

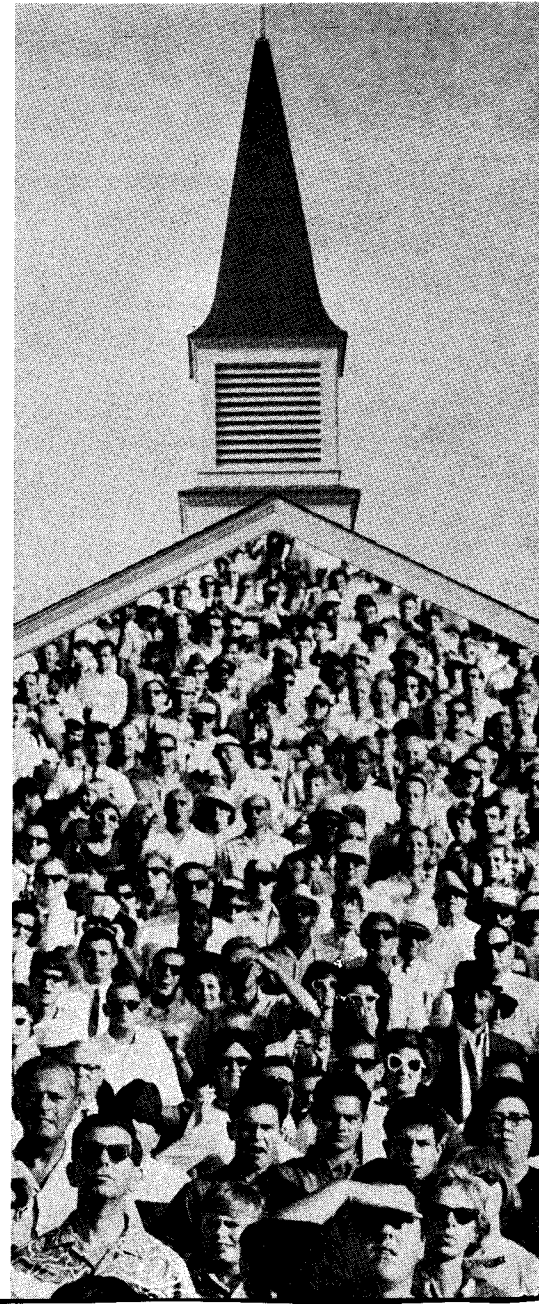
# *The Presbyterian Guardian*

VOL. 40. NO. 3 — MARCH 1971

*WHICH  
WAY*

**?**

*for the*  
**CHURCH**



# Theological Education in a Revolutionary Age

ROBERT B. STRIMPLE

In the turbulent world of the seventies, theological and ecclesiastical moods continue to be swiftly changing as churchmen strive to be attuned to the temper of the times. As a result, the goal and nature of seminary education are quite different in the minds of many today from what they were just a few years ago. It is well for those who are concerned about the training received by ministers of the gospel to be aware of these contemporary trends.

The most obvious trend in theological education in recent years has been the *ecumenical* trend. Not only are Protestant seminaries combining their programs, but Roman Catholic seminaries are joining them. And at the 1970 meeting of the American Association of Theological Schools, constitutional changes were made to facilitate the admission of Jewish schools to these cooperative ventures.

As if such developments were not startling enough, the cry now is for greater Christian and Marxist dialogue. The first 1968 issue of the World Council of Churches' *Study Encounter* is devoted entirely to this dialogue, with articles by Communists, Catholics, and Protestants. All of them agree that Christians and Communists may and must work together to establish a new society.

Such an outlook has its repercussions at the level of seminary training. We find that there has been established in the past two years what amounts to a *rival* form of ministerial training, in competition with the established seminaries. This *Action Training Coalition* defines itself as a "coalition of 20 action training agencies, primarily but not exclusively rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition" (see the Winter 1970 issue of *Theological Education* for a study of these agencies). In such centers the one aspiring to the Protestant ministry receives the same kind of training as the one aspiring to put his Neo-Marxist philosophy into practice in the streets of an urban ghetto.

## A new theology . . .

The Christian layman reading of such developments is likely to ask in bewilderment, "How can these things be?" The answer is that many churches have developed a theology — a conception of the church and its role, the role of its ministers, the nature of the gospel it proclaims — which they can now share in common. Having the same view of the gospel, the church, and the task of the Christian ministry, it is only reasonable that they should be quite ready to see all their ministers receive the same, a common training.

And this new theology provides the basis on which not only Protestants and Catholics may unite, and Christians and Jews, but also Christians and Marxists.

What is this newly emerging ecumenical theology? Its background is the secular mood of contemporary man, a

mood that Harvey Cox defines as "the turning of man's attention away from other worlds and towards this one." In turning our attention to this world, we are told, we see that it is a world "come of age." It has reached maturity; it has cut God's apron strings; and it realizes that man himself can and must accomplish anything that is to be accomplished in this world.

## . . . with a new gospel

In this secular world of the seventies the churches are asking: "What can the Christian gospel mean if it is to be truly meaningful" — that is, if it is to speak to men who are interested in this world only and in human actions and values only? This has proved to be a difficult question, and many answers have been suggested. But the consensus that seems to be emerging among many Protestants and Catholics is that the gospel for the seventies is the *gospel of the coming kingdom*, a gospel in which *hope* is the key rather than faith or love. "The eschatological perspective is on the verge of becoming the great new discovery of Christian thought in our time" (*Christian Century*, November 1, 1971).

The implications of this new emphasis are far too many to be considered here. But note that this kingdom, which the church announces and works to bring in, is a new society to be achieved upon this present earth and by human effort. Moreover, this effort will have to be aimed not merely at societal improvement or reform, but with radical and even violent revolution. "Behold, I make all things new" is the text often quoted.

## . . . and a new "God"

But someone might object: "Do we not read often in the literature of this new theology of hope, this theology of revolution, that the coming kingdom is the Kingdom of God?" Yes, we do. But we must understand what the word "God" means in the new theology. God is defined by Harvey Cox as the "Not Yet." And he supports the Marxist Ernest Bloch in affirming that "either this full life to come may be called 'God,' or man in achieving his potential in the future may be called 'God.'" This is a "transcendence" that even the Communist Roger Garaudy can accept: "There is something going beyond or transcending nature, history and individual experience: it is the future."

Saying that it is "the kingdom of God," then, is simply saying that it is a society that is still future. But it is the job of the church to make it present. Jesus devoted his life to that task, we are told, and so must the church. The kingdom will be brought in, as the New Testament teaches us, "by fire," by the cleansing flames of revolution, not by peace but by the sword.

(continued on page 42)

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## SOCIAL ACTIVISM & evangelism?

"Further Biblical-theological study and discussion [of race relations], except as directly related to and in support of specific concrete action proposals for eliminating racism at every level . . . shall be declared *out of order* because of the potential of any non-action oriented approach to tempt all of us to further improper sinful delays in this crucial area of the church's ministry to the world." So urged Dr. Dennis Hoekstra of Calvin College in a keynote address to the North American RES Conference on Race Relations in Chicago, March 2-5.

And this suggestion was in fact a controlling motif in most of the discussion and proposals that came out of this conference. The Reformed Ecumenical Synod of 1968 (after years of "biblical-theological study" of the subject!) adopted fifteen resolutions concerning race relations, and urged its member churches to "test conditions in their churches and countries by the norms as set forth" in these resolutions. In response, the Christian Reformed Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America authorized the holding of such a testing conference. Over a hundred delegates attended, the great majority Christian Reformed with proportionate delegations from the other two churches and a few interested participants from non-member churches.

### Keynotes

The conference opened with an elaborate responsive litany (including a confession of guilt for "excluding other men from our lives" and for having "broken covenant with God") and an address by the Rev. William Pannell of the Tom Skinner Crusaders. Other keynote speakers were the Rev. C. Herbert Oliver and the Rev. James B. White, United Presbyterian and Christian Reformed pastors in New York City.

Interestingly, both these men *did* present significant "biblical-theological studies." Both happen to be black and both are graduates of Westminster Theological Seminary. In a sympathetic discussion of the current drive for "black identity," Mr. Oliver still insisted that "it is God's image in man rather than melanin in man, that endows man with true humanity, dignity and worth." Mr. White urged Christians to see themselves as living in the time of Jubilee, a time for restoration when those with material plenty should concern themselves to aid their neighbors who have suffered from racial discrimination and economic oppression; he suggested that churches employ full-time deacons where the need is crucial.

The conference sought to "test conditions in their churches" by means of reports from representatives of each church; this revealed little more than general impressions, and the conference assumed that varying degrees of racism did exist among us. Most of the delegates were more concerned about concrete proposals to overcome racism and to alleviate unjust social conditions. This was accomplished through small "Support Action Groups" that spent many

hours formulating "specific programs for action" in various aspects of race relations and the churches.

There was no opportunity given for discussion of the RES resolutions themselves; these were the "norms" to be used not discussed. Some of the delegates had serious reservations about some of these. Is it biblical to urge *all* Christians to "acknowledge their common involvement in guilt . . . and to repent of their own sin" in the area of race relations? Is it even biblical to assume, as the resolutions do, that there are such identifiable groups called "races"? To be fair, this was a conference not a legislature; but the lack of critical discussion of basic assumptions did pose a problem of conscience for some.

### Proposals

The proposals from the small discussion groups were channeled through a "Findings Committee" for presentation to the whole conference on the last day. There were eight type-written pages of these, and very little time for discussion. My personal evaluation of them is that a heavy emphasis on social activism was being urged, with the focus largely on interracial relations and social needs of various minority groups, and almost no concern expressed for biblical evangelism or the eternal welfare of these same people. The conference agreed simply to offer these proposals to the churches and their related institutions "for their use."

There was also a strong insistence that Christian concern must be exercised through institutionalized endeavors. No doubt organization is needed for many such efforts. But individual effort to express Christian love for a neighbor was openly belittled. This is to miss a crucial point. Love is expressed only person-to-person; no machine, even one where the "wheels" are people, can love. Discrimination and oppression, although collective in force, are still the result of countless individual prejudices and ignorances. To remove the cancer of prejudice or to bind the wounds it has caused can only come as individuals are brought into direct confrontation with the Lord Jesus Christ. Organizational efforts should be no more than a means to this end, not ends in themselves.

Every delegate to the conference did "commit himself to the task of working for racial understanding in his areas of responsibility." That should be in reliance on the full teachings of God's Word in this matter, and also through genuine acts of love for neighbors in need, even if they live "across the tracks." We need to remember, as the conference warned, that "theologizing apart from deeds of obedience is dead," but also that "action without a living faith in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit is vanity."

And so, let each one of us examine his own heart, and "as we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

—J. J. M.

# Which Way for the Church?

## A REVIEW OF TWO BOOKS

### A CHALLENGE TO CHURCH MEMBERS

Which way for the church? Is the traditional church-in-a-building with its organized church school, officers, and paid ministry, now on the way out? Many pundits say so. The ideal, they feel, is the house-church, loosely organized and highly personalized. Others feel that more organization is needed, more institutionalized ways to do the work of the church in today's "post-Christian" world.

The church of Christ does confront a society that is changing so rapidly that careful thought and adjustment is almost impossible. But a careless drifting with the tide will be disastrous. The church cannot just sit back and let the world go hang. If America was ever a "Christian nation," it surely is no longer. We are the minority among a large pagan majority. Yet we still have Christ's honor to uphold and his disciple-making commission to obey. The question is how to do it today.

Two recent books on this subject have come from writers within the Reformed family. Both books are concerned about the church's practice in this present chaotic age. Both see the world as increasingly caught in a revolutionary ferment that could sweep away the organized church as we have known it. But these books come to quite different conclusions as to the direction they think the church should take.

There is a real need for all of us to think again on the teaching of Scripture concerning the church of Christ. This review is a plea for you to do just that. The reviewer does not pretend to be neutral, but neither does he think that he has all the answers. Your own thoughtful reaction would be welcomed, and may contribute to what should be a continuing discussion among the members of Christ's church.

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**OUT OF CONCERN FOR THE CHURCH.** Five essays by John A. Olthuis, Hendrik Hart, Calvin G. Seerveld, Bernard Zylstra, and James H. Olthuis. Wedge Publishing Foundation, Toronto, 1970.

To many readers, *Concern* will seem to be a misnomer indeed. There are so many negative judgments hurled against the organized church that it's hard to believe these writers really care about it.

Yet this is hardly fair. All five writers happen to be members of the Christian Reformed Church; all five do, as a matter of fact, love that church and her rich heritage of Reformed thought.

The writers represent the followers of Herman Dooyeweerd in the Association for the Advancement of Christian Studies. John Olthuis is executive director of AACS. Hart, Zylstra, and James Olthuis are faculty members at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. Seerveld, philosophy professor at Trinity Christian College, is a frequent lecturer at AACS gatherings.

Space prohibits a thorough review of the book. What is given is one reader's attempt to express the book's main thrusts and to offer some criticisms of them.

#### The "Concern"

All five writers see the organized church today as a slowly dying futility. In a world where large, impersonalized institutions determine almost every aspect of our lives, the church has become an ineffective voice. It is out of concern about this state of affairs that the book is written.

Unfortunately, the writers employ familiar words and phrases but with unfamiliar meanings and connotations. The harshly negative comments on the church and this confusing jargon are hardly designed to win many converts to the book's position.

The book sets forth what is admittedly only an outline program to bring the church out of its dormancy and into effective action in the world. The remedy proposed is for the institutional church to "preach the Kingdom" and lead its members to make the Kingdom visible in the world. What this means is that the "New Humanity" (otherwise known as "born-again Christians"?) must or-

ganize institutionalized endeavors in every sphere of human activity. This means Christian schools and a university, Christian labor unions and political action groups, Christian art institute and communications media, Christian research and study groups, to present Christian alternatives through organized groups to the humanistic thought-patterns of American life.

#### Underlying assumptions

The book speaks out of a philosophical viewpoint that sees all aspects of human life as focalized in distinct, or "sovereign" spheres. These include the home, the church, the state, economics, philosophic or scientific thought, art and esthetics, each with its own laws and sphere of operation. To "preach the Kingdom" is to make Christ's lordship visible through institutionalized Christian expression in each of these spheres.

This concept of "sphere-sovereignty" has led these writers into a view of the organized church quite different from the traditional Reformed and Presbyterian understanding. They see the organized church as the institutional expression of Christ's kingship in the sphere of faith. The church,

through its ordained ministry, is *not* to instruct its members on how to vote, carry on their business, or paint pictures. Its task is to instruct them in the faith, lead them in communal confession of it, and send them forth to organize Christian institutions.

### A summary critique

Did the apostles ever dream of any such institutionalized "Kingdom" activity? Paul never organized a Christian Tentmakers League, nor did he encourage Onesimus to found a Christian Slave Union.

There is no biblical justification for limiting the organized church to the sphere of private faith, denying it the right to speak directly into the concerns of economics, science, or education. Both the Heidelberg and Westminster Shorter Catechisms begin with questions that enclose every aspect of life within the sphere of faith. God's infallibly revealed law and grace are as "relevant" to labor relations as to church fellowship. The organized church must proclaim *the written Word* as it applies to work, to science, or even to sculpture.

The individual Christian is a member of the *organized* church whether he is at home, at work, or at Sunday worship. He is to confess his Lord before men, not just in the confines of a church building, but wherever he may go. It is precisely this confessing of Christ before the world by each member of Christ's church that makes the "invisible" church "visible" to the world.

The emphasis on Christian institutions is an understandable reaction to this highly institutionalized world we live in. And some such institutions may be expediently necessary today; a Christian school to do what the home cannot do alone, or a Christian

labor union to protect Christian workers from godless economic organizations.

But the insistence on organized efforts to confront humanistic institutions with Christian ones is a misreading of God's plan for his people. The repeated appeal in the book to Colossians 1:20-23, where it speaks of God's "reconciling all things to himself," as though this were the "proof-text" requiring Christian institutions of reconciliation in every sphere of life, totally misses Paul's point. What God is reconciling to himself is not politics or art or education, but politicians, artists, and educators. It is *persons*, individuals, who are reconciled to God through personal faith "in the body of his [Christ's] flesh" (verse 22). Then, those politicians, artists, and educators who "were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind" will carry their new obedience to King Jesus into their politics, art, or education.

The writers of these essays are so caught up in their vision of Christian institutions that they would suspend such "evangelistic" efforts as foreign missions, Bible distribution, or individual "soul-saving" until the Christian community has all these Christian institutions deemed necessary. But it is not through organized power-groups, "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). It is God's Spirit, using God's written Word of reconciliation, who works to cause this individual person or that to be born again and to enter *into the Kingdom*. Our task, as members of the church every day of the week, is to bring that Word into every activity and into confrontation with the men of this world. Only so will the Kingdom be extended and Christ's church built.

persuasive manipulation of people's attitudes by the mass-media is undermining any lingering respect for the church.

### The crucial problem

Civilization's decay is attributed to the loss of the concept of absolute truth. In today's world, particularly among the molders and shapers of opinion, and almost universally among the young (effectively brain-washed by secular education), there is no such thing as truth in clear antithesis to error. Truth is relative, "true for me" if it works or satisfies my desires.

To Schaeffer, this loss of the antithesis constitutes the major stumbling block to communicating the gospel to the modern world. This relativizing of truth is also seen as the source from which all modern thought has sprung.

On one side, the church is threatened by the revolutionary radicalism of the New Left. Believing that nothing could be worse than what now is, the Leftist is willing to destroy everything in the irrational hope that something better might rise from the ashes. The church, proclaiming God's truth, is an obvious target for such destruction.

On the other side, modern science and technology are also based on humanistic relativism. Faceless experts of the "Establishment elite" already are suggesting they be given control over all areas of life. A church, obedient to her Lord, would hardly fit into the plans of such a collectivist dictatorship.

Schaeffer's analysis will appear rather simplistic to many, and perhaps it is. But even a naive thinker can see the threat of violent anarchy from the Left, and the increasing control over our lives by the "technocrats" of the "Establishment." So, what shall the church do?

### Reforming the church

Schaeffer's concern is that the organized church reform itself in accordance with the principles given in Scripture. This is the only institution that can possibly withstand the forces of humanism or mount a counter-offensive. But to survive, the church must know the truth and proclaim it as God's absolute truth in opposition to all error.

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THE CHURCH AT THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, by Francis A. Schaeffer. Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., 1970.

Most evangelical Christians, and many non-Christians, have heard of Dr. Schaeffer's unique ministry. Through seminars and personal discussion at L'Abri in the Swiss Alps, and by means of lectures and books elsewhere, he has been remarkably effective in communicating the gospel to modern minds. Many young lives

have been reborn into Christ through the Spirit's use of this ministry.

Schaeffer sees Western culture as dying. He also sees the church under attack on all sides from an increasingly hostile world. The church's "Puritan ethic" is being blamed for the ecological crisis, and even the problem of the "population explosion." The

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# The Presbyterian Guardian

EDITOR

JOHN J. MITCHELL

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## Letters to the Editor

### Woman's "place" in home and church

Dear Sir:

I am now 72 years old, and have long felt that there was a need to re-evaluate the relation between women and men. I believe God has a place for his children in his work on earth. Yet in spite of many years in different Reformed churches, I am still somewhat confused as to what my status as a woman should be, both in the home and in the church.

I believe that God created man, male and female, but meant to be a unity. Sin was embraced by both the man and the woman, and thus God laid a difference upon us: "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16). As long as we are subject to sin and apart from God, the woman will be subjected to her husband.

For the born-again woman, I believe that this subjection should be one of position. The male is still the first whom God created, and the female did come out of the male. But if both male and female are born again, then there should be a relationship between them as though they were one self even as two persons.

We should live, think, and work together as a team not abreast, but in tandem with one going before the other. This way the man is in the lead to spy out the way, to break the path, to take up the slack when the other grows weary. He will set the direction for the path their life will follow.

But his decision should only be made after due consideration of his own and his wife's ideas, thoughts and understandings. If she is able to contribute constructive ideas, and if these are used or incorporated in the decisions made, then I believe she should also be given full credit for her part or share. This is not to inflate her pride, but to keep things on an even keel!

I wish this were how it had been in my own marriage (which ended eight years ago), and also in my working with and for other men. It has often grieved my heart a great deal that many men find it hard if not impossible to concede gracefully to the understandings found in women. And I believe such understanding would be shown more often if it was encouraged as Christ would have done.

We cannot expect to find perfection on this side of the Promised Land. So I must be content to try from time to time to figure out how best to serve my Lord Jesus as I work under my brethren. I rejoice that I have my Lord to lean upon, for I do become quite weary and discouraged at times with my brethren in Christ as I work with them for our Lord.

May we have a lively and instructive discussion on this matter, to the glory of our God and the enjoyment of his people, both men and women in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Mrs. Clara Ahrens  
Germantown, Philadelphia

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### "Women's Lib" and Christian wisdom

Dear Mr. Mitchell:

I want to express appreciation for the December-January issue of the *Guardian*, and especially for the attention given to "Women's Lib" in that issue. This letter is a response to your request for feedback.

The reports by Ruth Packer and June Cox, and the editorial by Jean Gaffin, called attention to several ways in which the "Women's Lib" movement frequently rejects God's laws for sexual and family life. When a Christian sees such flouting of his

Lord's authority, it is sometimes difficult for him to see anything else in what such culprits are saying. But it seems to me that, if we are to meet the challenge of "Women's Lib" with the Christian wisdom needed, we must recognize that this movement is reacting against some real wrongs in our own culture that Christians are also involved in. Two things in particular occur to me.

First, any woman who has had to earn a living knows that women are frequently discriminated against in America, both in the limited variety of jobs available to them and in the smaller salaries often paid them for work comparable to that done by higher-paid men. I can't imagine any biblical ground for this practice. Christian employers should do what they can to eliminate it, as should Christian voters also.

Second — and I think this cuts closer to home! — "Women's Lib" has focused our attention on the distortion of masculine and feminine sexuality in American life. The cures they suggest for this are sometimes worse than the disease; but in seeing the disease perhaps they have seen more clearly than we. I have been in too many Christian homes where it was taken for granted that at the end of the meal the women should retire to the kitchen to do dishes, while the men should sit in the living room to discuss theology, politics, or business — or watch the football game!

This is admittedly the American pattern. But it strikes me as a false one. American men are expected to be strong, silent, physically aggressive types, not given to tears or looking at flowers. They are afraid to touch or hug another man for fear someone will accuse them of homosexuality. They rule their wives with iron hands. Above all, they are not supposed to do dishes!

American women are expected to be submissive and alluring, to "get their way" indirectly by subtlety, to aim for marriage as their highest good, and to express their creativity primarily by having and raising children. Judging by Paul's own strongly emotional attitude to the Christians he pastored, by his remarks about single women, and by the kind of leadership women had in the early church (hold-



ing churches in their homes, being deaconesses and Bible teachers), I don't get the idea that the American sexual ideal is exactly what the apostle had in mind!

In short, I believe that we are less sensitive to the real injustices challenged by "Women's Lib" than as Christians we ought to be. And I believe that much that is sinful and distorted in American sexuality characterizes our own behavior as professedly Christian men and women. Our testimony in meeting the challenge of "Women's Lib" will be more pleasing to God, and more credible to women, if we will set our own house in order in these areas.

David Clowney  
Philadelphia, Pa.

## Which Way for the Church?

(continued from page 37)

The author urges the church to re-examine its form, or structure, in the light of biblical norms. The Scriptures clearly require that believers associate themselves in a community, come together on the Lord's day for fellowship and worship, exist under the supervision of church elders, display mercy through ordained deacons, and associate together in larger assemblies for a stronger unity.

Yet the church needs to be careful to keep the freedom of form allowed by Scripture. There are no biblical requirements for churches to own buildings, follow set orders of worship, or sing God's praise in one style of music. The church must keep free to adjust to change even while obeying the norms set forth in God's Word.

It is particularly in the practice of the communion of God's people that Schaeffer sees the greatest urgency for reform. Only as Christians really practice the love Christ commanded, the love for all men as neighbors and especially for those of "the household of faith," will the church meet today's challenge.

In contrast to the institutionalized expressions of Christian action called for by *Out of Concern for the Church*, Schaeffer insists that "salvation is individualistic. People cannot become Christians except one at a time, and

yet our salvation is not solitary. God's people are called together in community" (p. 60). This community is the church organized according to biblical norms, with freedom to practice love as Christ intended. Schaeffer's book is worth the reading by every Christian if only to learn the biblical balance between form and freedom, and the urgency to show truly Christian love.

### A necessary caution

There is one problem in Schaeffer's approach that should be noted. He rightly sees modern relativism as due to the abandonment of the antithesis between truth and error. Yet the author seems to believe that natural human reason is capable of right rational thinking in itself, that an appeal to antithetical thinking may enable a person to accept the Scriptures as true. In effect, this fails to take serious account of the polluting effect of sin on man's intellect as well as his moral activity. Classical rationalism, with its absolutes, was just as antithetical to God's truth as is modern relativism, and for the same reason: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Schaeffer speaks of salvation as the removal of man's moral guilt before a righteous and holy God. That is true. But salvation, including the work of God's Spirit in cleansing the mind and heart even before faith comes to expression, is salvation of the whole man — moral person, religious being, and rational mind.

The natural, unregenerate mind will not think rightly, though it may operate according to the rules of classical rationalism. God's absolute truth is in absolute antithesis to every pattern of thought devised by the sinful mind of man. What opens the door to faith is the proclamation of the truth of Scripture as used by the Spirit, the Author of that Word.

### "The Mark of a Christian"

I have been asked many times why Schaeffer has so often succeeded in bringing the gospel home to otherwise "impossible" prospects. I believe he gives his own answer in an appendix to the book with the title above (also

reprinted in separate booklet form by Inter-Varsity Press).

What is "the mark of the Christian"? It is the practice of love for God and for others, the practice of compassionate concern for individual persons no matter what their outward appearance, a self-giving love that costs you a great deal.

"What then shall we conclude but that as the Samaritan loved the wounded man, we as Christians are called upon to love *all* men as neighbors, loving them as ourselves. Second, that we are to love all true Christian brothers in a way that the world may observe. This means showing love to our brothers in the midst of our differences — great or small — loving our brothers when it costs us something, loving them even under times of tremendous emotional tension, loving them in a way the world can see. In short, we are to practice and exhibit the holiness of God and love of God, for without this we grieve the Holy Spirit.

"Love — and the unity it attests — is the mark Christ gave Christians to wear before the world. Only with this mark may the world know that Christians are indeed Christians and that Jesus was sent by the Father" (pp. 152f.)

Francis Schaeffer practices this kind of love, and the Holy Spirit has been pleased to use it and him to the blessing of many. This is the way the church should go!

—J. J. M.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>KINDERGARTEN TEACHER NEEDED</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Experience preferred</p> <p style="text-align: center;">◆</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Peninsula Christian School 22507 S. Figueroa St. Carson, CA 90745</p> <p style="text-align: center;">◆</p> <p style="text-align: center;">In the Los Angeles area</p>
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# The Sabbath — a Creation Ordinance and Sign of the Christian Hope

RICHARD B. GAFFIN, JR.

*Continuing the discussion of the "Sabbath Question," Dr. Gaffin professor in New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary, focuses attention on a basic consideration.*

The question of the sabbath's place in the New Testament age depends on whether or not the sabbath is a "creation ordinance." Did God (in Genesis 2:2, 3) intend that a weekly sabbath rest be part of man's life until the consummation of all things?

The view that the sabbath is a "creation ordinance" is based on the connection between Genesis 2:2, 3, Exodus 20:10, 11 and Hebrews 4. All too frequently, however, there has been little appreciation for the biblical way in which these passages are related to each other in their bearing on the "Sabbath Question." The Bible is a unity, and this unity is such that the New Testament functions as an infallible interpreter of the Old.

It must be emphasized then that, while Genesis 2 is the foundation for the "creation ordinance" view, this view is not undermined by the present-day confusion and uncertainties in the interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis. Hebrews 4:4 (in its context) provides a by no means exhaustive, but nevertheless canonical instance of how Genesis 2:2 (in its context) is to be understood by the Christian.

## I. HEBREWS 3:7 - 4:13

This passage forms a unit within the larger whole of the book. In dealing with those statements that speak directly about the sabbath, we must remain aware of the structure and primary emphasis of the whole passage. What we have here is a commentary on Scripture, an interpretative discussion of Psalm 95:7-11 and Genesis 2:2.

### "Today"

From the Psalm, the writer of Hebrews picks up two key terms: "today" and "my [God's] rest." These are *not* to be equated. "Today" is applied to and defines the present situation of the readers (3:13). Though originally addressed to the generation of the psalmist, even then it had anticipatory reference to the time when the work of Christ would be finished. For the Christian reader, "today" is the present, the new covenant time in which the "good news," "the word of hearing" is proclaimed (4:2). It is the time in which "the promise of entering his rest remains" (4:1).

"Today" is the time for faith and obedience (3:15, 4:7), when the consummation and final judgment are still future, when hardness of heart, unbelief and apostasy (3:12) are present possibilities. In short, as the Psalm reference makes clear, "today" is for the church a time of testing and wilderness wandering as it was for Israel in the desert.

### "My rest"

In contrast, "my rest" (as *rest*) clearly points up the

antithesis toward the believer's present toil (6:10, 10:24) and his exposure to hardship and temptation. This rest is a broad conception, synonymous with salvation in the fullest eschatological sense. It is entirely alien to the context to take "my rest" as referring to blessings experienced by believers now. Rather, it is the focus of the believer's hope even as Canaan was for the Israelites in the desert (cf. 4:8). It has a *local* character; it is a rest that believers *enter into* (3:11, 18, 19; 4:1, 3, 5, 6, 10). It is the "heavenly country," the "lasting city which is to come" (13:14; cf. 11:16).

It seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that "my rest" is *still future* "as long as it is called 'today'" (3:13). Not only does this conclusion rest on what is explicitly stated, but it flows out of the basic line of argument in 3:7 - 4:13. Thus, the present tense used in 4:3 has a future force, accentuating the certainty that believers *will* enter God's rest.

It has been argued that, since the writer of Hebrews so strongly emphasizes the eschatological character of Christ's work for the believer, "my rest" must refer to a present reality for the Christian; in other words, the sabbath is fulfilled and the Christian already has entered into God's rest. But this misses a distinctive feature of the eschatological teaching in Hebrews, namely its "qualified eschatology." Especially in 3:7 - 4:13, the author is concerned to show that though the new covenant community of believers is itself an eschatological phenomenon, there is a further eschatological fulfillment to be received. In a very real sense the church has come, through the exalted Son of God, to Mount Zion; but in another, equally real sense the church is still "on the way" to its destination. Within this pattern of eschatological emphasis, with its dual focus, "my rest" lies entirely within the scope of what is "not yet."

## Genesis 2:2

Two elements in the author's presentation bear directly on the sabbath issue: The second main clause of Genesis 2:2 is found in Hebrews 4:4; and "sabbath keeping" or "sabbath rest" is referred to in Hebrews 4:9.

The quotation from Genesis in verse 4 identifies the origin and character of "my rest." The reference establishes the nature of the antithesis between faith and unbelief that permeates the whole passage. The wilderness generation failed to enter "my rest" not because it was unavailable to them (it has been there "from the foundation of the world"), but solely on account of unbelief. On the other hand, believers are certain to enter it. Combining Genesis 2:2 and Psalm 95:7-11, the author shows that some are to enter "my rest" in accord with God's design, and some will fail because of lack of faith (verse 6).

We should notice then the broad perspective opened up by this reference to Genesis 2:2. The rest of God, the end-goal of redemption mentioned in Psalm 95:11, the inheritance of which Canaan was only a type and which the



New Testament people of God are now seeking to enter, is none other than the rest of God at creation. The eschatological redemption-rest is not a mere reflection of God's creation-rest, the earlier not just a model for the later. Hebrews knows only one rest, "my rest," entered by God at creation and by believers at the consummation. The writer sees the description given in Genesis 2:2, not simply as a reference to the bare existence of this rest, but as the *design* and *mandate* that others should enter and enjoy it. Otherwise, "it remains for some to enter it" (verse 6) would have no foundation!

### "Sabbath keeping"

In verse 9, the central concept of rest is termed a "sabbath keeping" or "sabbath rest." This shift in vocabulary is striking, and appears to be deliberate. In fact, the author may well have coined the word translated "sabbath keeping."

We may not be able to determine exactly why he uses this phrase, but the effect of its use is plain. It identifies "my rest" as specifically sabbath rest. In a most direct fashion, this rest (as the consummation hope for the believer) is tied to the institution of the sabbath and its observance. From this connection certain conclusions seem to follow: (1) Sabbath observance would appear to be a sign looking forward to the sabbath rest of the consummation. Though never stated by the writer, the implication is that sabbath keeping signifies rest to come. (2) Since the writer consistently emphasizes that this eschatological reality is still in the future for New Testament believers, observing of the sign now is still in order and still binding upon the Christian. (3) In view of the appeal to Genesis 2:2, it would appear that specifically it is the sign of the *weekly* sabbath that continues to be required of us.

### In Summary

The teaching of Hebrews 3:7 - 4:13 may be summarized as follows:

(1) The view that the rest typified by the Old Testament weekly sabbath became a full reality for believers at the coming of Christ (so that the observance of the typical sign is no longer appropriate or demanded) is not supported by this passage. On the contrary, such a conception runs counter to its central thrust.

(2) According to this passage, Genesis 2:2 states much more than simply that God rested on the seventh day. What is shown here is that God established "my rest" in order that men may enter and share it. Genesis 2:2 expresses the design and mandate for the promised consummation rest yet to be enjoyed by believers. But this eschatological rest is related to the weekly sabbath as the reality to the type. Or, in other words, according to the structure of thought in Hebrews, we are to see the weekly sabbath as a "creation ordinance."

## II. EXODUS 20:8-11

The Fourth Commandment requires that a weekly sabbath be kept. This command is based specifically on God's activity at creation. (There is no good reason for not affirming a direct connection between verse 11 and Genesis 2:2, 3. The appeal to the subject matter in general and the language of "blessing" and "hallowing" in particular are unmistakable.)

It is often argued that the creation pattern is here used

to give the motive for a new commandment given to Israel at Sinai. But this fails to reckon adequately with the language of verse 11, or with the interpretation given in Hebrews. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, according to verse 11, God's rest from creating involved at the beginning a setting apart of one day in man's weekly cycle for rest. This would seem to follow especially from the substitution of "sabbath" in Exodus 20:11b for "seventh" in Genesis 2:3, reflecting the use of "rest" (or *shabbath*) in this latter verse. Similarly, Hebrews teaches that the weekly sabbath is a sign of the eschatological reality that has been projected from the beginning in the fact of God's rest at creation, so that the institution of the sign and of God's rest itself appear to coincide.

### Points of emphasis

1. The introduction of redemptive motives (as in Deuteronomy 5:15) as a basis for sabbath keeping is in no way incompatible with the sabbath as a creation ordinance. Such redemptive grounds do not relativize the creation motive or make it any less basic. As in all that God does, creation is the foundation and presupposition of redemption.

2. It is frequently argued that the biblical silence concerning sabbath observance before the exodus is an objection to the "creation ordinance" view. Apart from the reminder that an argument from silence is never conclusive, it ought to be observed that it is not in conflict with the sabbath as creation ordinance to say that the sabbath was given to Israel at Sinai (Ezekiel 20:12; Nehemiah 9:14). This is true in the sense that the period from Adam to Moses was one that was "before the law" (Romans 5:13, 14; Galatians 3:17, 19). This does not mean that it was a period in which the basic demands of the law were not in force or law (and sin) were non-existent (Romans 4:15; 5:13). But it was a period in which the law had not yet been given the explicit and pointed revelation it received at Sinai, so that some of its requirements were only dimly perceived, if at all.

Moreover it is relevant in this connection to recall that monogamous marriage was violated by the patriarchs without any expression of divine disapproval or of scruples by those involved; yet our Lord says, referring to Genesis 2:24, that "from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8). The gathering of the manna before the sabbath (Exodus 16:22ff.) is perhaps best understood against the background of a long neglect of sabbath keeping; at any rate, sabbath observance before Sinai is plain.

3. The basic provision of the Sabbath commandment is a day of rest, a weekly cessation from labor. This is both a requirement and a gift. To be sure, the rest commanded is not idleness; it is a rest holy to the Lord (Isaiah 58:13, 14), and that involves worship not only appropriately but necessarily (Leviticus 23:3; Acts 15:21). But to conclude that a rest day was commanded simply in order to permit a time for public and private worship is a significant reduction and distortion of the biblical perspective. The weekly sabbath rest has been given to God's people "on their way" in both the old and new covenant, to be a sign of their eschatological hope, the continual confirmation that their labors are not in vain in the Lord.

## III. OTHER NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS

It is fair to say that those who maintain that weekly

sabbath keeping is a creation ordinance read other pertinent biblical statements in the light of this conviction. This is as it should be if the view itself is taught in Scripture, for the perspective it establishes is quite basic. Accordingly, the much discussed statements of Paul that express some latitude or abrogation (Galatians 4:10, Colossians 2:16, 17 [see the February *Guardian*] and perhaps Romans 14:5, 6) are to be understood as referring not to the weekly sabbath, but to those elements peculiar to the system of Old Testament sabbath observance.

Jesus' statements concerning the sabbath and his healings on that day all serve to highlight his messianic identity and eschatological role. The passage in which this self-identification as the Messiah finds climactic expression confirms the sabbath as a creation ordinance: "The sabbath was made for man [Adam] . . . therefore the Son of Man [the last Adam] is Lord even of the sabbath" (Mark 2:27, 28). Eschatological lordship with reference to the sabbath is expressed here. But the pattern by which this lordship is realized in relation to the messianic people and their practice is disclosed elsewhere, notably in Hebrews 4.

## Theological Education in a Revolutionary Age

(Continued from page 34)

### . . . for a "revolutionary" church

Thus the church's role, in the new theology, is to be the vanguard of the revolution, and its ministers the revolutionary leaders or "elite." Johannes Metz, Austrian Roman Catholic theologian, calls his a "political theology," and sees as its task "to awaken in the area of church and theology a responsible understanding for the significance of revolutionary violence under certain historical conditions . . . Violence in certain respects can be a disguise, a pseudonym for Christian love."

If this is the nature of the gospel, its message becomes essentially indistinguishable from the classic Marxist message. And if this is the role of the church, what a new direction the training of its ministers must take! The new Action Training Centers speak of training ministers as "change-agents" and as "positive conflict-generators" — dangerous euphemisms, I suggest, for militant revolutionaries.

### A truly relevant gospel

This new ecumenical "gospel" is not the gospel that Westminster Seminary is training men to proclaim!

This does not mean that the gospel of Jesus Christ has nothing to say to men in terms of their living in today's world. In Jesus Christ, in his body the church, there is reconciliation effected between men — between black and white, rich and poor — even as Paul spoke of reconciliation between Jew and Gentile. But the gospel announces that such reconciliation can be accomplished only on the basis of, only as a result of, an even more basic reconciliation of sinful man with his holy Maker. This reconciliation was purchased at the cost of the atoning blood of God's own Son, and is entered into by repentance and faith in that Son.

It is not that the church is unconcerned about the relationships of men with men. But its message is distinctive, is unique, is impossible of confusion with the Marxist message, because it commands men in terms of their relationship to their Creator: "Be ye reconciled to God." And this God

Finally, from an understanding of the sabbath as a creation ordinance, the special prominence of the first day of the week in the New Testament (in the resurrection narratives; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10) may be taken as an indication that the first day of the week is the Christian's sabbath. Nevertheless, it ought to be recognized that the change of day does present a problem and cannot be established unequivocally on exegetical grounds.

The weekly sabbath for rest and worship was given by God at creation as a sign of the consummation of all his purposes in creation. It continues in force until Christ returns to make this consummation rest a reality for those who believe. The sabbath is not only a blessing and privilege for those who keep it. In an increasingly despairing and restless world, its observance is a sign and witness of the hope God's people have. It should be vigorously preached and faithfully practiced by the church, "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

is not simply a symbol of the future. He is the true and living God, who *was*, who *is*, and who *is to come*.

The new Action Training Centers claim to train men to minister to social *structures*. Westminster Seminary continues to train men to minister to *men* — to men who establish and maintain oppressive structures — to the *whole* man as a creature of God and a religious being who is totally depraved, misoriented, and must be reborn, redirected by the power of Christ's Spirit if he is to live in obedience to God.

### True freedom and justice

Our revolutionary age cries for "freedom." But it is only Christ who reveals to men what freedom really means — to be free for God and righteousness. And it is only Christ who sets men free — free from sin, free from death, free in the freedom of the risen Christ.

The contemporary revolution cries also for "justice." But having rejected the authority of God's revelation, the Word incarnate and inscripturated, that revolution possesses no standards to give content and meaning to justice, love, and peace. It leaves men in bondage to the opinions of men. The *Bible's* authority, on the other hand, is a *liberating* authority — for it brings men under authority of their Creator and establishes the foundation for proper social structures of family and state, so that there may be law and order with justice.

The church does have an eschatological message to proclaim. It announces a coming day of judgment. Christ the sovereign Lord will return. That final day of wrath and redemption is coming. Until it comes the world needs to hear the good news of peace with God, redemption from sin, and healing for the nations. May God grant that in our day, as in the day of its founding, it will be that everlasting gospel that Westminster men are trained to minister to men.

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*Professor Strimple is a graduate of the University of Delaware and of Westminster Theological Seminary. He taught for eight years at the Ontario Bible College, and in 1969 came to Westminster to teach in the Systematic Theology department.*

## A truly Reformed National Presbyterian Church?

In the last issue of the *Guardian* we reported on the formation of the National Presbyterian and Reformed Fellowship. What does it mean?

The news item noted the presence of participants at a planning meeting in Philadelphia from the following churches: the Presbyterian Church U.S. ("Southern"), the United Presbyterian Church U. S. A., the Reformed Church in America, the Christian Reformed Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church N. A. ("Covenanter"). At least some of the participants from the Orthodox Presbyterian and the two Reformed Presbyterian Churches were there with the approval of some official agency within their churches; all others were there without ecclesiastical endorsement of any kind.

The Fellowship is open to any ordained minister or elder from any church in the Reformed or Presbyterian tradition who will share in the new organization's objectives. These goals include a joining together for "encouragement and mutual assistance of those who seek in our time the unity of a pure witness to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ"; and this is avowedly a seeking after true ecumenism that is both Reformed in doctrine and Presbyterian in church government. In other words, the Fellowship at least is open to working toward a "National Presbyterian and Reformed Church" that might include all the various remnant groups who are still true Calvinists.

But aren't there dangers in any attempt to achieve a broader unity of this sort? Of course. At the same time no one is suggesting that such a nation-wide Calvinistic Church be organized next week. On the other hand, it is hardly fair to despise the effort as hopeless (though it could turn out to be so) or to brand it as a compromise with apostasy. Dr. Carl McIntire (in the March 4 *Christian Beacon*) charges that "Orthodox, Re-

formed Presbyterians Join Fellowship With Apostates." Does Dr. McIntire believe that every ordained man in the United Presbyterian Church is apostate? Are all ordained men in churches affiliated with the National Council of Churches also apostate? We surely regret that it has taken over thirty years for Machen's urgent warnings to be heard. But if these brethren in the Lord have finally "seen the light" and recognize the horrible outcome of compromise with unbelief, should we not rejoice? And should we not encourage them to "seek in our time [better late than never] the unity of a pure witness to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ"?

We should not be so naive as to think that a truly orthodox national Reformed and Presbyterian church will come just because some people want it. The "separated brethren" of the Orthodox and both Reformed Presbyterian Churches and those in the Christian Reformed Church have had the blessing of freedom to study God's Word without the distractions of resisting unbelieving church leaders. We may have gained insights into God's will that others lack — or, we may have become so proud of our achievements that we lack love for those less blessed!

What will come of this Fellowship? The dream is truly inspiring. Imagine what it would mean to find pure preaching of the Word, right administration of the sacraments, and faithful discipline of God's people, in truly Reformed and Presbyterian churches throughout the whole land! The problems to overcome are staggering and temptations to compromise will be great. But God, in his infinite grace and sovereign power, is surely able to accomplish great things in our day. We should all be in much prayer for a rich outpouring of the Spirit that this tentative fellowship of Reformed churchmen may yet result in a work approved of God for the blessing of many souls.

—J. J. M.



### When you write your Will WATCH OUT!

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## Here and There in The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

**Novato, Calif.** — The O. P. chapel here, begun as an outgrowth from the Covenant Church in Berkeley, and served by home-missionary Robert H. Graham, is preparing to petition the Presbytery of Northern California for organization as a church in the presbytery. In February, eleven families signed a "declaration of intent" indicating their desire to be organized; those not already members of other O. P. churches are attending instruction class. [We hope to have pictures and a fuller report next month.—Ed.]

**Winner, S. Dak.** — February 25 was "Missionary-of-the-year Night" at a Fellowship Supper for the Winner Church. A short skit was given illustrating different phases on one missionary's work, and the audience was challenged to name the missionary. Work among students and lepers, with hospitals, in teaching and preaching, was portrayed, and slides were shown. If you don't know, the missionary is Ted Hard in Korea. Mrs. Jack Kelley was in charge of the program.



**CARL A. AHLFELDT, faithful servant, home to his Lord**

**Bangor, Maine** — After months of severe pain and increasing weakness, the Rev. Carl A. Ahlfeldt was called home to his Lord, on Saturday, March 13. Funeral services were conducted by the Rev. Messrs. Bernard J. Stonehouse and LeRoy B. Oliver at the Pilgrim Church on March 16.

Having completed his course at Westminster Theological Seminary in

the Spring of 1936, Carl Ahlfeldt was ordained by the First General Assembly of what is now the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He took up his first pastoral duties in Indianapolis, remaining there until 1943. Pastorates in San Francisco; Portland, Oregon; and Oklahoma City followed. In June of 1968 he was installed as pastor of the Pilgrim Church in Bangor where he served until illness forced his retirement.

In June of 1961, at a special Anniversary Service in Wilmington, commemorating the first twenty-five years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Rev. Mr. Ahlfeldt delivered an address titled, "Others Have Labored." For those of us still at work in the Lord's harvest, it is truly a case of benefitting from the labors of this pastor, a careful student and preacher of the Word, a loving bishop of souls and a true father and brother in the faith. We have lost a faithful friend and co-worker, but we can only rejoice that he now sees his Lord face to face in perfect joy and rest from his pain and labors.

**Philadelphia** — Emmanuel Chapel rejoices in two new beginnings. On March 14, the Chapel inaugurated regular worship services with over 40 in attendance. Then on March 25, Timothy Harold Krispin became the newest addition to the family of the William C. Krispins,, home missionaries in this South Philadelphia area.

### New Christian School Association in New Jersey

**Westfield, N. J.** — Efforts to establish a Christian school with a distinctively Reformed approach in the western part of Union County, New Jersey, have been initiated by the Union County Association for Christian Education. The Association, founded in April 1970, is composed of a growing number of Christians who have felt the increasingly urgent need for Christian schools in this largely suburban county. A seven-man Board of Directors is currently working on the problems of curriculum, finances, teachers, and potential student interest in an attempt to open school during the Fall of 1971 or 1972.

Much work needs to be done, but the opportunities are very great. There is a growing awareness of the need for quality Christian education among Christians, and there is also increasing disaffection with public school systems in the local communities. The prayers of *Guardian* readers are urged for the work of the Association. Those moving into the New York City area are encouraged to investigate further the plans of the Association. It is hoped that the Christian school will be able to draw from such communities as Westfield, Plainfield, Scotch Plains, Cranford, and Rahway.

Inquiries may be addressed to the Association Secretary,, Mr. Edwin Hackenburg 214 Chestnut St., Westfield, N. J. 07090.