worship: to hear the Word; to break bread; to pray; and to lay aside their gifts for the poor.

It should be evident that diligent church-attendance very really is obedience to the Fourth Commandment of the Law of God. As part of the first table of the Law, the Fourth Commandment demands love for God by His redeemed people—diligent church-attendance is worship, the praise of God in Jesus Christ by a thankful people. The Fourth Commandment calls the saints to rest—at church we rest by enjoying God's wonderful work in Christ by means of the Word and the Sacraments. The Fourth Commandment ends in Christ Jesus—in attending the church of God we seek fellowship with Christ (Who is present there by His Spirit and Word), and we strive to honor Him.

Attending church is a genuine remembering of the Lord's Day, if it is diligent. First, it must be an act of faith; no unbeliever can possibly remember the Lord's Day, regardless of whether he comes to church. Secondly, it must be faithful; believers are to gather every Sunday, as often as services are held. Thirdly, it must be whole-hearted; our attendance is to be eager, joyful, lively. Good church-attendance is characterized by the attitude expressed in the Psalter based on Psalm 122:

> "With joy I heard my friends exclaim,
> Come, let us in God's temple meet;
> Within thy gates, O Zion blest,
> Shall ever stand our willing feet."

This aspect of obedience to the Fourth Commandment is threatened today. There are leaks in the dike. There are those who attend only infrequently, missing entire Sundays or consistently missing one of the services every Sunday ("oncers"). There is the growing practice of missing the worship services, now and then, because they interfere with our pleasures, e.g., our vacation-plans. The Lord's Day is completely forgotten. It is used for travelling or for sight-seeing, just as though it did not belong to the risen Christ, but to ourselves. The strange notion is found in the Church that the Fourth Commandment may be broken occasionally. Men suppose that, if they remember the Lord's Day 51 weeks of the year, they are warranted in forgetting it 1 week. What would these same people say if others would adopt this thinking in regard to the commandment against stealing, or the

commandment against murder?

"But the Lord's Day gets in the way of my pleasure," says the man determined to enjoy his weekend vacation. Yes, the Law of God has a way of doing this. Throughout the Old Testament, the Sabbath-Commandment "interfered" with Israel's pleasures; and for this reason they broke it (cf. Isaiah 58:13 and Amos 8:5). May we bend and twist the Law to suit our pleasure? Or are we to plan our lives according to the Law and to find our pleasure in doing what it says?

Our would-be vacationer persists, "But I work hard during the year, and I need some rest." To be sure, we need rest; and this needed rest is the rest of the Lord's house and the Lord's Word.

Another threat to diligent church attendance is formalism in worship. The minister preaches dutifully, droning on; and the people listen dutifully, wondering all the while, when will he ever be done. *How* do we come to church? The early Christians greeted each other with the words, "The Lord is risen!" We might say, "Lousy weather, isn't it."

Not least of the dangers is this, that, at the church we attend, the Word of God is not preached. Attending some church ("the church of your choice") is not necessarily obedience to the Fourth Commandment; attending some church *very faithfully* is not necessarily obedience to the Fourth Commandment. For one concerned to remember the Lord's Day, the all-important question is: "*What* church do you diligently attend?" "Is it a church that honors Jesus by proclaiming Him as the Lord; the eternal Son of God in the flesh, the only and sovereign Savior from sin?" "Is it a church that gives the rest of God by preaching justification by faith alone and salvation by grace alone?" "Is it a church consecrated to the glory of God in teaching all of God's commandments, and upholding them by the exercise of discipline?"

Devotion of the Entire Day to the Lord

For the sake of this diligent church-attendance, we are to put aside the ordinary work of the other six days of the week, as well as our play. This is the Fourth Commandment: "Thou shalt not do any work" (Ex. 20:10). Already in the Old Testament the purpose of ceasing from work was clearly pointed out: "that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou" (Deut. 5:14). There is no value in not working in itself; but not working is necessary for resting the rest of the Sabbath. When the Israelite worked on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32ff.), the sin was not that he picked up some sticks, but that he despised the spiritual rest of God, i.e., Christ and His salvation. He revealed himself to be a worldly man. This deserved, and still does deserve, the death penalty.

It is the same today. Working on the Lord's Day is destructive of diligent church-attendance. It is true that there are works of necessity that may be done! Jesus taught that one may pull an ass out of the ditch. But, as someone has said, if I have an ass that falls into the ditch every Sunday, I will either fill up the ditch or sell the ass.

The home-work of our children is included in this prohibiton. Just as our ordinary work is farming or factory-work or some business or house-work, the ordinary work of the school-children is home-work; and God requires this work to be set aside in the interest of other, better things.

If obedience to this prohibition of work means financial loss and economic hardship, we should be perfectly willing to suffer such loss and hardship. Jesus Christ is not much of a lord if His Day, and the worship He claims on His Day, are forgotten on account of bread.

Similarly, spending Sunday afternoon watching the football Bears or the baseball Cubs, apart from all other considerations, is destructive of the public worship of God that is required by the Fourth Commandment. Pleasure is the great threat in our society. The world corrupts the Lord's Day, so that there is more deviltry on Sunday than on all the other days of the week combined. This too is an old story. In his glorious call to proper Sabbath-observance in Isaiah 58:13, 14, the prophet *begins* by warning Israel against "doing thy pleasure on my (Jehovah's) holy day." If we are going to use the Lord's Day for our play, we could better work—it is the lesser of the two evils. Augustine said long ago, concerning remembering the Lord's Day, "It is better to plow than to dance."

Ordinary work and play are forbidden *because they are destructive of the diligent church-attendance required by the Fourth Commandment.* What one does during the rest of the Day stands intimately related to the public worship of the Lord's Day. To throw oneself into his everyday work an hour or two after the morning worship service is to cut off the lingering effect of the house of God and to drown the hope of the world to come in the cares of this life. The man who spends all of Sunday afternoon wrapped up in the ballgame cannot bring the evening sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to the house of the Lord. Very likely, he will not attend the second service. The appalling drop in the attendance at the second service is largely due to the use of Sunday for the people's pleasure—golf, picnics, visiting, watching television, or relaxing at home with a novel. If he does hurry from the end of the ballgame to church, he does not come with a heart filled with the wonderful works of God in Jesus and with affections set on the things above, where Christ Jesus sits on the right hand of God.

What Am I to Do?

The entire day is to be given over to worship; the whole day is to be devoted to the Lord Christ. This is the answer to the familiar question, "What are we to do on Sunday?"

God intends that we be active; work is required. Doing nothing is not obedience to the Fourth Commandment, e.g., "sacking out" all day. Jesus showed this in John 5. He healed the lame man on the Sabbath, and, when the Pharisees objected, said, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work" (v. 17). The notion that one kept the Sabbath by doing nothing was part of the legalism of the Pharisees.

The work to be done, however, is spiritual exercises—private, personal

worship of God. There is public worship, but there is also private worship. We should pray. We should read, not the Sunday newspaper, but Holy Scripture, as well as books and magazines that explain Scripture. Just as our day witnesses a sad lack in private prayer-communion with God, so also is there a serious falling off of good, solid theological reading and study on the part of all Christians. Earthlimindness comes in now on the floodtide. The Lord's Day is God's dike! The Synod of Dordt spoke of "hallowed contemplation" as an appropriate activity on Sunday. "Hallowed contemplation"—even the words are strange to us today. We are so busy; our minds are so full of this world; we are so adverse to an hour of quiet and solitude. Sunday is a day for thinking holy thoughts—thoughts of my sin; thoughts of my redemption; thoughts of my privileged position and calling; thoughts of the beauty of the Church; thoughts of Christ; thoughts of the glory of God.

Permissible, requisite work on the Lord's Day includes "works of charity," i.e., good works of love for our neighbor, especially our fellow saints. The Heidelberg Catechism mentions contributing to the relief of the poor, or almsgiving, as an important aspect of church-attendance. There are other ways to help the needy. Jesus healed them. We can call on old folks languishing at home or in institutions. We can visit, or have over, the lonely saints. We can comfort the distressed. The Church is full of needy, if we only open our eyes.

On Sunday evenings, delightful Christian fellowship can be enjoyed—and practiced, as a duty. Then, we do not discuss our daily jobs, all the restaurants we have gone to, the pennant race, or the many faults of the other members of the congregation; but we speak together about the Lord Christ. Isaiah 58 expressly warns us against "speaking thine own words."

On the Lord's Day, there should be family worship. There is public worship. There is private worship. There is also family worship. The Fourth Commandment is a family commandment. It is addressed by God to the head of the home, the husband and father: "...in it (the Sabbath Day) thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor *thy son, nor thy daughter...*" The father is responsible for the obedience of his house. He is to rest, with the family. Historically, the Lord's Day has been a bulwark for the family among Reformed and Presbyterian people.

Let there be family worship, especially in view of the threats to family life today. The family should discuss the sermon. (This is not the same as tearing the sermon to pieces or criticizing the preacher.) The family should read and study the Bible together. Parents should teach the children their catechism. How I love to hear a child say at the catechism class, "My Dad (or Mother) told me the story." The family should sing together.

There is so much to do on Sunday that the day is too short. "How long is the Lord's Day?" some have asked. Give the Lord a full day; it is the Lord's *Day*, not the Lord's hour. Really, this is an ominous question. It sounds suspiciously like the question of the Jews in Amos 8:5: "When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?" Nobody talks like this about his vacation: "Oh, when will it be over?"

Such questions about the Lord's Day indicate a leak in the dike in my own soul—worldliness is pouring in. The man who remembers the Lord's Day, the man who tastes something of the rest of Christ talks differently: "Oh, when will the eternal Sabbath Day dawn?"

Still, our obedience to the Fourth Commandment is, at best, imperfect. We do not have perfect faith in Christ our Rest; we do not come to church with that zeal for God's glory and with that thankfulness for His work in Jesus that we ought to have; we often hear the Word coldly—yes, and we preachers often preach it so; our use of the Sacraments and our prayers are often habitual; our thoughts are profane; our conversations are worldly; when all is said and done, on a Sunday evening, the most that can be said of our Sabbath observance is that we did nothing. The Fourth Commandment teaches us our misery, so that we fly to Christ for righteousness.

But the Lord Who justifies also sanctifies, so that we do have a beginning of obedience to the Fourth Commandment. This beginning, although small, is a victorious beginning. We do rest in Christ by faith on the Lord's Day. This then becomes the power by which we live and work the other six days of the week, ceasing from our evil works and yielding ourselves to the Lord to work by His Spirit in us. Thus, we begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.

Ours is a joyful Sabbath keeping. The Lord's Day is not a dreary day. It is not true of us what Thomas Babington Macaulay acidly (and unjustly) said of the Puritans and their Sabbath observance: "The Puritans opposed bear-baiting on Sunday, not because it gave pain to the bears, but because it gave pleasure to the people."

Rather, our experience is that expressed by the hymn:

"Day of all the week the best,
Emblem of eternal rest."

Our experience is that promised by the prophet long ago, in Isaiah 58:13, 14:

> "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."

YOUNG PEOPLE!! — Send your questions to Rev. Moore's Mailbox.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES
THE SLEEPING CHURCH

by John Veldman
Faith Church

Please read Matthew 25:1-13.

Talking about "being turned off"! Here we go through our life preparing ourselves for that exciting adult life ahead of us only to hear the minister talk about persecution outside of our borders and warnings about it in the (not too distant?) future for us. Reading the paper does not really give us a break either. Whoever may be blamed for it, the result is enough to turn anyone off. Internationally, we seem to have become a reacting instead of acting nation. Nationally, it doesn't seem to be better. Lay-offs are played down, but are an upsetting reality for those who get hit by them. "Will the gloomy predictions, that it will get worse, become true?" "I need a part time job to help pay for my education." "I am finished with my education and want a full-time job. With thousands looking for work, will I find one?"

From a "natural" point of view, I don't care about these signs of the times, do you? Also, of course, the first question to pop up in our mind is: Even from a spiritual point of view, what is the difference? Christian young people are people, too! They have to live just as well as do the non-Christians. So, all these signs of the times make us feel uneasy about the future.

Let's first make sure that we get God into this picture. Unless we want to view Him to be just good enough to get us to heaven when we die, we will want to view Him as the One who revealed Himself to be our eternal life now, for all His people (John 3:36, 17:3). Therefore, let us turn to the Bible, the only source of knowledge and information, in the midst of all the confusion and discouragement (and for some, even real fear) so that we can test our reactions to the signs of the times and be sure that we have our priorities right.

The last promise in the Word of God is found in one of the last texts of the Bible, Revelation 22:20. "Surely I come quickly, Amen." When Jesus referred to this coming in Matthew 24, He spoke in stern terms; stern enough to upset His disciples, in much the same way as we might have reacted. Not just a synagogue, but will this Dwelling Place of God amongst His people be destroyed? To Jesus' followers this was inconceivable. That would be like taking the heart out of God's people and could only happen at the end of the world. Jesus then proceeds to show them where the true priorities are—not in

the watching and preserving of this beautiful *temple*, but in the warning, "watch therefore, for ye know not what hour *your Lord* doth come." (Matthew 24:42). To explain exactly what He has in mind, Jesus continues in chapter 25 with the parable of the Kingdom of Heaven as it is likened unto ten virgins.

When we keep in mind that, according to verse 13, the purpose of the parable is that we should watch since we do not know the day or even the hour, it becomes clear that the introduction of "slumbering and sleeping" (vs. 5) into the parable serves chiefly to accentuate the element of surprise of the sudden announcement of the bridegroom.[1] This is important for us to keep in mind for the simple reason that we, the church, are pictured right now as slumbering and sleeping.

And, we can see, that what is meant by Jesus in describing the church as sleeping, becomes an all important question. After all, we are not dealing with an interesting story about the way in which weddings took place in Jesus' time; rather, we have to understand the spiritual truth conveyed by it.

The questions which we have to answer are as follows:

1) Who are the virgins—wise and foolish?
2) What is meant by the waiting time?
3) What represents sleeping and slumbering?
4) What is the result of the call to wake up?

Regardless of many who emphatically make claims to the contrary, these ten virgins (plural) represent the church, and the church (singular) represents the bride of Christ. As mentioned, the virgins constitute the visible church with all its members. This, once again, is contrary to other interpretations offered. They claim that the five virgins represent the church and the other five represent the world! But, obviously, Jesus is not speaking about five Jewish virgins and five Gentile virgins, but He is speaking about ten Jewish virgins.

As we realize that the church is represented, we might then ask the question: Why are the virgins not called the five good and the five bad virgins—just as in chapter 7:25-27, the builders of their houses are not called good and bad but "wise and foolish"? What's the difference?

It seems that the parable about the builders may help us to understand this parable. It is obvious that in the case of the builders, the houses, for all practical purposes, were good and well built. Good bricks were used, there were sufficient rooms, windows were made, etc. They were built, perhaps, according to the same good blueprint. But, when the signs of the times came, by way of storms and floods, the foolishness and wisdom showed up. Seen in this light, we can see why the expression of wise and foolish are used here—especially since its final result will not become visible until the bridegroom comes.[2]

What is signified by the waiting time? As always, misinterpretations abound. Some picture the assurance of the remnant as they awaited the bridegroom, instead of focusing in on their carelessness?[3] Rather, the waiting time depicts the long time of waiting of the church for these 2000 years, and as we as individuals share in this waiting time.

An analogy of this can be seen in the marriage customs of the Netherlands. Before my wife and I were married, a trip to city hall was necessary to become officially engaged (ondertrouwd). From that day until the wedding day in City Hall and Church, a separation would have been viewed almost as seriously as a divorce. In the same way, Christ and His Church are now engaged. "They are in principle already married, but while the church remains in the world, she is a virgin....while she waits, she keeps herself unspotted from the world."[4]

Now we come to the heart of this article: What does it mean to be a "sleeping church"? When I was asked to write on this subject, the question was raised as to why the request came to me. The subject is so important, because it relates so frighteningly directly to our daily life: actions and reactions. One needs to be a minister or teacher to be able to understand, and explain this clearly on paper. On the other hand, we must remember that the Bible requires that all of us, as much as God gives us opportunity, must exhort one another, "and so much the more as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

First of all, let us remember where this article started: with Jesus' warning in verse 13 to "watch therefore." We only have to think in terms of the military to get the implication. A watch is set out as a part of the preparedness of the unit of which a soldier belongs. Watchfulness is one of the basic requirements of a soldier. Many times the Bible also speaks in the same terms. Our ministers often refer to our elders as watchmen on the walls of Zion, or Christ's church. It is apparent that the waiting time discussed above makes the warning so urgent. Not only in the parable does He delay His coming as far as normal human expectation is concerned, but also in the life of the church throughout these 2000 years.

Already in II Peter 3:4 the waiting seemed so long that the enemies of the church poked fun of the church's watching. Today, after so many centuries of waiting, the promise may seem even more unreal. More real to us are our daily confrontations with school, teachers, work, cars, friends, entertainment. Temptations become almost too strong for us. As if this were not enough, it is as if our spirits can see clouds of God's anger become darker and more threatening when we see the terrible iniquity increasing. This iniquity is even under the cloak of the law (Psalm 94:20), for example, gambling, abortion, and shops, stores closed to us by unions. These are the first stages of persecution here. *This* is the reality of our everyday life!

Under all these things comes the daily repeated reminder and admonition: "Watch". Be a representative of your "unit", the church. Whenever the church went through difficult times, they encouraged one another with the same words as the persecuted church speaks today: "His coming is at hand." The result of this is a longing for His coming. Picture yourself in a country such as Hungary, China, or Russia, etc., representing almost one-half of our world. Your father has just been picked up for his "forcing damaging beliefs on his children." Your mother is doing odd jobs to keep food on the table. You are

unable to get higher education or a better job since you are a Christian. There is a real possibility of your being sent to a labor camp for loafing. You are hated by many, shunned by others and you are troubled in your heart because of your parents. The coming of the Lord must seem like the most wanted event you can pray for!

We, in this country, apart from talks of recession, still think in terms of affluence, almost as if persecution does not exist at all. We love to force ourselves into thinking positive. We concern ourselves with things such as a bigger boat, a nice vacation, a better motorcycle, a fun beach party, a better paying job, a nicer teacher next fall, and the like. This is replacing pessimism with positive thinking, isn't it?

But what does the Word of God call it? Slumbering and sleeping!

John Calvin writes the following, explaining this text:

> "Denoting earthly occupations in which believers must be engaged... and although forgetfulness of the kingdom of God ought never to steal upon them, yet the distracting influence...of this world is not inappropriately compared to sleep."[5]

Also note the following:

> "This drowsiness and sleepiness points to the spiritual lethargy which steals over the church. The *members* become *indifferent to the coming of Christ* and fall into the drowsiness of carnality and worldliness; they are, so to speak, drugged with pleasure and become lethargic with the carnal pursuit of earthly happiness."[6]

Now the question arises, what will be the result of the cry to "Wake up!" in verse 6 as it has been sounding to us from pulpit to catechism room, from Bible reading at home to school room? Remember that at the outset we concluded that we would want to get our priorities right. We are willing to be encouraged exclusively by His promise: "Surely I come quickly, Amen."

In the case of the foolish virgins, the oil of wanting to be prepared and wanting to persevere to the end was totally lacking. It *could not be borrowed from church, parents, or anyone!* The door was shut to these make-believers with the terrible words: "Verily...I know you not."

Now, what will happen to us? We are children of Christian parents (as they were), members of the church and baptized (as they were). Also, more importantly, we are sinners as well. *We* read and pass on the same filthy books. *We* cheat in school, shoplift, lie to parents, teachers and employers. *We* read the Bible as little as possible. *We* are sleeping as they were! Shame covers our faces, tears fill our eyes.... Oh, Lord, be merciful to me, I am a black sinner! (Song of Solomon 1:5).

Our bridegroom will say, "Come with Me, you are my bride. I have loved you from before the foundations of the world. I realize that you are black." (Song of Solomon 1:6). In my faithfulness have I cleansed you (I John 1:9) and in pure white may you go with Me in My banqueting house and My banner of

love will be over you (Song of Solomon 2:4).

Prof. H.C. Hanko summarizes this well:

> "For as surely as He comes, does He take His bride to Himself. The marriage with Christ will be fully consummated. The eternal joy of that heavenly banquet will be of God's people forever.
>
> Watch therefore. It might be the night is growing darker. Indeed it is. The Lord seems to delay His coming. But watch! Have you become sleepy with the cares and pleasures of life and begun to wonder whether the Lord will ever return? Watch! Watch in hope, in longing, in certainty. Watch unto the end. The victory is sure to be ours." 7

As expressed in the words of Him Who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars:

> "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.
>
> He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white rainment; and I will not blot out his name before My Father and before His angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." (Revelation 3:3-6).

1 Edersheim, **The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.**
2 Jamieson, F. and B., **Commentary on the Whole Bible.**
3 Wycliffe, **Bible Commentary.**
4 Prof. H.C. Hanko, **The Mysteries of the Kingdom.**
5 Calvin, **Commentary on Matthew.**
6 Prof. H.C. Hanko, **The Mysteries of the Kingdom.**
7 Ibid.

WHAT IS A SQUARE?

Everybody knows a few squares. I know one. He's that strong, polite, God-fearing young fellow who freely admits that he prays, weeps for joy, plays with little kids, kisses his mother, goes to his dad for advice, and thinks old folks are great. He wears clothes that fit him, puts savings in the bank, has his hair neatly groomed, likes school, can't imitate all the television comics, avoids dirty discussions about sex—he even blushes. He goes to church, drinks milk, drives within the speed limit, is in bed by 12, doesn't smoke, and expects purity in girls.

As a result of his unusual behavior, he suffers the loss of gang companionship; but he gains the gratitude and admiration of his parents, family, and teachers, has an unjaded imagination, and enjoys spiritual perception. To some he may seem a strange fellow, but *I like him!*

—Anon.

REV. ROBERT C. HARBACH

I'M OK!

So who makes that claim? It's so common we hear it all the time. I inadvertently bump hard into a person. I apologize with, I'm sorry! Did I hurt you? And the reply is, I'm OK. But who can really, truthfully say this? Remember, it is said within the context of a cursed world, a fallen humanity, a life that lies in the midst of death and which itself is a continual death. If we pause to take this into account, then we say Ah, then No, I'm not OK, for I am lost in sin! Righteous Adam, *supralapsus*, could say, I'm OK; for in every way he was. The Creator had made him perfect. He could truthfully say, I am righteous, I am holy, I am good. I'm OK! But man, *infralapsus*, could not say it. He was not OK. He would have to say, I am dead, I am alienated, I am estranged (Ephesians 2); I am evil (Jeremiah 13:23), I am unprofitable (Romans 3), I am unclean (Job 14:4), I am filthy (Proverbs 30:12), I am darkness (I Thessalonians 5:5). But when man by the power of God's Spirit and Word of His holy gospel has been brought to experience the great, divine work of regeneration (palingenesia), thus having been born from above, and so made a new creature in Christ Jesus, he can say far more than "possibily I'm OK," or "probably I'm OK", or "there's a 50-50 chance I'm actually OK." He can say, "By the grace of God I am what I am, namely, born of the Spirit, and so OK."

But many are not sure of this. This uncertainty seems to be reflected in a book title I noticed the other day, "*AM* I OK?" At least this appears more thoughtful than the somewhat flippant cliche under review. Usually we think of philosophers as very thoughtful men. Xenophanes was. That's evident in a statement of his that "there is nothing praiseworthy in...plotting violent

revolutions." Today it is different; revolutionists are getting too much attention and praise. Yet it was Xenophanes who asked himself, Am I OK? He had a skeptical caution and a blind zeal for "truth-seeking." This is something we as Christians do not do. We are not "ye seekers" searching for that elusive horizon of truth. We *have* the truth! But this philosopher was a seeker-for-truth. Pretty much, too, in the spirit of Pilate, who asked, What is truth? This was really to insult the Son of God who claimed, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." Pilate was no different from the Jewish religious leaders of his day in that he, as they, refused to recognize the identity Jesus claimed for himself. So it was with this interesting philosopher. He was skeptical about ever finding the truth about anything. He said, "There never was nor will be a man who has certainty...; if he does chance to say what is right, yet he does not know that it is so. But all are free to guess." So it is Xenophanesian to ask, Am I OK? But then, forget it! I can never know; not for sure. My guess is I'm as OK as the next person, which is not saying much. Add a million zeroes and you still get zero!

On the other hand, the mature Christian, the model of us all, is no philosopher, yet he is thoughtful in the only true sense of the word because he aims to think according to the revelation of God in the Scripture. His lips do not rattle off cliches, even though he of all people could truthfully say, I'm OK. Instead, what he sings in his heart is,

I am evil, born in sin;
  Thou desirest truth within.
Thou alone my Savior art,
  Teach Thy wisdom to my heart;
Make me pure, Thy grace bestow,
  Wash me whiter than the snow.

For he knows that by nature he is just so corrupt that he is wholly incapable of doing any good and prone to all wickedness. The Christian, then, before he can say, I'm OK, says with Job, I am a burden to myself; if I say I am perfect (i.e. OK), it shall prove me perverse; no, rather, I am vile. With David he says, I am ready to halt; I am frail. With Isaiah, he says, I am a man of unclean lips. With Jeremiah, he says, I am black. With Paul, he says, I am carnal, I am a wretched man, I am chief of sinners! With Peter, he says, I am a sinful man, O Lord!

Keep in mind, however, that this self-abasement (an indispensable part of Christian character and conduct, Matthew 16:24) is repugnant to "the old man," and to the "natural man," as it certainly was to the Pharisee. He said, God, *I am not* as other men are! Negatively, he was insisting over against all others, *I'm* OK; I'm not so sure about you. But it was the tax-collector who said, I am the sinner! With that he cried for mercy. His prayer was answered. *He* went down to *his* house justified. Only then could he say, I'm OK. For this is the way it is with the mature Christian. After he has a real experience of his ethical, moral, spiritual misery (Revelation 3:17) and his wonderful deliverance from it, then he can sing, *I am Thine,* O Lord, and I Belong to the King,

because, especially now, he realizes he belongs to Jesus. He can sing, "I am weak, but Thou art strong." He can sing, "I am so glad that our Father in heaven..." He can sing, I am redeemed! Oh, yes! in that sense I'm OK.

There are others who have far more confidence than Xenophanes. They hold to a process of reasoning which begins with "I'm OK," I exist, to argue on step by logical step, until they can say, "Thou art OK," Thou dost exist. We might call this the I-Thou Connection. It goes something like this: the "I" is real. I think, therefore I am. I cannot doubt my own existence, since even in that doubt *self* appears. So, I *am!* The next step is in reference to the Christian God, the 'Thou.' He just *might* exist. It is up to us to do what we can to find out. In fact, there is so much evidence that He does exist (you see His works in all nature, and you hear His voice in His own Word, the Bible) that you are simply morally responsible for the dire consequences if you do not examine the evidence, heed its message and take that great "space shuttle" step from "I" to "THOU"!

Well, the I-Thou connection is interesting, but for the mature Heidelberg Catechism Christian, it has a wrong starting point. It is, for the Christian mentioned, just the opposite connection; it is Thou-I. This is so because the truly Reformed Christian begins not with self, but with faith; not with the emplacement of the underlying thought that "I exist," but with the fundamental, rock-bottom position that "God is!" There is the most final divine *subject* and *predicate*. What is the *object*? It is *God*, as in "God is God!" This is our starting point. For this we seek and need no proof. We do not say, for the sake of discussion with our non-Christian acquaintances, that possibly God exists, or *probably* He exists, or He "maybe-could-might" exist. So just for the sake of amicable argument, let's *suppose* He does, then let's look for confirmation and support (of which there seems to be plenty) establishing what we suppose. Then with our supposition confirmed we arrive at faith, hopefully. That means, too, that having found the supportive evidence, *then* we may take our stand on "In the beginning God!"

But that's not the way we go about things, including God. His own Word, the Scripture, is self-certifying, and does not need sustaining argument. Neither does faith. We do not stand with humanism (I-Thou, or I-thou) in order to arrive at, or simply to confirm, our Reformed theology. Always, at the back of, or at the forefront of our minds is the Bible together with what we believe the Bible teaches as found in our Three Forms of Unity. On that ground we approach things. We do not think of things, say, within the framework of the concentric circles: cosmos, purpose, man. We think of the universe within the environment and under the control of (the) eternal purpose (of God). Whatsoever comes to pass is within the framework and under the dominance of the trinitarian predestinating God. Nor need we to try to prove that to the non-Christian. We rather call him to stand with us on the only safe, sure ground where alone true knowledge is possible. To do that, the unbeliever must repent of his sins, turn from his wicked ways, from his own thoughts, which are not God's thoughts, from his own way, which is not God's way. He

must take his stand on His Word and in that "none other way under heaven whereby we must be saved." To do anything else, anything less, in this dangerous world is absolutely perilous. Christ is the only way to the New Heaven and the New Earth; and when I get there, it will be with so much relief and so much superabounding joy that I'll exclaim, Now I'm *really* OK! *Everything* finally is!

MOVEMENT WHERE?

by Ben Wigger

"The trouble with self-made men", someone has said, "is that they always insist on sharing the recipe." I remembered that recently as I listened to Phil Donahue, the talk show host, being interviewed about his newly published autobiography.

Phil Donahue is no doubt about as genial as anyone on television. But his view of his past is all too sour. He seems to have an especially negative view about his stern upbringing by Roman Catholic parents. And he seems to be especially self-congratulatory about his defection from it, as if leaving one's religion represented a triumph of the mind.

Of course, it would be unfair to blame this trend today on Phil Donahue. But it does seem that people today have developed a way of moralizing in reverse.

Apart from the fact that we do not believe that the Roman Catholic Church is anything but a false church, I find it still hard to understand how anyone can be so vain about leaving any church, be it Catholic or Reformed, and call such a desertion a moment of personal growth.

We must never lose sight of the fact that forsaking God and His true Church for the world and all it offers is a terrible sin.

To me it always sound as if the person who has done just that has a case of bad conscience; and just such a view is his attempt to be ingenious. And really, isn't it just a little bit self-righteous for someone brought up and instructed by

the truth of our faith to say in effect that the truth of God's Word that sustained men like John Calvin or Martin Luther somehow failed to meet the demands of his restless intellect.

It is a shame, but today one's background is no longer something to be grateful for; it is now something to be overcome. One of the gauges used to measure success today is the person's rise from a narrow, limited subculture to an urban, mainstream culture.

Lest we as God's Church fall into just a sin, let us never forget to be grateful for our past. The world would just as soon have us ashamed of our strict background. They would have us believe that the emphasis should be placed on not what you are, but what you have become.

We must also be aware that there are no guarantees that anyone born and raised in the church will automatically be a believer. The history of the church has shown this repeatedly that they are not all Israel that are of Israel.

But to a certain extent, isn't there some of Phil Donahue's reasoning in all of us? Aren't we sometimes just a little ashamed by what we are and what our backgrounds have been? And you don't have to be an older person to have experienced some of this.

There may have been times in your life, short though it may be, in which you felt uncomfortable exactly because of what you were, a Christian.

Perhaps the fact that you attend church has given you some embarrassment in the past. Or some of your "friends" think your attending a Christian school is stupid. Or maybe the fact that your parents insist in knowing where you are at all times, and with whom you are spending some of your free time, has caused you to wish, if just for a moment, that your life wasn't so full of restrictions and that you were free to do exactly as you pleased.

The basic problem with this viewpoint is that one tends to be too critical of the group he deserts—the church—and too uncritical of the group he joins. The world may look good to us simply because we are looking in from the outside. The world has nothing to offer but the pleasure of sin for a season, while the child of God has the promise of eternal life.

This is exactly what Satan wants us to think. He presents a picture that shows the world and all that it offers as an almost irresistible goal. And if it were not for the grace of God, we would indeed be swept away by it all. Satan wants us to become a part of the world. If he can get us to turn our backs on the church, and all that it stands for, and move up into the freedom of this sinful life, that would be just great with him. He makes it appear that we have to outgrow the old and embrace the new or people will think of us as simply out of it.

But do not misread what I am saying. There has got to be constant spiritual movement in our lives. We have to grow in the knowledge of God, of Jesus Christ and His Word. The world would have us believe that we can only grow by forsaking the beliefs that we have in God and His Word. But that is no movement upward, but rather a movement downward.

Real movement upward is forsaking all that the world has to offer and placing all of our life in Jesus Christ.

We have been given one of the greatest gifts when we have our Christian heritage. It can be traced back to the Reformation. Our covenant homes and Christian parents and our churches and schools serve as the basis for our movement upward, not into the world, but into the church. Soon you will become the fathers and mothers, the ministers and teachers, the elders and deacons of our church. We have an obligation and duty before God to show to others coming after us the way in which they should walk, so that together we will grow in love for God, His truth, and each other.

A TEACHER'S VIEW

by Mr. Vern Huber

Having heard, over the years, a number of student's views of Covenant, I decided that it is time to give a teacher's eye view of a day at Covenant.

It is about 6:00 A.M. The alarm on my digital clock rings and I grope for the button which allows me an extra nine minutes of snooze time. Sometimes it becomes impatient and rings after six minutes. Note that in each case the number of minutes is a multiple of three. Although I may appear, at this point, to be in an unconscious state, my mind is alive and active, making important decisions. A teacher must make many important decisions during the course of a day. My first decision must be made when the alarm goes off. Should I leap out of bed and be the first in the bathroom and enjoy the luxury of shaving with hot lather?...or should I lie here awhile and relax, and get used to the idea that a new day has dawned? I make my decision instantly and slip back into a semiconscious state. This may seem to be the lazy way out, but it isn't at all, for my mind is hard at work calculating the amount of hot water being used so that I can make my move at the precise moment which will allow me to catch the last gallon of hot water for my morning shave.

Eventually I make my way to school. I stroll into the faculty lounge and hear the usual wise cracks about looking like Colonel Klink, or Dick Tracy in my new top coat. But I don't have to listen to them for long, for this morning I have hall duty.

It seems that it has become necessary in the last couple of years to have a teacher in the hall during faculty devotions. It is during this time that a certain number of our young people choose to do damage to the school, and to each other, and make a general nuisance of themselves. Besides being childish, these kinds of actions show a general lack of spiritual sensitivity. This is not a

pleasant aspect of hall duty, but there are compensations. It gives me a chance to greet and visit with students on an informal basis before classes begin.

I stroll down the hall, cup of coffee in hand. "Hello, how are you?...Good, I'm glad to hear that, I'm quite well also, thank you...Do I belong to the German Army? Not that I know of. As a matter of fact, I want you to know that this coat is very much in style—at least that is what my wife tells me." I hear a banging on a locker. I quickly locate the locker and open it. A small boy steps out looking as though nothing unusual had happened. Should I pursue this matter? I conclude that he is probably rather shy and that he prefers to spend his time standing around in his locker. By this time I have taken up my post near the boy's restroom.

It seems that we have a club made up of boys who meet each morning in the restroom. It strikes me that this is not the most wonderful meeting place in the world, so I tell them to meet somewhere else. They agree and leave. Later as I head down the hall toward the other end of school, I notice that they are calling their meeting to order in the area of the trophy case.

I am not the only one with hall duty this morning. Down at the end of the hall I see a boy standing guard. It is his duty to warn the smokers lest they get caught breaking the non-smoking rule. The concern of these students is not that they are breaking a rule, but rather that they might get caught breaking a rule.

The bell rings and all head for their various classes—everyone except me. I head for the faculty lounge, for I have a free period the first hour. During this period, I finish my preparations for the day. This is usually a quiet and uneventful period of the day for me—a time when I can enjoy a few moments of peace and solitude before beginning the day's struggle.

The bell signals the beginning of the second period. I stroll into my second hour class (statistics) and check around to see if everything is in order. Deb is grinning as if she has some mischief planned. Marilyn has a trace of a smile and an expression that seems to say, "I know something that you don't." Ken is just sitting. I'm not sure, but I think he is sleeping with his eyes open. I notice a note on the black board proclaiming some student's opinion of his first hour class and school in general: "I hate school and expecsionally this class!" For the next few hours I help my students through the intricacies of statistics, physics, and geometry. I end the morning with devotions with my fourth hour class.

Since it is my day for hall duty, I grab a sandwich and a half cup of coffee and head down the hall toward the gym. Most of the students are in the gym, enjoying some recreation. A few students are in a classroom preparing for a test. Others are occupying themselves in less construction ways. One group is playing a game. I don't know if they have a name for this game; I shall call it teacher-baiting. These make a great show of look suspicious, hoping a teacher will pursue them, only to find them innocently chewing on candy cigarettes or some such thing. There are various ways one could view this kind of an activity. At the heart of it, I believe, that it is an act of disrespect. But I

suppose one could be more charitable and consider it an innocent little game. Indeed, sometimes when I see how eager they are to have me join in their little game, I get caught up in the spirit of the thing and play my little part. There are rewards. The other day I got a candy cigarette.

The first period after lunch I have a study hall to supervise. This is a period during which there are many emergencies: phone calls which must be made (a life or death matter); towels which must be folded; feet which must be wrapped; cars which must be fixed. The list is endless. I do my best to help with each emergency and at the same time maintain an atmosphere conducive to study.

I finish my afternoon conducting a geometry and an algebra class, during which I give "spine tingling" presentations, leaving the students in a mood of eager anticipation for the next installments.

The students have left. I sit back and consider the day's activities. I have mixed feelings of accomplishment, disappointments, and hope. I hope that we have grown together intellectually and spiritually. So often we failed. We missed the mark. By the grace of God, tomorrow we can do better.

I CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT

by Mr. Fred Hanko

My teacher sure is mean. It seems like he's always yelling at me when I'm not doing anything. No, I don't mean exactly yelling, but he's always saying don't do this and don't do that, and then he punishes us for no reason at all. It's just that the other kids do much worse things than I do, but I always get bawled out. I think he's picking on me.

Like today, here we were, coming in just when the bell stopped ringing and he tells us we're late and have to stay in. Well, I explained that we were just standing right out there in the hall talking, and we didn't know it was time for the bell. Then when I heard the bell, I had to get my book out. He doesn't want me to come to class without my book. So I get my book, and then I get punished for being tardy.

Then in history class I couldn't answer that question he asked. Of course, I couldn't answer it: I forgot to do the assignment. I was doing some other things and I just completely forgot it. I would have done it if I had just thought of it. I know I couldn't answer the questions yesterday either, but that was because I

left my paper at home. I did the whole thing, but I just didn't have it with me.

Later on he gets after me because I was doing my math. I know it was history class, but I had just a couple more problems to do. I was listening to the history lesson, and if I missed something, I could always get it from my friend later. If I don't get my math done, then I get in trouble in math class. I guess he doesn't care if I get in trouble with my math teacher.

Then at recess time I get in trouble for staying in the restroom and not going outside. I know he told us before that we had to go outside, but we were just getting our coats on, and then the bell rang. We were just standing around in there talking, and we didn't know what time it was. He didn't have to talk to us. After all, we were going to go out.

It's true that I pushed this kid in the halls, but he didn't have to get mad about that. He didn't even let me explain. Here I was just walking down the hall when I bumped into this kid. He thought I did it on purpose, so he gave me a great big shove. So I shoved him back. I didn't do it very hard. I couldn't help it that he fell down. He must have slipped or something. Besides, we were just having a little fun. I don't know why I get blamed for everything.

I stayed in at noon for tardiness. Yes, he had to send somebody out to get me from the playground, but I couldn't help that. I would have been in there, but I forgot. I came right in, and I was standing around talking to some other kids and eating the apple I had left from lunch. Then he comes in and tells me I have to sit in my seat and do some work. He never told me I had to sit in my seat when I was staying in. Then he won't even let me finish my lunch.

Maybe I was talking a little bit in class, but I just asked for a sheet of paper. How do they expect you to get your work done if you don't have any paper? That other time I couldn't help it. The person behind me poked me. I couldn't just sit there and not answer him. He just asked me a question, and I answered him. Then when he said my name, I wasn't even talking. I was only turning around to look at my friend. I didn't say a single word, and then he says my name. I can't help it that my friend sits back there. You should see some of the other kids. They talk a lot more than I do, and they hardly ever get punished.

I can't understand it. Here I try my hardest, and all they do is yell at me. I always get blamed for everything. Why do they always pick on me?

JUDGING THE FRUIT

C.H. Spurgeon used to tell this story:

"An American said to his friend. I wish you would come down to my garden and taste my apples. He asked him this about a dozen times, but the friend did not come. One day the fruit grower said: 'I suppose you think my apples are good for nothing, so you will not come and try them."

"Well, to tell you the truth," said his friend, "I have tasted them. As I went along the road I picked one up that fell over the fence, and I never tasted anything so sour in all my life. I really do not care for any more of your fruit."

"Oh," replied the owner with a great smile, "I thought that was the trouble. These apples around the outside of my orchard are for the special benefit of the boys of the neighborhood. I went fifty miles to select the sourest apples, and I planted them all around the outside of my orchard, so that the boys might think that they are not worth stealing. But if you will come inside, you will find that we raise a very different kind there, sweet as honey."

And so it is with those who judge the Christian Church by its worst members, the hangers on around the edge, those most like the world and who play with the world, make the same mistake. Don't judge all believers in Christ by the worldly church-members.

PETER FABER
4190 EAST BURTON
CITY 49506