

# THE STANDARD

*Bearer*

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## MEDITATION

### Jehovah's Faithfulness

"But Zion saith, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me." —Isa. 49:14-16

Zion was wrapped in darkness in the prophetic vision of Isaiah.

And small wonder it was. She had more than deserved to be wrapped in this mantle of darkness.

Scan the context, and shudder.

The measure of iniquity was more than full. The nation that was named for Jehovah had provoked Him to His Face, in that they whored after other gods, after the gods of the nations that surrounded them.

And doing that, they had turned their backs upon the Fountain of Israel. These two things always go together.

And then the prophets had come with their heavenly injunction: Where are the fruits of My vineyard, saith the Lord of Hosts? These prophets had spoken, wept, pleaded, but all in vain.

Worse than that, this perverse nation had mocked their prophets, derided their testimony, persecuted their persons and had killed some of them. We have heard the bitter weeping of Jeremiah and Micha.

Oh yes, this Israel had forsaken their God, the God who alone was able to deliver . . .

And what followed?

Well, what would you expect? You cannot have success when you turn your back to the Lord. You must needs be plagued all the day long.

He called, and His servants came: the hated en-

emy, the arch-enemy of Israel: Babylon, wicked, foul, proud Babylon.

And the heritage of Jehovah was led to a strange land.

The daughter of Zion finds herself in Babylon, between the two rivers.

And there come the haters of God with unholy glee in their hearts: they are going to have a good time with these aliens and their strange customs: Come, sing us one of the songs of Zion!

But no, we cannot sing the Lord's song in a strange land! Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, ere I sing in this God-forsaken land of the sons of the devil.

And with tears in their hearts, they look toward Judah and Jerusalem, so far away!

But they see no deliverance.

How could they expect deliverance, after such great apostasy?

Upon their own unfaithfulness they can expect nothing but the just reward of their deeds.

Oh, it was sad in Babylon!

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But wonder of wonders, in that night of agony resounds the prophecy of God: Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God!

Notwithstanding their grievous sins, they hear the golden speech of God: "Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted His people, and will have mercy upon His afflicted."

It is the shaft of brilliant light of prophecy that shines in the darkness in Mesopotamia.

Lift up your heads, O Zion, and rejoice ye daughters of Jerusalem: your God cometh, and His arm shall rule for Him. He is going to lead you like a flock; He shall gather the lambs in His arm, and carry them in

His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young!

So, wipe away those tears; anoint your head with the glad oil of rejoicing: your Shepherd cometh to lead you back to Jerusalem!

But no, Zion still weeps. She turns a deaf ear to the miraculous speech of God, the unexpected, the baffling speech of unspeakable love. God's mercy on us? Oh no, how can that be?

Besides, look at the objective facts: we are in Babylon, far from the holy land, far from the city of God and our glorious House where our fathers served Him!

How, O prophet, can you speak of comfort, of mercy when the facts testify of our forsakenness. Oh no, but God has forgotten all about us, and He has forsaken us! Those are the sober facts.

And they continue to weep in Babylon.

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How utterly foolish of Zion to act this way!

They have forgotten one thing: God changeth never! God is faithful from everlasting to everlasting, and with Him is no change, nor variableness, nor turning.

Jeremiah testified of just that. He came to the weeping children of Zion and said: The Lord Jehovah hath appeared to me of old, and I have listened to His speech. This is what He said unto me: I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee!

But it was foolish to continue to weep in the face of such comfort.

First, because it made their night still darker.

Second, because they robbed themselves of the only comfort in such straights.

Third, because it was contrary to reality, the reality of the love of God.

No, for Zion there was no cause to lament; no, not in the face of such wondrous prophecy.

And therefore the Lord enjoins the people of His elective love to look about them: they have but to look and they will see shadows, symbols of His own fond love.

What generation is without its mother and babe? You find them in the lowest hovel and in the most glorious palaces.

Did you ever see a mother that would turn from her darling babe?

Is there a mother that would not have mercy on her son?

Ah, if the whole world would say of that son:

Lynch him! Destroy this dastardly wicked boy from off the face of the world! Then, if this culprit can escape the avenging mob, and sneak to the hovel of his mother, she will meet him with outstretched arms, and fold him to her breast, and say: My son, oh, my son!

Oh yes, mothers do have pity on their son!

It is the sweetest picture in this sorry earth.

And God bids His people to look upon that picture.

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But yet, it is possible that a mother be found who would cast off her son, and utterly forsake him in his misery. It is not likely, it is not probable, but it is possible.

And so God says: If they would forget, yet will I not forget thee!

Oh, dear reader, write those words on the posts of your doors; let them be for frontlets between your eyes; teach them to your doubting heart; inculcate them to the generations following: those words are sweeter than honey and the honey comb. I spoke earlier of the *miracle* of the love of God.

You see, the love of God and the faithfulness of that God are unchangeable.

But why?

And then is this the answer: God's love is not subject to change because of reasons outside of Him.

Ponder that statement.

He takes reasons within Himself to love us. His goodpleasure, which is as old as God is, is the fountain of His love toward us. And so it is not subject to change, even as our love and mercy.

Today I lie on my knees before the object of my love, and say: Thou art my life, my joy, my all! But tomorrow something happens, anything happens: there are a thousand possibilities; and I arise to detest the erstwhile object of all my adoration.

But not so God.

No, not even the sin of Zion can change the love of God.

And how Zion had sinned. She knows it; she is full of remorse, and cannot hope that God will ever forget.

But in the face of all that sin, the Lord saith: tell her that her iniquity is pardoned!

(We live anno Domini 1953, and I may add now: God will bear all our shame and sin, our curse and hell; till all is gone! till heaven is earned on His cross!)

What comfort!  
What unspeakable consolation!

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God has an image of His beloved Zion in the palms of His hands.

So have we.

Oh those pictures, those images of those we love!

But here is the difference: God has your photograph before you yourself appeared in history.

Before the world was made, He had your image in His palms, in His heart of hearts.

And you may rest assured that the image which God has with Him from all eternity is beautiful. You are so beautiful in that image that God delights to look at you.

No, not as you appear now in history, for then your image is so ugly that you yourself turn away from it, and cry: O my God, who shall deliver me out of the body of this death!?

As we appear in history we are very ugly indeed. Be patient!

God is at work. He labors throughout all the ages to make you in history as you are in His palms. Looking at the image of you in His heart, He fashions and fashions again. We call it sanctification.

And He will continue to fashion you, in body and soul, until you shall be just as lovely as He imagined you in His own heart before the earth sank on her foundation.

Be still, my heart!

God thinketh on thee!

And that's enough!

Amen.

G. Vos.

#### IN MEMORIAM

The Consistory of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Mich, hereby expresses its heartfelt sympathy with our brother Consistory member, Elder F. Sytsma, in the loss of his brother

#### MARTIN SYTSMA

who passed away Feb. 10. May our God abundantly comfort the bereaved by His Word and Spirit and strengthen them in the hope of the saints.

The Consistory,  
Rev. C. Hanko, Pres.  
G. H. Stadt, Clerk

Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Editor — REV. HERMAN HOEKSEMA

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## EDITORIALS

### Our Visit to Europe

Our last Synod decided to send delegates in the capacity of visitors to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod that meets this year in Edinburgh, Scotland. The meetings are scheduled for August 4 to 13. At the same time our Synod instructed the delegates also to get in contact with the committees of correspondence with foreign churches in the Netherlands. They have to contact the committees of the Reformed Churches, of the Reformed Churches (Art. 31), and of the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

At the last meeting of Classis West, however, it was decided to protest against this decision, and to instruct Synod to cancel the whole matter.

The *Standard Bearer* advises Synod not to heed this protest.

Let me briefly review the history of this matter.

In 1950 our Synod received the following invitation from the Reformed Ecumenical Synod:

On behalf of The Reformed Ecumenical Synod, in session at Amsterdam from 9-19 August 1949, the officers of this Synod have the honor to invite The Protestant Reformed Church to participate in the next Reformed Ecumenical Synod, which, the Lord willing, is to meet in August 1953 in Edinburgh. Receiving church will be The Free Church of Scotland.

The officers include a copy of the basis for proposed Reformed Ecumenical Synod, as it has been set up by the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of Amsterdam; and express their confidence that the Protestant Reformed Church will agree with this basis, and may be willing to participate in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of Edinburgh upon it. She is requested to appoint three delegates to this Synod, who are expected to agree personally with the Reformed Confession of faith and with the basis mentioned above.

The officers kindly request a favourable reply at the earliest possible date, and if suitable, likewise the names of the appointed delegates, at the address of the second clerk, Dr. P. G. Kunst, Victorieplein, 31a Amsterdam-Z.

Committing the Protestant Reformed Church to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and praying for the Lord's particular blessing.

The officers of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of Amsterdam,

(w.s.) G. Ch. Aalders, Chairman  
P. G. Kunst, Second Clerk

At the Synod of 1950 it was decided to table the matter of participation in the Ecumenical Synod until Synod of 1951, and that in the meantime the Committee of Correspondence with Foreign Churches be charged to investigate the matter more thoroughly and to report at the next Synod.

The Committee of Correspondence was to investi-

gate especially a certain clause in the Basis of the Ecumenical Synod. The clause referred to reads as follows:

It has to be emphasized that only a wholehearted and consistent return to this Scriptural truth of which the gospel of Jesus Christ is the core and apex, can bring salvation to mankind and effectuate the so sorely needed renewal of the world.

I may add here that the entire Basis for the Reformed Ecumenical Synod reads as follows:

The foundation for the Ecumenical Synod of Reformed Churches shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as interpreted by the confessions of the Reformed faith, namely, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Gallican Confession, the Belgic Confession, the First Scotch Confession, the Second Scotch Confession, the Westminster Confession, the Canons of Dordt, the Thirty-nine Articles. It should be understood, that these Scriptures, in their entirety, as well as in every part thereof, are the infallible and ever abiding Word of the living Triune God, absolutely authoritative in all matters of creed and conduct, and that the Confessions of the Reformed faith are accepted because they present the divine, revealed truth, the forsaking of which has caused the deplorable decline of modern life. It has to be emphasized that only a wholehearted and consistent return to this Scriptural truth of which the gospel of Jesus Christ is the core and the apex, can bring salvation to mankind and effectuate the so sorely needed renewal of the world.

Because of the diversity in the forms of government of the Reformed Churches, uniformity of church polity cannot be stressed as a fundamental requisite, except in so far as the principles of this polity are contained in the Reformed Confessions, as for example the headship of Christ and the marks of the true church: the pure preaching of the gospel, the Scriptural administration of the sacraments and the faithful exercise of discipline.

In 1951 our Committee of Correspondence addressed the following letter to Dr. P. G. Kunst:

Dear Dr. Kunst:

Last year our Prot. Reformed Churches received a communication from you which was an invitation to participate in the next Reformed Ecumenical Synod which, D.V., is to meet in August, 1953 in Edinburgh.

In behalf of our Committee of Correspondence with Foreign Churches I have the honor to reply to said communication. Our Synod of 1950 did not make a definite decision with respect to this matter. However, it was decided to ask for a little more light and information about the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. We do not know just exactly what participation in such a meeting would imply, and what commitments we would make if we should decide in favor of participation. And whereas our Synod meets annually it was felt that a final decision with respect to the invitation could wait a year.

I will now quote from the minutes of the "Acts of Synod 1950" the following decisions:

Art. 91 "A substitute motion is made to table the matter of participation in the Ecumenical Synod until the Synod of 1951, and that in the meantime the Committee of Correspondence with Foreign Churches be charged to investigate the matter more thoroughly and to report at the next Synod."

Art. 92 "An amendment is made to add to the motion these words: especially the objectionable clause in the basis. (This

objectionable clause refers to the following sentence from the Basis of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod: 'It has to be emphasized that only a wholehearted and consistent return to this Scriptural truth of which the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the core and the apex, can bring salvation to mankind and effectuate the so sorely needed renewal of the world.'

"This amendment carries.

"The substitute motion, together with the amendment, carries."

I think from the above quoted articles it becomes quite plain what our Synod had in mind. We would greatly appreciate hearing from you at your earliest convenience so that our next Synod, which meets the first part of June, may be able to make a final decision with respect to the invitation.

With Christian greetings in the name of the Committee of Correspondence with Foreign Churches,

(w.s.) John D. De Jong, Clerk.

To this we received the following reply, which I will translate for the convenience of our readers:

Dear Rev. De Jong:

Hereby I wish to thank you kindly for your communication of March 9 in the name of the Protestant Reformed Churches, regarding the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, which the Lord willing, will be held in August 1953 in Edinburgh.

In answer to your letter I inform you that the condition for participation in this Synod is the acceptance of the basis. The decisions which will be taken by this Synod will be binding for the participating churches when and in so far as these adopt them.

In regard to what you remark about the Acts of Synod of your churches held in 1950, I would remark the following. In our opinion it is certainly not the idea that the gospel will bring salvation to mankind in general: in the gospel lies the way to salvation, and therein alone (Acts 4:12) but this does not mean, that all will accept this gospel, only those who are chosen by God and regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

I would appreciate further information from you after the Synod of your churches has met.

With kindly regards,

(w.s.) Dr. P.G. Kunst

Our Synod of 1951 once more considered this matter. Regarding this we read in the Acts of the Synod of 1951, Art. 180:

Motion made and supported that we send delegates to the 1953 Reformed Ecumenical Synod.

A substitute motion is made that we refer this matter back to the Committee of Correspondence in order that they may give us a well-motivated advice on this matter at the next synod. This substitute motion carries.

At our last Synod, 1952, the Committee of Correspondence advised Synod as follows:

Esteemed and Worthy Brethren:

In re the question whether as churches we should accept the invitation to attend Ecumenical Synod of the Reformed Churches to be held in August 1953 at Edinburgh, your committee for correspondence comes with the following advice:

1. That we attend this Ecumenical Synod as visitors.
2. To become members of the organization provided we are allowed to make exception to the statement in the basis for the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (to which objection has been

raised already in our synodical gathering), or if the organization at our request should withdraw said statement.

The following grounds were offered for the proposal of the Committee of Correspondence:

1. We have an invitation to attend. Unless there be principal and weighty reasons why we should not even attend as visitors, and report to Synod of 1954, D.V., we should accept the invitation.
2. We should be willing to fulfill our calling to witness of the truth wherever the Lord calls.
3. We do not bind ourselves to anything by attending the sessions of the Ecumenical Synod as official visitors from our churches.
4. It will be a healthful experience to rub elbows with others of the Reformed persuasion.
5. Already:
  - a. We agreed to do preliminary work for the International Reformed Mission Council.
  - b. We agreed to cooperate with other Reformed churches in the revision of the Church Order.
  - c. We seek correspondence with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands.

Then, in the Acts of Synod, 1952, Art. 152, we read:

A motion is made and supported to adopt the advice of the Committee of Correspondence to attend the next meeting of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod upon the grounds advanced by the committee. This motion is carried.

And in Art. 153 of the same Acts the following is added:

A motion is made and supported that those who attend shall present to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod:

1. Our thanks for their invitation.
  2. Our appreciation for their concern for the Reformed truth.
  3. Questions concerning their basis and the implications of the idea of their Ecumenical Synod.
  4. Kindly request from them an answer for our next Synod.
- This motion is carried.

Now to complete this bit of history, we must remember that we also had an invitation to participate in the International Reformed Mission Council, that was also to meet at Edinburgh, simultaneously with the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. Before this we had had an invitation to cooperate with the preparation of such a council, and that invitation we had accepted. And now we received an invitation to participate in the council itself. The Committee of Correspondence also advised to act favorably on this invitation, and that too, on the following grounds:

1. We are invited to attend, and such attendance involves no obligation to join the proposed I.R.M.C.
2. We already decided at our Synod of 1951 to cooperate in doing preliminary work for the proposed I.R.M.C.
3. One of the purposes of the proposed I.R.M.C. is the study and dissemination of the Reformed mission principles. Your committee feels, not only that it is our God-assigned calling to witness and participate in the discussion about those principles, but that we cannot but benefit by participating in such discussions.

4. The proposed I.R.M.C. may assist our churches in finding a mission field of our own.

The Synod of 1952 decided to adopt the advice of the Committee of Correspondence with the grounds given. See Acts of Synod, Art. 155.

Moreover, Synod also decided:

That the visitors to be chosen to attend the Reformed Ecumenical Synod shall also seek contact and confer with the representatives of the Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands (both Synodical and Art. 31), and the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands.

All this Classis West proposes to Synod that it shall be rescinded, that no delegates be sent as visitors to the Ecumenical Reformed Synod, nor that a delegate be sent to the International Reformed Mission Council, nor that the three delegates appointed to be visitors to the Ecumenical Synod shall visit the Netherlands to seek contact with the Reformed Churches there.

There were before Classis West three protests on this matter, namely, the protest of Sioux Center, the protest of Redlands, and the protest of Oskaloosa.

This matter, as also all the other matters presented to Classis West, was given into the hands of a committee.

In regard to the protest of Oskaloosa, the following advice was given by the committee and adopted by Classis West: (quoted in part).

1. Our Committee feels that it is true what Oskaloosa implies that there ought to be weighty reasons for a thing, especially a matter of this nature as the Ecumenical Reformed Synod, the more so since the invitation was not at all to attend as visitors but as full-fledged participants.

2. Also in regard to grounds 2 and 3 (what is meant is the grounds proposed by the Committee of Correspondence in favor of participating as visitors in the Ecumenical Synod, for which see above, H.H.), it should be borne in mind that we were not asked to visit but to participate, hence though we ought indeed always to be ready to witness where God calls us it is still a question whether God calls us to participate in such a Synod, and besides it is questionable to say the least whether in the capacity of visitors we would be accorded any opportunity to witness.

3. In regard to ground 4 (again what is meant is the grounds proposed by the Committee of Correspondence, see above, H.H.), it is true that rubbing elbows is a healthful experience though we can hardly call this a justifiable reason for a trip of three men to Scotland, and that in the capacity of visitors.

4. In regard to ground 5—We feel that the things mentioned here also fail to furnish a well-motivated and well grounded basis for sending these men as visitors to the Ecumenical Synod.

Another ground which the committee also adopts from the protest of Oskaloosa is that concerning the expense involved. It is as follows:

As to the objection of the expense involved, our Committee believes that since our men would be going as visitors and not as participants, that it has not yet been determined whether we ought to take part in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, and

because our questions can as well be answered by letter we are also of the opinion that the \$3000.00 or more involved is hardly warranted, though we would not necessarily consider it a useless expenditure in every way.

On the basis of the foregoing the Committee advised that Oskaloosa's protest be sent on to Synod as requested, together with the answer of Classis as advised above. Moreover, the Committee advised that

We as Classis join Oskaloosa in asking Synod to recall its decision to send delegates as visitors to the Ecumenical Synod, and that we ask Synod to appoint a committee to study the entire matter of ecumenicity in the light of Scripture and the Confessions, and that Synod send a letter to the Ecumenical Synod convening in Edinburgh expressing the four things with which the Synod of 1952 charged the delegate visitors.

Virtually the same stand was taken by the committee and also by Classis West in regard to the protests of Sioux Center and Redlands. From the advice of the committee appointed in re the protest of Sioux Center we quote the following:

That cancellation of the projected visit and study of the entire matter of ecumenicity before we go on as Synod any further is indeed "the better way" in view of the fact that our delegates would only be visitors and as such have no invitation to attend nor to take part in any of the deliberations of that body met in Edinburgh, and in view of the fact that there is good reason to investigate the entire matter of ecumenicity before we proceed.

And from the committee's advice in re the protest of Redlands we quote the following:

1. That though the "unrest" in our churches complicates any work our churches may do, especially toward the outside, we do not admit that this is a sufficient ground to cancel the projected visit.

2. That since our delegates would go only in the capacity of visitors and the question regarding the advisability of affiliation must be determined before we can go as participants, we do feel that this visit, entailing so much expense, can as well be cancelled.

Moreover, in this connection the committee also advised the following:

4. That in regard to the attendance of the International Council of Missions (that should be: the International Reformed Mission Council, H.H.) by one of the delegates, we express that this also be cancelled if the other is cancelled. Grounds: The Ecumenical Synod was the matter of chief interest, and this secondary.

Although the reports that I have do not mention this, I am nevertheless quite certain that Classis West also cancelled the visit of the three delegates to the Netherlands to seek contact with the Reformed churches there<sup>1</sup>.

This whole advice was adopted by Classis West and sent on to Synod.

<sup>1</sup>The very fact that one of the grounds concerns the spending of three thousand dollars implies this.



Once more I say that the *Standard Bearer* advises Synod not to adopt this advice of Classis West. And for this the *Standard Bearer* has the following grounds:

1. The talk about the expense involved is worse than ridiculous. The committee and Classis West themselves evidently felt this, because they express themselves very cautiously by saying: "We are also of the opinion that the \$3000.00 or more involved is hardly warranted." Strictly speaking, therefore, they say that it is warranted. Have we become so small, and I mean mentally and spiritually small, that we are of the opinion that \$3000 is too much to seek contact with other Reformed groups, while we spend as much and more for the support of a single one of our needy churches? This ground, I am sure, the Synod will never adopt as its own.

2. If Synod should adopt this advice of Classis West, it would mean that we forever slam the door in the face of any contacts with other Reformed groups. This does not only refer to future participation in the Ecumenical Synod, but also to participation in the International Reformed Mission Council, if at least it should meet,—which, by the way, is still a question,—as well as to contact with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Synodicals, Liberated, and Christian Reformed. Remember that we have an invitation to attend. It is only a matter of courtesy to follow up this invitation as far as possible, unless we can produce grounds upon which it is impossible for us to attend. Hence, we should be courteous enough to accept the invitation. We should not forget that it is only a comparatively short time ago that we were still considered un-Reformed on the basis of the fact that the Christian Reformed Churches in 1924 had cast us out. This invitation to attend the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, as also the invitation which we received to cooperate with other Reformed churches in the revision of the Church Order, shows plainly that by this time we are considered Reformed. And we should not insult the other churches by refusing to accept their invitation to attend the Ecumenical Reformed Synod.

3. Classis West argues that we can just as well send a letter. Now, in the first place, a letter is a very poor substitute for personal presence. If we really are interested to find out whether or not it is possible for us to participate in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, we certainly should present our objections in person, and argue them, and report our findings to the Synod of 1954.

4. That we decided to attend as *visitors* is certainly not a ground against the decision of 1952, but in favor of it. For this means that we do not bind our-

selves to anything by attending the sessions of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod.

5. It is argued that since we do not intend to participate as official delegates to the Ecumenical Synod, it is no use to attend, for we will have no opportunity to speak and to participate in the deliberations. This I deny. In the first place, I am positive that we will have the opportunity to present our objections against the Basis of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod and to argue our objections. But in the second place, although I cannot guarantee this, I am quite positive that the delegates to that Ecumenical Synod that appear as visitors will be given an advisory vote. I am rather sure that this has been done before. And besides, I am perfectly positive that the brethren convened at that Synod are courteous. And I would consider it a matter of courtesy to give to the visitors advisory vote.

6. Classis West would make our churches a laughing stock to all the Reformed churches. Consider that already a good deal of preliminary work has been done to prepare for this visit of the delegates of our churches to Scotland and to the Netherlands. I had correspondence with the calling church of Scotland. They expect us, are preparing to receive us, and already placed us officially on the agenda of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. Moreover, the Rev. Vos, who expects to go in my stead as my alternate, has tried to contact the various committees of the different Reformed churches in the Netherlands. And I happen to know that he received a very courteous and friendly letter from Dr. Aalders. That brother, immediately upon receiving the letter of the Rev. Vos, contacted the other members of the committee of correspondence of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, arranged a very definite meeting for September 11 at 10 o'clock in Baarn, and informed the Rev. Vos to that effect. Moreover, the same brother upon my request sent material which I desired to have relating to their decision in regard to the unconditional promise. Also this material he was very prompt to send. Within ten days from the date of the letter sent by the Rev. Vos we received a package by airmail on which was 33 guilders postage. All this shows to my mind that the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands are certainly willing to seek contact with us. We asked for it. We decided to send delegates at our Synod of 1952. We let the brethren across the ocean know that we were coming. And shall we now, in 1953, simply reverse all this without any valid ground or reason, and let them know that we are not coming? I would say again: we would make ourselves a laughing-stock to all the Reformed churches.

Besides, do not forget that other preparations have

been made. Reservations have been made on the boat to the Netherlands. Perhaps by the time the Synod meets the tickets have been issued and paid for. Arrangements have been made for passports and vaccinations, and shall the Synod now make fools of the delegates they themselves appointed?

I have more confidence in our Synod than to fear that they will commit such a blunder.

H.H.

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## OUR DOCTRINE

### THE TRIPLE KNOWLEDGE

AN EXPOSITION OF THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

PART III — OF THANKFULNESS

LORD'S DAY 35

#### 4. God is a Jealous God (cont.)

Nor is this the meaning of the motivation in the second commandment. Surely God visits the sins of the fathers upon the children in the third generation. But do not forget that the clause is added, "of those that hate me." Fact is, of course, that the generations of those that hate God are the reprobate, to whom God does not reveal His saving mercy. In those generations the children commit the same sins as their fathers. If these commit the folly of making graven images and bowing before them to worship them, if they commit the rebellion of refusing to hear the Word of God and to heed His revelation concerning Himself, their sin will continue in the line of generations, and their children will commit the same folly. If in these generations there should occur an exception, as is mentioned in Ezekiel 18:14, an elect among the reprobate, as a brand plucked out of the fire, God will surely not visit the sins of his father upon him, but will show him the everlasting mercy of His covenant. But this is usually an exception. As a general rule the sins of the fathers continue in the line of generations. They develop organically, and increase more and more, until final destruction is the end. This is the meaning of the dreadful curse the Lord Himself pronounces upon the generation of Israel of His day: "Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them ye shall scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the

blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." Not upon the righteous, but upon the generations of the wicked God visits the sins of their fathers. As Ursinus also writes in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism: "Hence, God threatens that he will punish the sins of the fathers in their children, meaning those who persevere in the sins of their fathers, whom it is just and proper should be made partakers of their punishment."

This holy jealousy of God, according to which He visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children even unto the third and fourth generation, is plainly revealed as far as the heathen are concerned in Rom. 1:18ff. In this passage we are told, first of all that the wrath of God, which is but one aspect of His holy jealousy, is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. God's wrath is the reaction of His holiness, operative and manifest in punitive justice. God is light, and there is no darkness in Him. The only attitude He can possibly assume over against all darkness is that He reacts upon it in wrath and terrible anger. He is a consuming fire. God's wrath, therefore, is constant and unchangeable as His very Being. In man's life wrath may reveal itself in flashes of anger. It is spasmodic and changeable. Man's wrath subsides frequently in proportion to the fierceness with which it burns. Not so with the wrath of the Most High. In Him it is constant. It burns as long as unrighteousness and sin exist. This wrath of God, according to verse 18, is revealed from heaven. The apostle does not refer to any special revelation by which God declared to man that He was filled with wrath over His unrighteousness. But he is thinking of something that takes place in the world in this present time, through which it is plainly evident that the wrath of God burns over all ungodliness of men. And the fact to which the apostle refers is that according to the punitive judgments of God sin produces sin in the generations of the ungodly. Unrighteousness gives birth to deeper folly and degradation. Darkness bears deeper corruption, and finally death. In the history of the sinful race, and in the moral and spiritual condition of the then existing world it was very plainly evident that the wrath of God has been operative from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Sinful man deliberately holds the truth in unrighteousness. Sin, unrighteousness, is not a matter of ignorance, no more than knowledge is virtue. For God manifests the truth concerning Himself round about in the works of His hands: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For



the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse." —H.H.

## OF BOOKS

WHYTE'S BIBLE CHARACTERS, by Alexander Whyte, 2 volumes. Reprint by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Price \$12.50.

We become more and more indebted to the Zondervan Publishing House for publishing worthwhile Christian literature, and especially for reprinting some works of Reformed authors of the not too distant past.

*Whyte's Bible Characters* is one of these works. In it Dr. Whyte discusses many characters mentioned in Holy Writ in a very interesting and often original manner. The style is clear and the work is easily accessible to the understanding of the general reader. I would recommend it also for study to our societies which often make the characters of the Bible a special subject of their discussion.

Two remarks. 1. Dr. Whyte treats the persons mentioned in the Bible as separate characters rather than as organs and instruments of revelation. This should be borne in mind, especially when the work is used as an aid for Bible study in our societies. 2. I always have a great sympathy for Jonah, and is, perhaps, that reason why I do not like Whyte's description of him and his comparison of him to the elder son in the parable.

DOGMATIC THEOLOGY, by William G. T. Shedd. Reprint by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Mich. 3 vols. Price for the set \$14.85.

This is another worthwhile reprint. And although I do not agree with all of the contents of this work of Dogmatics, I nevertheless recommend it to the serious and critical study of our ministers and students. In fact, Dr. Shedd writes such a lucid and pleasant style, that I could recommend the work to a wider circle of readers than that of theologians.

As to the contents, the following: Dr. Shedd begins with an introduction, in which he treats the prolegomena: method, division, definition, and treatise on revelation and the Holy Scriptures. Then follow the different loci of dogmatics, five instead of six, the doctrine of the Church not being given a separate place, and "means of grace" being treated under Soteriology. The third volume is a supplement, in which Dr. Shedd discusses different elements or phases of the various loci previously discussed together with several quotations from theologians of the past.

It is, of course, impossible, in a brief review such as this, to evaluate properly a dogmatic work of this scope. In general, I may say that Dr. Shedd is a Calvinistic theologian of the strong *infra* type. As such he reveals himself throughout the work. When I say that the work must be studied critically, I have reference, especially, to the rather strong emphasis the author lays on "common grace." In fact, we find here, principally, the errors of the "Three Points." It is, to my mind, also a weakness of the work that it gives no separate place to the doctrine of the church, and treats the means of grace under Soteriology.

Hence, I say: heartily recommended for critical study.

—H.H.

## THE DAY OF SHADOWS

### Absalom Slain

II Samuel 18:19-23

So had the Lord destroyed the opposition and delivered His servant. The danger of his perishing by the sword of his enemies had thus been removed. However, there is yet another aspect of the salvation that was sent him that must not be overlooked. In the words of Ahimaaz, the priest (18:19), the Lord had *judged him from the hands of his enemies*. This is a side to the gracious working of God in behalf of His servant that must be seen.

As was explained, looking at his past gross sins, the enemies concluded that David was the vilest of men, an accursed one, whose portion was with the damned. And as was shown with the Scriptures, all his confessions of sin and tears of contrition could not make them to change their minds about him. All it proved to them was that he was a consummate hypocrite. For they wanted him wicked.

But his enemies could not stop here. If he was that kind of man, he must still be walking in all manner of wickedness in secret, behind the closed doors of his palace. That this was the view they took of him is again plain from his Psalms. "I was a reproach," he was accustomed to complain, "among all mine enemies, but especially among mine friends, and a fear to my acquaintance; they that did see me without fled from me. I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am like a broken vessel. For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side: while they too counsel together against me, they devised to take my life" (Ps. 31:11-13). "False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not ... in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not; they did tear me and ceased not: with hypocritical mockers in the feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth" (Ps. 35:11, 15, 16). "Mine enemies speak evil of me, when shall he die and his name perish? And if he (the enemy) come to see me (came to see David in his distress), he speaketh vanity (his expressions of sympathy were mockery): his heart gathereth iniquity to itself (the enemy perverted his words into evil); when he goeth out of (my) house, he telleth it. All that hate me whisper together against me: against me do they devise hurt" (Ps. 41:5-7).

But in answer to his cry the Lord took the side of

His reviled, persecuted and slandered servant. The defeat of Absalom shamed his enemies and silenced them. It put them in the wrong and David in the right. It declared as well as words could that he was righteous in Christ, and thus holy and blameless before God in love, that his penitence was genuine, that God delighted in him accordingly, would raise him up from the dust of death unto which He had brought him, would restore him to his throne, so that it would again be given him to behold the beauties of the Lord in His holy temple as king in Zion.

So had the Lord judged His servant indeed, openly pronounced him just in the audience of angels, men, and devils, and judged him, mark you well, *from the hand of his enemies*. This has reference to their destruction by which gracious working the Lord manifested that he was just and his enemies guilty and condemned before Him, in His court, and according to His unerring judgment and verdict.

As has already been shown with the Scriptures, these events and experiences in the life of David, king in Zion, were predictive as shadows of things to come. In their totality they may be likened to a glass through which we see, darkly, the realities of the Gospel. We see Christ suffering and dying for the sins of His people outside the gate of the holy city, overcoming by the travail of His soul all their foes—sin, satan, hell, death and the grave—and consecrating thereby a new and living way to the sanctuary and the Father, raised from the dead and exalted at the Father's right hand in the highest heavens, and His reviled and persecuted people, set in heavenly places with Him, at His second coming raised up by Him from the dead unto life everlasting, and by the destruction of the adversary and final passing away of this world openly justified in the ears of angels, devils and men.

That David himself as enlightened by the Spirit of prophecy had understanding of this is plain from the final section of his Psalm (22:25-31). Having cried to the Lord to save him from the dogs that had encompassed him, and from the assembly of the wicked by which he was enclosed (ver. 16), and having voiced his firm conviction that the Lord would hearken unto his cry and send deliverance (ver. 24), he concluded his prayer with a prophecy to which he prefixed a short hymn of praise:

My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.

The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live forever.

All the ends of the world shall remember and turn

unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.

For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations.

All they that be fat upon the earth shall worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none shall keep his soul alive.

A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.

They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.



The tidings of the defeat of the adversary had now to be reported to David. Ahimaaz the son of the high priest Zadok insisted that Joab authorize him to do the reporting. We remember this warrior-priest. In cooperation with the two highpriest and Jonathan the son of Abiathar he had kept even at the risk of his life the fleeing king informed as to the progress of the revolution in Jerusalem. For he was a good man. It seems that with heart and soul he was devoted to David and the cause of God that he represented. But he was hasty and impulsive and inclined to be unrealistic in his thinking. Nor as we shall see was his courage always equal to his zeal. The last time we met him on the pages of Holy Writ he was with David in the plains of the wilderness, whither he had hastened to tell the king how Ahithophel had advised, and to urge him to cross the Jordan with his people that same night. Instead of returning to Jerusalem, he had followed the king across the river to Mahanaim. Thence he had gone with David's people to the battle, stayed with them when they recrossed the Jordan in pursuit of Absalom's fleeing forces, as all the while keeping close to Joab, it must be.

Here we find him imploring Joab for permission to report to the king. He loved David and wanted so badly to be the one to gladden his heart with the good news that the Lord in His mercy had delivered him out of the hand of his enemies. The king would be overjoyed. He would be certain to respond to such tidings with a song of praise instantly. So Ahimaaz must have imagined. What he seemed to be overlooking is that the opposition destroyed included also Absalom, David's own flesh, the one son that he could not stop loving and pitying, despite all that had happened, and that therefore, because of his anguish of soul at hearing the full truth, he might not be able to hear the Gospel that day. For the Gospel it was, but a Gospel as terrible as it was glorious particularly for David. But perhaps Ahimaaz had no son of his own,

at least no wayward son of whom he had to believe that he had perished in his sins. It may be, too, that he wanted the news broken gently, and that he thought that a task so delicate couldn't be intrusted to others.

Be this as it may, he was determined that Joab commission him to report to David.

*And Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said (to Joab), I will run by all means, and I will bear the king tidings, how that the Lord hath done him justice from the hands of his enemies.* 19.

This then was to be the form of the words of the message as Ahimaaz was intending to communicate it. The report as thus formulated was Gospel indeed. But it had one fault. It was too indefinite. It said nothing about Absalom, about the fact of his having been slain and of the dreadful way in which he had come to his end. And this was Gospel, too. It was an element in the Gospel that had to be told, no matter how much pain the hearing of it might cause David. So God willed, His gracious purpose being to sanctify him also through this suffering.

But it seems as if Ahimaaz wanted to spare him this grief, or at least cushion it by the glad tidings of victory. A great thing had happened. The Lord had openly taken the king's side against the enemies. Let him think on that and praise God and refrain from anxiously inquiring after what became of that worthless, reprobated son of his. But was this not expecting too much from him?

Joab for some reason or other, or perhaps for a combination of reasons, was much opposed to authorizing Ahimaaz to report to the king. One of his reasons may have been that he imagined that the effect upon the king of the tidings that his command regarding Absalom had been disobeyed would be maddening, and that, being rather fond of Ahimaaz, he didn't want him exposed to the king's wrath. It may be, too, that he doubted whether the priest would have the heart and the courage to tell the king that Absalom was dead. Yet, according to Joab's way of thinking, that was the one thing that the king had need of hearing. But, as we shall see presently, he may have had still another reason—the principal one—why he was opposed to commissioning the priest.

*And said to him Joab, Not a man of tidings art thou this day. ..Thou shalt bear tidings another day; but today not shalt thou bear tidings. ..For the king's son is dead.* 20.

Without another word to the priest, Joab turned to a servant of his standing by, the Cushite, the Ethiopian, whom he had on hand for just such a dreadful task as this one happened to be and mandated him.

*And Joab said to the Cushite, Go and tell the king*

*what thou hast seen, and prostrated himself the Cushite before Joab and ran.* 21.

So then, what Joab required of the Cushite is that he tell the king what he had seen. What had he seen? Doubtless Absalom's dreadful end—his hanging on that great terebinth into which, in his mad flight, he had driven the mule upon which he was riding, and between the low-hanging branches of which his head had become solidly wedged. Doubtless it was this that Joab wanted reported to the king, it being the unmistakable sign that this worthless son, whom the king had ordered spared, was cursed of God indeed—"cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree—and that there was nothing left for Joab to do but make an end of him right there and then. God had delivered the accused one into his hand. Could it then have been right for him to release Absalom from that tree and deliver him up to David alive? It must have been this to which Joab had reference in commanding the Cushite, "Tell the king what thou hast seen." If so, the Cushite may have belonged to Joab's armourbearers by whom Absalom was smitten until their could be no more doubt that he was dead. Of Absalom's end the priest had not been an eye-witness. He knew that Absalom was dead. But judging from his report to the king, he was ignorant of the way in which the king's son had met his death. In Joab's eyes it must especially have disqualified him as reporter. For the task of bearing tidings to the king he wanted an eye-witness. He wanted the Cushite, this servant of his.

But Joab found that he still had Ahimaaz on his hands. The priest would not be put off. And he would keep at Joab until he consented.

*Yet again Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, and he said to Joab, Be what may, I will run by all means, even I also, after the Cushite.* 22a.

But Joab was unrelenting. He even pleaded with the priest.

*And said Joab, To what purpose wilt thou run my son? For to thee there is no tidings finding.*

So reads this last statement in the Hebrew. The commentators find it particularly perplexing. What does it mean? There are the following renderings: 1) "Seeing that thou hast no tidings ready" (Eng. King James Version). 2) Seeing that thou wilt have no reward for thy tidings" (Eng. A.V.) 3) Seeing that thou hast no tidings sufficing, that is, which commends itself as appropriate" (Bib. Com.). The statement has been translated in still other ways.

The context brings out clearly enough what Joab here meant to be telling the priest. Principally this: that, seeing he was ignorant of the details of the way in which Absalom had come to his end, he had no message; and, besides, that he lacked courage and also

perhaps that he shouldn't want to expose himself to the king's wrath. Not that Joab had a distaste for the priest. He rather liked him. He called him "my son". The expression is always one of endearment. It was just that he didn't think him qualified.

But Ahimaaz was adamant.

*Be what may, I will run*, was his retort. 23a.

"Be what may," that is, let it be that the king's son is dead. Think ye that I am daunted by the dreadfulness of such a tidings? Fearlessly I will report.

Joab lost patience with the priest. He was through arguing with him.

*And said Joab, Run!* 23b.

"Run," that is, be gone, get thee away! Mark you, a bellow of just one word. Nevertheless, it was all that the priest had need of hearing to set him in instant motion. Perhaps without as much as saying adieu! he bolted out of Joab's presence and ran—mark you, ran—by the way of the plain, overtook the Cushite and passed him. Why should he be making such haste! He wanted to be the first to bring tidings to the king. The Cushite seemed not to object. He allowed the priest to overrun him and keep his lead. Though a Cushite by birth, the man was a true Jew, judging from the form of the words of his tidings, also devoted to David and the cause of God, as well as Ahimaaz, but not like him, the overconfident type, but, judging from his deportment, a man thoughtful and self-possessed and endowed with more courage. Doubtless, the task assigned to him by his master weighed heavily on his soul. So, if Ahimaaz insisted on being the first to confront the king with the tidings of Absalom's death, it was well with him.

*And ran Ahimaaz by the way of the plain and passed the Cushite.* 23c.

—G. M. Ophoff

#### IN MEMORIAM

Very unexpectedly on March 29, 1953, it pleased the Lord to take unto Himself our beloved Mother, Grandmother and Sister,

MRS. GERTRUDE VANDEN BERG

at the age of 69 years.

Though the suddenness of her departure was a great shock, we know that our loss is her gain.

Children and Grandchildren  
Brothers and Sisters

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah  
For His mighty acts of fame;  
Excellent His might and greatness;  
Fitting praises then proclaim.

## FROM HOLY WRIT

### Exposition of I Corinthians 15:20

The significant passage in I Corinthians 15:20 reads as follows: "*But now Christ is risen out of the death, the firstfruits of them that sleep.*"

This passage is more than a matter of fact statement; it is rather a shout of joyful exultation over-against all, who doubt or deny the hope of the resurrection of the dead in the last day. Such there were in the congregation of Corinth. Says Paul in verse 12 "Now if Christ be preached, that He was raised from out of the dead, how *say some among you* that there is no resurrection from the dead?"

How come that these men denied the resurrection of the dead?

Is this due to the preaching of Paul? Or is this possibly due to a discrepancy between the preaching of Paul in distinction from the other Apostles?

Not at all!

Whether it were Paul or the other Apostles, both preached that Christ died according to the Scriptures and that He rose again from the dead the third day according to the Scriptures.

All denial of the resurrection is simply unbelief; it is an emptying out of the content of the gospel, making faith empty and the preaching contentless; then the preacher is a liar who preaches the resurrection, and we are yet in our sins! Of all men the believers are the most miserable, if Christ be not raised. Then we could better live according to the dictum and philosophy of the world: let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!

But, thanks be to God, such is not the case!

"For Christ arose from the dead and became the firstfruits of them that sleep."

Certain it is that the resurrection of all the saints is sure, since Christ has arisen from the dead. It is a blessed fact.

Let us try to understand its implication as taught us in this text.

Christ is the "firstfruit of those fallen asleep". What is the meaning of the term: Those that sleep?

The term itself is quite a prevalent one in Holy Writ. Jesus says to His disciples in John 11:11, "Our friend Lazarus is *fallen asleep*; but I go that I may awake him *out of sleep*". In Matthew 27:52b, "and many of the bodies of the saints that had *fallen asleep* were raised..." Paul employs the term in that his-

toric sermon in Antioch of Pisidia, as recorded in Acts 13:36, where, speaking of the death of David, he says, "For David, after he had in his own generation served the council of God, *fell asleep*, and was laid unto his fathers . . ." And, again, Paul uses this term in I Thes. 4:13, 14. Here we read: "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that *fall asleep*; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them that are *fallen asleep* in Jesus will God bring with him."

In all of these passages the term "fallen asleep" refers to the departed saints, who have trusted in God, served the counsel of God in their generation, have run the race and kept the faith. The term does not seem to refer in Scripture to those, who die outside of Christ. Furthermore, the term seems to imply, that, those who have fallen asleep, have entered into the Lord's rest. They no longer are in the battle-fray. They rest from their labors in the Lord. These labors were not in vain. They have entered into their long looked-for reward. Then, too, the term "fallen asleep" does not refer to the state of unconsciousness between the death and resurrection of the saints, but it refers to their no longer participating in the present life in God's Church on earth. Just as a sleeping man is oblivious to his surroundings, so also the dead.

So much for the term "fallen asleep" in general.

But what is the meaning of the term in our text in the phrase "firstfruits of those fallen asleep"?

We believe that also in this phrase those fallen asleep are none else and none more than the believers in Christ, who died in the Lord. In the first place, because thus it is literally stated by Paul in the context. In verse 18 Paul writes, speaking of the awful consequences of the denial of the resurrection-truth, "then they also that are *fallen asleep in Christ* have perished." Thus the context. Let it be remembered. Secondly, because in the phrase, under consideration, the original Greek employs the definite article. (*toon kekoimeemnoon*). The function of the Article is to point out a class of men or things from other things. Here it designates the class of men, who are in the Lord, and who are asleep in Him.

The viewpoint here in I Corinthians 15 is that of the blessed resurrection throughout. It would, indeed, be strange, if the concern of Paul were not with the blessed ones, who have fallen asleep in Christ, but with the dead in general!

Christ is indeed the firstfruits of those who have died in Him.

This brings us to another element in the text.

It is the question of the idea of firstfruits in gen-

eral in Scripture, and also the question of the implication of the fact, that Christ is the firstfruits of the dead.

Concerning the term "firstfruits" in general, we can say, that it refers to the first ripe fruits of the land, whether in its natural state or whether prepared by the hands of man, and that it was holy to the Lord. It was representative and a pledge of the full harvest. The element that it was first in the order of time was not on the foreground. Rather that it was the *chief* fruit is implied in the idea of firstfruits. The Hebrew term "reeshith" (beginning) also is very expressive. It is the term for firstfruits. In Genesis 1:1 we read: "In the *beginning* God created heaven and earth. The beginning is the "head", the source of things. The beginning is determinative. In the "beginning" God created heaven and earth. Here we have the perspectives of all of history laid open before our eyes. God made all things in view of the heavenly. The "beginning" is chief. In like manner we read in Genesis 10:10 of the "beginning" of Nimrod's kingdom. This kingdom was in its beginning, "Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar". That was its beginning, its moving principle and its fundamental pattern. Then we have the term used in the well-known passage of Proverbs 8:22. Here we read, "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, (reeshith dareko) before His works of old." Here beginning is evidently more than first in order of time. Wisdom here spoken of in Proverbs 8 is, no doubt, the same as the Logos in the Prologue of John's Gospel. It is the personal Wisdom. Him God possessed in the beginning of His way. And this way is God's way throughout history, from Alpha to Omega. And with a view to the Logos to come into the flesh all things in God's Counsel stands, and history is executed. The "beginning" is here the equivalent of the truth, that, when God layed down the foundations of the earth, the all-important fact God has in mind is the manifestation of His Son in the flesh, in His death and resurrection.

Thus it is also in the use of the term "firstfruits" in our text.

For notice that "Christ" is the firstfruits. This means that the Son of God is the Anointed Servant of God, appointed and qualified by God to be His Chief Prophet, only High-Priest and Eternal King. Of Him God says in Psalm 2, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee, ask of Me and I will give the heathen for Thine inheritance." For Christ is the firstfruits of them that have fallen asleep according to the appointment of God from eternity.

It is exactly in the resurrection of Christ that we see the idea of the firstfruits of the full harvest. He

is the firstfruits of them that have fallen asleep. This does not merely imply that Christ is the first man to come forth out of the grave. When He arises from the dead there is not simply so many dead *minus one*. Christ is not simply one dead man next to other dead men. For He is Christ. He is the last Adam. He represents all, who have fallen asleep in Him. And, hence, when He rises all are made alive in Him. Just as in Adam all died, so all, who fall asleep in the Lord, shall also rise in Him. In this sense He is the firstfruits. He is the pledge and guarantee of the full harvest. His resurrection is principally the resurrection of the entire church.

That such is the case is evident, first of all, from the reasoning of Paul in the foregoing verses. There Paul reasons from the effect to the cause. Says he: if there be no resurrection, then is not Christ risen. If there is no water then there is also no Fountain. But now the Fountain is open, the water is certain. For God hath opened a Fountain in Israel; the waters of the resurrection of all the saints is certain.

Besides, it must not be forgotten, that Christ is in His own peculiar order of dignity in His resurrection. He is the Son of God in the flesh. He is very man, it is true. But He is also God blessed forever, Amen. He is the resurrection and the life. And as the Father hath life in Himself so hath He given to the Son in the flesh to have life, resurrection life in Himself.

And, therefore, the resurrection of those, who fell asleep in Him is certain. For if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead, shall give life also to your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwelleth in you.

And, therefore, we can joyfully say overagainst all the enemies of the Cross and the Resurrection: But now Christ is risen from the dead, the firstfruits of them that sleep. And, again, we say with Job: "But as for me I know that my Redeemer liveth, And at last he will stand up upon the earth. And after my skin hath thus been destroyed, yet from my flesh shall I see God."

So then, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, in as much as ye know that your labors are not vain in the Lord!

—G. Lubbers

## IN HIS FEAR

### My Brother's Keeper

That Cain!

He surely was a heartless, cruel and proud man!

He had slain his brother in cold blooded murder. Never had he seen a human death before. Never had he heard even of such an awful crime. Now his own hands have performed it. And calmly, without any smiting of his conscience he buries his brother under the sand. Without a qualm of emotion he walks away from the scene of his crime. Having performed the first murder in the history of this world, he is not even troubled enough by it to go and tell his parents of the awful thing he has done.

What is more, he is not afraid to answer the Almighty, Who is the source and fount of all life, in a proud and haughty way. When asked, "Where is Abel thy brother?" he dares to counter with the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Surely he is not a man who is living "in His fear". Indeed, Cain, you are your brother's keeper! And we can understand and explain his fearless, haughty answer when we consider that he first deliberately lied to the Almighty and said that he did not know where his brother was.

Plainly, he is a child of the devil, the father of lies, and is under his diabolical influence. Hence the lie has a hold on him. And the lie warps man's mind. It gives him the wrong picture entirely. It distorts everything. He may still see things, but he does not see them as they really are. This is so because the lie always ignores God. It leaves Him and His glory out of the picture. Then nothing that we see has any meaning. One might better try to take the sun out of the universe and still expect to find life than to rule God out of His own creation and still expect to see the beauty, the glory and reason for all that which does exist. Forget the God who made your brother and neighbor, and you cannot see yourself as his keeper. For whom will you keep him? Forget, or worse still, deliberately rule Him out and you cannot see anything that He has made in its right light. It simply is impossible to ignore Him and still see things right and to understand rightly the relationships in which He created things. Ignore Him, and that in itself reveals that you do not see Him in the right light. But that wisest of all men, who was guided by the infinite wisdom of the Spirit who infallibly guided him, wrote, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of The Holy One is un-



derstanding." There is no fear of God before Cain's eyes. That is why he can ask such a proud and diabolical question, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Do not repeat Cain's question!

Do not live it!

The fear of the Lord is a rather important element in our lives. It will have a profound effect on all our practical life. In His fear we will be our brother's keeper. In His fear we will *want* to be our brother's keeper.

So let us dismiss Cain.

You and I are our brother's keepers. And if we are honest with ourselves, we will confess that although our Heavenly Father has kept us from inflicting the death blow upon our brother, our hearts are by nature capable of all that lack of fear of the Lord which moves us to cruelty to the brother. We may not dare to touch him physically because he is stronger than we are. The sight of blood and the sound of moaning may so unnerve us that we cannot do such a deed. But the will to do so, the bitter hatred, the fit of anger that preceeds such a deed is so very strong in all of us. And presently, in the next installment, we hope to make plain how frequently we do shrug our shoulders and borrowing a page from Cain's notebook, we also say, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Indeed we are, as well as Cain was.

We may say, without the fear of contradiction, that we are our brother's keeper both in the realm of the natural and of the spiritual. The Scriptures admonish us to be his keeper in both spheres. And that does not refer merely to the brother according to the flesh. We are the keeper of our every neighbor. The father and mother in the home keep their eyes open for the physical wellbeing of their children. And in the baptismal vow they have also promised to keep an eye open for the spiritual instruction of their seed. They have promised to be their children's keeper. The same thing is demanded of the brother unto the brother. Let us see once what the Scriptures have to say about this matter.

At the very outset we are reminded of the second table of the Law wherein God expresses to us the proper relationship between a man and his neighbour. The form is entirely negative here, and therefore it does not express literally the work and the calling of the brother's keeper. We are, however, indebted to Jesus for His interpretation of that Law and also to the explanation we find in our Heidelberg Catechism.

Among other things Jesus gave us that fundamental principle which is the interpretation of the whole second table of the Law, "Do unto others what

ye would have them do unto you." That takes care of everything, of every relationship between man and man. That covers every possession and faculty which God has given to man. And that is not negative. In it Jesus tells us what we must do. What you enjoy, seek to help your neighbour enjoy also. Strive to make him happy, to keep him free from care and anxiety. By all means do not practice those things which would worry him and cause him to have a troubled mind. DO unto him what you would to have him do unto you, and then the negative side will take care of itself.

That this neighbour does not look upon you with friendly eyes, that he does not lift one finger to be your keeper does not change the calling you have in the least. This same Jesus Who told us to *do* unto others what we would have them do unto us does not to any degree or in any way put a limitation upon those "others". In fact in another connection He exactly states, ". . . do good to them that hate you . . ." You are still his keeper. You are yet to do to him what you would like to have him do unto you.

To continue with that which the Scriptures say in regard to this seeking of the wellbeing of the brother we can also turn to those words of the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Philippians, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Nay, this is not advice to be "nosey" and to interfere with the affairs of others. But it does teach us that we must not be so selfish and narrow-minded in our own business that we go thru with our plans, our developments and ambitions when we know that we are going to injure the brother's business. It means that the believer will never crowd his neighbour, and surely not his brother in Christ, so that he is forced out of business and so that you may monopolize the trade in that area. You did do that? You, who could better afford it, cut your prices below that which he could afford, you took advantage of his unexpected financial hardships and foreclosed upon him without pity and mercy, you looked the other way when he reached out for a helping hand and began to count how much you would be benefited by his downfall? You DID? Then go sit beside your brother Cain. And never let men hear you say one word about Cain's heartless, cruel, unbrotherly deeds. Listen! The Apostle prefaced these words with the following, "If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels of mercy, fulfill ye my joy, that ye may be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem the other better than themselves." It speaks for itself, does it not?

The Apostle wrote a similar thing to the Corinthians in his first epistle to this congregation. He writes, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." That word *wealth*, here in I Cor. 10:24, is in italics which means that it does not appear in the original. We will not enter here the discussion as to what element of the neighbours we are to seek, the point is brought forth clearly here again that we must be our brother's keeper.

Before we run out of space in this installment we do wish yet to quote from the Heidelberg Catechism to maintain this principle that we *are* our brother's keeper. In explanation of the sixth commandment our Fathers state that God here required of us that we show to our neighbour "patience, peace, meekness, mercy and all kindness" and that we "prevent his hurt as much as in us lies: and that we do good even to our enemies." Again in answer to the question as to what is required in the eighth commandment we are told that God demands that "I promote the advantage of my neighbour in every instance I can or may; and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others: further also that I faithfully labor so that I may be able to relieve the needy." Indeed, let us not forget the needy brother. We are also his keeper. And the ninth commandment we are told requires of us that we "defend and promote as much as" we "are able, the honor and good character of" our "neighbour". That certainly makes it sufficiently clear for us to maintain that we as well as Cain, are our brother's keeper in the sphere of the natural things.

The above we will not, perhaps, readily deny. Even the world speaks of a certain "brotherhood of all men" and has its Red Cross, Red Feather, Community Chest or what have you whereby men seek the wellbeing of their fellow men. In the Church of Jesus Christ there is another way in which we are our brother's keeper. And that calling of ours is very easily denied today. Nay, the Scriptural principle of it is not openly discredited, but in practice it is for convenience sake and for fleshly pleasure ignored. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says to the Corinthians in regard to their brothers in Christ, "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to them that are weak . . . when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." You are your brother's keeper also in the things you allow and practice. You can bury him under the sand, shrug your shoulders and walk calmly and indifferently away. But you still are your brother's keeper. More of this next time, the Lord willing.

—J. A. Heys

## The Voice of Our Fathers

### The Canons of Dordrecht

#### CHAPTER II

#### THE GREAT SYNOD

By the name "de groote synode" Reformed people of Dutch ancestry are wont to call the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-19. And well may we continue to remember it as the "great synod". For great it was in every respect. In a way we may say that it marks the arrival at majority, the maturing, of the Reformation in the Netherlands. Great was this synod, to be sure, as far as its length was concerned. For it gathered in almost uninterrupted sessions from November of the year 1618 until May of 1619. Great it was, too, as far as its method was concerned. For it labored with long patience toward those indicated on the five counts of Arminian heresy; and when no amount of patience would quicken even common decency in those recalcitrants, the synod continued to labor thoroughly, methodically, and unhurriedly for an additional four or five months, in order officially to gainsay the Arminian errors, defend the pure gospel of Holy Writ, and maintain the very foundation of Reformed truth. Great it was also as its personnel were concerned. For a roll-call of the membership of the synod sounds like a "Who's Who" of the Calvinistic movement at that time, with few exceptions. But of course, most of all does that synod deserve the name "great" because of its chief fruit, the famous, but not well enough known, *Canons of Dordrecht*.

Once again, it is not our intention to furnish a detailed history of the Synod of Dordt. To do so does not belong within the realm of this study. And besides, it would unduly lengthen our writings, and perhaps trouble the reader with needless detail. It is, however, beneficial for our understanding of the *Canons* briefly to notice some of the outstanding facts concerning the Synod which produced these *Canons*, its personnel, its machinery and method of labor, and the thoroughness of its manner. And to these we devote our attention in the present chapter.

In the previous chapter we already took notice of the fact that the Arminians throughout their battle had the protection and often the positive help of certain forces in the government, the well-known Oldenbarneveld at their head. This was possible because of the peculiar relationship between church and state in the Netherlands. For a long time it looked as

though this governmental protection and support would spell defeat for the Reformed cause in the Netherlands. In the end, however, Prince Maurits chose the side of the Contra-remonstrants, and in a lightning *coup* took the reins of government out of the hands of the wily Oldenbarneveld, the latter paying with his life after being condemned for treason. When one reads the history of these years, the question cannot be repressed as to the part which political aims played not only in the actions of Oldenbarneveld, but also in those of Maurits. And although it seems almost certain that at least part of the fire on the altar was not of a religious, but of a political variety, we will not here pass judgment on the character and motives of Maurits.

Certain it is that God caused Maurits and Willem Lodewijk to rescue the cause of the truth from the fierce assaults of the enemies. For when Maurits came in control of affairs, the tide of battle immediately turned in favor of the Contra-remonstrants. Done now were the long and fruitless conferences which the Arminians had always been so willing to hold under the watchful eye and protective wing of the government. No more did the Contra-remonstrants' pleas for a national synod,—and such a national synod had not been held for years, though often requested,—go unheeded. When once action came, it came swiftly. The matter must be decided. And after allowing time for the various particular synods to convene and to appoint delegates, a national synod would be convened at the earliest possible date.

Thus it was that on November 13, 1618 the National Synod of Dordrecht opened its historical sessions. The hour of decision had struck!

The personnel of the Synod we will not discuss in detail, although, as we said, many a shining light in the firmament of Reformed church history signed his name to the *Canons* when finally the sessions of Synod were ended. The churches of the Netherlands were represented by 34 ministers and 18 elders, among whom were many men of renown. Different the synod was from our present synodical gatherings, in that ministers and elders were not equally represented. To the regular delegates from the various provincial synods were added the theological professors. Among the latter the name of Gomarus stands out, of course. And although what he called the "higher view", that is, the supralapsarian view of the decrees of God, was not incorporated in the *Canons*, nevertheless the outcome at Dordrecht was a mighty and sweet victory for that staunch defender of the faith who had first opposed Arminius at Leiden, and who even afterwards, both in the ministry and in his later position in the University of Gronigen, never ceased to do battle in

the cause of the Reformed truth. Polyander and Thysius, Walaëus and Lubbertus were the other professors present at the Synod. Among the delegates to the Synod we must not fail to mention Johannes Bogerman, the fiery and capable president of the Synod, who will long be remembered for the manner in which he dismissed the Arminians from the floor of the Synod. Nor must we overlook such names as Voetius, Trigland, Hommius, and Damman, the last two being the able clerks, whose task was indeed tremendous. Outstanding about the membership of the Synod in general is the fact that they stood directly in the line of the Calvinistic Reformation. When one takes the trouble to study the educational background of these men, he discovers that many of them had at least part of their theological training at those great centers of Reformed theology, Geneva and Heidelberg. At Geneva many of them had enjoyed the instruction of Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor. And at Heidelberg, the birthplace of our Catechism, it stands to reason also that many a soundly trained minister of the gospel was instructed. Hardly can one escape the impression that exactly with a view to the Arminian controversy God had raised up these mighty warriors for the truth.

One of the most interesting features of the Synod is the presence of the foreign theologians. Of these there were 27, representing the Reformed churches of Great Britain, the Palatinate, Hesse, Switzerland, Wetteraw, Geneva, Bremen, and Emden. Delegates from France were invited, but were unable to attend because of government interference. In addition, the Synod also received the written opinions of the aged Dr. David Paraeus, from the University of Heidelberg, who by reason of age and infirmity was unable to attend, as well as the written opinion of Petrus Molinaeus, minister at Paris, concerning the Five Articles of the Remonstrants. Here again one is immediately struck by the fact that at this Synod the very flower of the Reformation was represented. For many of these men were not only the giants in the church at that time, but were only a step or two removed in history from the Reformers themselves.

In the meantime, we must not imagine that the Synod was really a sort of Ecumenical Council of the Reformed churches at that time. On the one hand, it cannot be gainsaid that the delegates from foreign churches had more than an advisory vote, at least in the sense that we speak of an advisory vote today. In consulting the *Acta*, as well as a detailed history of the Synod such as that of Dr. Wagenaar, it becomes plain that the foreign theologians played a very active part in the Synod and wielded much influence. In the first stages of the Synod they spoke and argued a-

bout the attitude and treatment of the Arminians right along with the national delegates. And in fact, throughout the sessions of Synod it appears that their influence was large, and that the national delegates were very loath, to say the least, to act without the approval of the foreign delegates. Besides, when it came to the matter of treating the Arminian heresies, all the foreign delegations handed in their opinions concerning the Five Articles along with the national delegations. And these were treated on equal footing. In fact, there are places in the *Canons* where the particular formulations adopted were so formulated largely through the influence of the foreign delegates. Especially the English theologians seemed to have much influence, due undoubtedly to the fact that there was close political intercourse between England and the Netherlands at the time. And when finally the *Canons* themselves had to be formulated, all the doctrinal opinions of the various delegations having been heard, the foreign delegates were very active again. For three of them, Carleton (the English bishop), Scultetus (from the Palatinate), and Diodati (from Geneva), took their places in the committee of nine which was to serve the Synod with Concept-Canons. Besides, the *Canons* as finally adopted were signed not only by the national but also by the foreign delegates, even though the Swiss theologians had been expressly forbidden to do so.

On the other hand, however, all this does not imply that the Synod was an Ecumenical Council. For first of all, the various Reformed churches were not equally represented. There were 57 delegates from the Dutch churches (if we include the five professors), while from all the foreign churches together there were only 27 delegates. The Synod, therefore, was still predominantly Dutch as far as its personnel was concerned, and therefore also as far as its voting-power was concerned. In the second place, although also the foreign churches were vitally interested in maintaining the Reformed truth, we must not forget that as far as the concrete case was concerned which was treated on the Synod, it was strictly a national matter. It was for this reason also that while the foreign delegates were more than willing to deliberate upon and decide the doctrinal matter on the Synod's agenda, they limited their activities to this matter strictly. When it came to the matter of disciplining the ministers who were guilty of the Arminian heresy, the foreign delegates withdrew, and left the national delegates to decide their own affairs. In the third place, the *Canons of Dordrecht*, although signed by the foreign delegates, were, of course, never recognized as being an official standard of any other churches than those of the Netherlands. What these

foreign delegates adopted, they adopted not for their own churches, but for the Dutch church. At Dordrecht, therefore, we had no Ecumenical Synod.

Nevertheless, the presence of these delegates at the Synod was of great influence in the formulation of our *Canons*. But what is more, the fact that they aided in the composition of the *Canons* and the condemnation of Arminianism, and finally affixed their signatures to our *Canons* means that the latter are undeniably Reformed. They are not merely the expression of one branch of the Reformed churches. They cannot be condemned as the work of a narrow sect. They are the proper expression of the Reformed truth, according to the testimony of the whole Reformed church at that time. If I am not mistaken, this was the last time that such close intercourse between churches of Reformed persuasion took place. We may safely say, therefore, the contempt of many historians notwithstanding, that our *Canons* are the ultimate expression of the Reformed doctrine of sovereign grace and sovereign predestination.

—H. C. Hoeksema



#### IN MEMORIAM

The Consistory of the Lynden, Washington Protestant Reformed Church wishes to express its sincere sympathy to brother Elder G. Buma and family in the death of his father.

May the Lord richly comfort and sustain them in their sorrow.

The Consistory  
G. Postema, Vice President  
D. Scheele, Clerk

Lynden, Washington



#### NOTICE

The Protestant Reformed School of Redlands will be in need of a teacher for the lower grades one through four. Send application to:

John Kimm  
P. O. Box 581  
Redlands, California.

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Ye saints, your joy proclaim  
And glory in the Name  
Of God above;  
And when the daylight dies,  
Ere sleep shall close your eyes,  
Let praise to God arise  
For all His love.

## Contending For The Faith

### Why Doctrines Have A History

(continued)

In our previous article we called attention to the fact that doctrines have a history because the Scripture is no book of formulated doctrines. We also asked and attempted to answer the question: What is Scripture? It is the historic-organic revelation of the God of our salvation in Christ Jesus. This revelation itself is progressive. And it is simply a fact that the Church of God does not see everything at once. The wonderful truths of God's Word crystallize gradually in the believing consciousness of the Church. There is a great difference between the knowledge of the Church today and at the time immediately following upon the time of the apostles.

*Because of the mind of the Church.*

Another reason why doctrines have a history is the mind of the Church. It is a fast and definite rule that Scripture must be interpreted with Scripture and that the Word of God is never in conflict with itself. Scripture cannot be in conflict with itself. This is due to the fact that the Author of the Scriptures is the living God. Although it is true that approximately thirty five secondary authors were used by the Lord to write the Word of God, it is equally true that the Bible has but one primary Author, the Holy Spirit of God. God is never in conflict with Himself, and His Word is characterized by the same oneness and unity. The Scriptures, therefore, may never be interpreted as in conflict with themselves.

To this we may add that the mind of the Church is so constituted that it is in need of a logical and systematic conception of the truth as it is revealed in the Divine Scriptures. Sin, although it did corrupt the human mind spiritually, did not destroy it naturally and logically. Man became corrupt and spiritually perverted, but he did not become irrational and illogical. Two plus two are four after the entrance of sin into the world as well as before the occurrence of this event. Reading, therefore, the Scriptures, the mind of the Church is so constituted that, when the truths of Holy Writ are formulated in the believing consciousness of the Church, the mind seeks an understanding of the Scriptures in such a way that those Scriptures are in complete harmony with themselves. Without this we cannot possibly have any knowledge of God and of the truth, and this for the simple rea-

son that we simply would not know what to believe. If it be true that things which appear contradictory are really not contradictory, then it follows inexorably that things which do not appear contradictory may really be contradictory to each other. If this be true, we understand, no knowledge of the truth is possible. This, of course, must not be confused with rationalism. Rationalism is the rule of the human mind over the Word of God. The Word of God, then, does not determine whether anything is the truth or not; the mind is the final authority. Man, then, will believe only what he understands, and he will reject whatever appears contrary to his understanding. We do well, of course, to bear in mind that a truth is not necessarily in conflict with the human understanding simply because the human mind is not able to comprehend it. The truth that the Lord is God alone is surely beyond all human understanding; this surely does not imply that it is also in conflict with it. We repeat: if it be true that the Scriptures may appear to be in conflict with our human understanding, no knowledge of the truth is possible. The Word of God, therefore, cannot teach that God loves and hates the same person at the same time, that Christ died only for the elect but also for all men, that God is the sole Cause of our salvation but that action must proceed from us first, that we are dead in sins and trespasses and nevertheless are able to please the Lord without regeneration of the heart. To this assertion that these discrepancies exist we immediately reply that they are impossible because they contradict themselves. And my mind, created by the living God, stipulates that the revelation of that living God of Himself must be devoid of conflict and contradiction.

This is another reason why doctrines have a history. It is simply an undeniable truth that the mind of the Church of God seeks a logical and systematic conception of the truth. Of course, we must take God at His Word and never impose our theological thinking upon any passage of the Holy Scriptures. But, at the same time we seek to know the truths of the Scriptures and come to a systematic knowledge of the same. It is strikingly true that it is always he who refuses to take God at His Word who complains that others impose their theological thinking upon the Word of God. The history of the Church is replete with such historical examples. This is also true of our own history as Protestant Reformed Churches. Who complain that there are those who impose their theological thinking upon the Word of God? Is this not true of those who refuse to give wholehearted endorsement to such truths as sovereign election and reprobation, utter depravity, and irresistible grace? Does this not apply to those who insist that, although we must maintain



on the one hand that God has elected and reprobated from before the foundation of the world, we must also proclaim a general offer of grace on the part of God and that the Lord is gracious to all men in the preaching of the gospel? The passages involved are always those passages which seemingly speak of a general love or mercy of the Lord, and the complaint is made that we do not take the Lord at His Word.

*The Holy Spirit dwells in the Church.*

This, we should understand, is extremely important. Indeed, we believe in the perspicuity of Holy Writ. The perspicuity of the Scriptures refers to the transparency, clearness of Holy Writ. This was one of the leading issues of the Reformation. The Word of God has been translated into almost all the languages of the world, and the Bible has been prepared for study and reading for peoples of all lands and nations, whether they be of high or low degree, clergy or laity. We all can read the Bible. This does not necessarily mean that we understand and comprehend the Scriptures. On the other hand, however, the Word of God is transparent, clear as crystal, points us to our sin and guilt, our Saviour in Jesus Christ, our Lord, and our eternal and heavenly hope in a language which a child can understand. However, this does not mean that the Bible is simply easy to read and understand. Anyone acquainted with the Holy Scriptures knows differently. Any student of the Word of God knows that the Bible is profound, that, in its profundity, it is bottomless and fathomless, that it deals with the truths which defy all human understanding and comprehension. The Scriptures speak of truths which are higher than the heavens, wider than the oceans, deeper than the deepest sea, higher and wider and deeper than the universe, inasmuch as the Bible reveals the infinite God to us, in comparison with Whom the whole universe is less than a drop of water on the bucket and a particle of dust on the balances, yea, less than nothing and vanity (see Isaiah 40:15, 17). Nevertheless, the Reformation maintained the perspicuity of the Scriptures. It is simply a fact that Luther translated the Bible into the German language and this in spite of the fact that Rome attempted to discount this translation by decreeing that the Vulgate (the Latin translation of the Bible) is the sole standard of belief. And ever since the Bible has been translated into almost all the languages of the world, so that it has been prepared for study and reading for the peoples of all lands and nations, whether they be of high or low degree. To be sure, we may not be able to understand and comprehend the Word of God. But, on the other hand, it is transparent, clear as crystal, and we can

read it for our spiritual benefit and edification because the Lord can and does sanctify His truth unto our hearts and minds. This perspicuity of the Scriptures is part of the priceless heritage of the Reformation. Besides, it is simply a fact that it is exactly this principle of the perspicuity of Holy Writ which has safeguarded the truth throughout the ages. For, although men of brilliant minds have repeatedly attempted to undermine the Word of God and deprive the Church of its one and only foundation, it is always the Church which has risen to the defence of the truths of Holy Writ.

This the Church has been able to do because of the Spirit of Christ Jesus Who dwells within her. The Church has the promise of the Holy Spirit, the promise that the Holy Spirit, will dwell in her and lead her into all truth. He enlightens the mind and causes the Church to reflect upon and appropriate the truth unto themselves. He causes the people of God to see the glorious truths of the Scriptures and give expression to them in a language which is both clear and beautiful. And it is indeed true that all the life of the Church is affected by that promise of the Holy Spirit. When societies within the Church of God come together to discuss the Word of God, they are indeed led by the formulation of the truth by the Church in the past, and this the Church owes to the Spirit Who dwells within it. We must, therefore, be very careful before we speak, in a derogatory manner, of the confessions and creeds as the products of men. One sometimes hears (can it be true that this language is also heard at times in our own churches?) that the confessions are the products of men and that we must, therefore, when evaluating anything to be true or false, turn our attention to the Word of God. Of course, the Word of God is the sole standard of the truth, and our confessions may never serve any other purpose than to enrich our knowledge of the Word of God. But, it is well to bear in mind that it is incorrect to say that our confessions are the products of mere men. They are the products of the Church of God as led by the Spirit of God and Jesus Christ, our Lord. They were indeed written by men, but by men as ecclesiastically assembled, representing the Church to whom the Lord Jesus had given the promise that He would lead her into all the truth, even unto the end of the world.

—H. Veldman

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Praise ye the Lord; all creatures, sing  
The praises of your God and King;  
Let all that breathe, His praise proclaim  
And glorify His holy Name.



## DECENCY and ORDER

### Good Order and Our Churches

In our last installment we introduced the first article of our Church Order. At that time we wrote on the subject of *Good Order* in general and pointed out that the Word of God repeatedly calls us to live orderly lives. Such a life is one that is in all things in harmony with the revealed will and word of the God of all order.

This orderly arrangement of all things in the original creation has been grievously disrupted by sin. This also then has its effect upon the church in the world so that she does not appear in the world as a body united in orderly fashion and living in accord with the Holy Word but rather she appears as a house hopelessly divided and torn by disorder and schism. For this reason it is necessary that there be "Offices, assemblies, supervision of doctrine, sacraments and ceremonies, and christian discipline" in the church for through the proper functioning of these institutions order in the church will be maintained and peace and unity will prevail.

We made the observation then too that there are "evidences in our own churches of sagging porches, tottering dormers, and broken panes which mar the beauty of our ecclesiastical structure". The peace and unity we once enjoyed no longer prevails. Instead there is disunity and some already speak of the *inevitable split*. This condition results from a disorder in the functioning of one or more of the institutions mentioned above which are designed to maintain good order. This disorder has temporarily disrupted all progress and development and unless it is properly rectified the future existence of our denomination is in jeopardy. As a communion of churches we cannot live in disorder any more than a school of fish can live outside of the water.

In the present article we wish to reflect somewhat upon the situation because we feel that when order and decency are once again restored in our churches the dogmatic problems that confront us will either be absolved or the differences which do exist will become obvious even to the least discerning laity which I am confident is at present not the case. Our ecclesiastical fog is the result of disorder and until the fog is lifted it will be difficult if not impossible to discern clearly. Clarity prevails only when "all things are done decently and in good order."—(I Cor. 14:40). Confusion is the product of disorder!

Let us begin our survey then by going back to 1950 when the Declaration of Principles was brought into being. Was this a product of disorder brought into being by illegal means, i.e., means that are contrary to the principles of Reformed Church Order? If it was, our present situation may be caused by this disorder and then we must correct this by withdrawing the Declaration and proceed further in the legal way. If it was not, however, our present situation stems from a refusal to abide by this order and this must be corrected first of all in the local churches through the proper functioning of the "offices, supervisions, and discipline." (Art. 1).

To the undersigned there is no question concerning the orderliness of the proceedings of the 1950 Synod. I would have our readers consider a few simple, well-known facts:

Fact is that "the missionary work of the churches is regulated by the general Synod in a mission order". (Art. 51, D.K.O.) This means that it is the Synod's business to regulate according to its wisdom the missionary work of the churches. No one can fail to acknowledge this.

Fact II is that "all proposals of importance to be treated by the Synod must appear on the agenda so that Consistories and Classes may have opportunity for previous deliberation with the *exception* of those matters that are brought by various standing Synodical Committees." (Arts. 4, 6 Rules of Order of the Synod). This, of course, is nothing new but obviously many are either ignorant of the rules that govern ecclesiastical procedure or do not wish to regard them.

Fact III is that in 1950 the standing Synodical Mission Committee "requested the Synod to draw up a form that may be used by those families requesting organization into a Protestant Reformed Congregation". (pg. 63, Acts 1950) The Mission Committee was confronted with a problem concerning what was binding in our churches and according to their written testimony they expressed that the answer to this problem did not lie within their jurisdiction. We all know this. It was a matter that was properly within the jurisdiction of the Synod. Hence, the matter was placed before that body for deliberation and decision.

Fact IV is that the Synod of 1950 replied to this request and presented the Declaration to the Mission committee as a working hypothesis in the organization of our churches. Objections were raised that "this is not what the Mission Committee requested" but this objection has to do with the content rather than with the legal procedure and so is not for us to consider here. The sole point we wish to make clear is that

Synod acted orderly and lawfully according to its own judgment in this matter. One may question and perhaps disagree with that judgment but as we see it the matter of order, jurisdiction and right is beyond doubt. Synod did nothing thus far out of order.

Now there is one more thing. Synod also sent the Declaration to the various Consistories for approval before final adoption. This procedure may be questionable. However, it certainly was not the intention of this doing of Synod to seek the approval of the church on *their legal procedure*. Synod did not do this because she doubted whether she acted within her right. Of course not! Synod simply requested the approval of the churches upon the *content* of the Declaration so that any anti-confessional matter might be elided before its final adoption. Even this Synod did not have to do and would have been in good order had she adopted the Declaration in 1950 for the organization of churches. But now the repeated attempt is made to evade treating the content (which the churches were requested to do) and wrangle over the question of legality. This is disorder! This is equivalent to stripping Synod of its proper functions under the Church Order. This is denying the standing committees of Synod the right to make their requests and allowing Synod to treat them.

From still another point of view we cannot agree with the *order* that is followed in the churches regarding the matter of the Declaration. This is the viewpoint of Art. 31 of our Church Order in which it is stated that "whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, *unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the Articles of our Church Order*, as long as they are not changed by a general Synod. (underscore mine—G.V.B.) This is a sound principle for it establishes the Word of God as the sole criterion for good order and as we stated previously "we are in good order only when we are in harmony with that Word". Now, if the Synod's action, taken by majority vote, is contrary to the Word (or to the Confessions which is the same thing for we agree as we state in the Formula of Subscription that our Confessions are Scriptural) it is most certainly an action of disorder. But, are objections raised to this? We hear various objections. Some assert that there is no need for the Declaration; others state that it isn't what the Mission Committee wanted; again we hear that it was adopted too hurriedly; or it disturbs the peace of our churches; or Dr. Schilder has cogent reasons not to adopt it; or it closes the door to others; and many more and for these reasons refuse to receive it as binding. The good order prescribed in Art. 31 above, however, allows none of these objections for when a

thing is agreed upon by a majority vote the only valid objection is that the decision conflicts with God's Word. Order, then, demands that we dwell on this one cogent point. To avoid this and to attempt to overthrow the work of Synod by an avalanche of sundry arguments and personal opinions is to produce confusion which is the product of disorder. This is the situation as we see it today.

It is true that some attempts are made to show that the expressions and concepts of unconditional promise, unconditional faith, etc. in the Declaration are unscriptural. This is rightly following the order of Art. 31 but even then it will not do to insist upon certain ambiguous so-called Reformed conditions nor will it suffice to cite the fact that certain Reformed writers of the past have written of conditions but in unambiguous language the concept of Reformed conditions, conditional promise, conditional faith, conditional repentance, etc. must be expounded from the Scriptures so that the churches may be wholly convinced that the phraseology of the Declaration is anti-Scriptural and anti-confessional. To simply fill the air with vague, confusing sounds which becloud the truth is to contribute to the confusion and disorder of our time. If we insist upon conditions in the *ordo salutis* we are further obligated by the moral as well as the written order of our churches to make our position unmistakably clear overagainst the plain expressions of the Declaration of Principles and the Canons.

No attempt is made here to deny one the right to protest or to maintain their convictions. We merely insist that this be done according to good order which is also compliance with the rules. When one binds himself to the Confessions which clearly ban 'conditions', putting them in the Arminian's mouth only, he is certainly duty bound to justify his objections to a declaration which harmoniously with the Confessions also speaks anti-conditionally. That, as we see it, is decency and order.

Concluding, we may yet remark that order is also systematic arrangement. Only when the Truth is systematically set forth and each part is properly focused upon the center of truth—THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD—do we maintain an orderly arrangement of truth. Introducing conditions throws the *ordo salutis* by sovereign grace out of this focus and in our vision mars the beautiful order according to which "of HIM and through HIM and to HIM are all things; to WHOM be glory forever". (Rom. 11:36) And this, too, is disorder!

G. Vanden Berg

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## ALL AROUND US

### *The Antithesis and Common Grace*

Under this title the Rev. Adam Persenaire wrote a Guest Editorial for the *Banner* of March 20, 1953. It appears that the Reverend is alarmed by what others in his churches are saying and writing relative to the Antithesis and Common Grace. He writes: "Now all this, if it is not the result of loose thinking, but of a conviction on the part of those who hold such views, is very dangerous reasoning, and could easily lead to utter frustration, as far as the application of our Calvinistic principles is concerned." He is afraid of Anabaptism and Barthianism. And he claims that "much that is being written and said recently in our circles about the relationship of the Christian to this world and the movements and organizations that are found therein leaves the impression that the Calvinistic doctrine of the antithesis and the doctrine of common grace are not complementary, but rather, paradoxical or apparently contradictory."

Persenaire insists that the antithesis and common grace are complementary truths. The one calls for the other. One cannot speak of the antithesis, in the Reformed sense, unless he also posits the existence of common grace, and one cannot maintain the concept of common grace unless he also holds that there is an absolute antithesis between the regenerate and the unregenerate, between the kingdom of Christ and that of the world. He therefore tries to prove two propositions: The Antithesis is Absolute, and, Common Grace is also Necessary.

We can agree with Reverend Persenaire when he tells us that the Reformed conception of the antithesis is opposed to the Roman Catholic, Anabaptistic and Barthian conception. We also agree when he maintains that the very idea of the antithesis presupposes that the Christian must be in the midst of the world, in order that there he may live his distinctive life as a Christian out of the principle of regeneration. The Christian must be a savory salt, a shining light, a witnessing witness, a willing servant of Christ, a pure temple of the Holy Spirit. All neutrality is excluded. All his relationships in this world are determined by his primary relationship to Christ. And this relationship to Christ does not cover a part of his life, as the Anabaptists teach, but, according to our Reformed conception, the whole of life.

But we disagree when he says that the Christian "to prevent total corruption of the whole of life must be a salt." It is revolting to think of myself, a Chris-

tian, whose calling it is to preserve a piece of rotten meat. Neither can we agree that the "Christian must claim the whole world for Christ, his King." We are convinced that Christ isn't too much interested in how much of this world we can salvage for Him. We believe that Christ teaches us to look for another world.

But what about that Common Grace business? The Reverend of course seeks to prove that common grace complements the antithesis. He asks: "And what about certain types of cooperation between Christians and non-Christians? If we hold to the absolute antithesis, must we then deny common grace, and is then all cooperation between Christians and non-Christians impossible?" His answer is: "On the contrary the very idea of the antithesis calls for the positing of common grace, and makes a certain amount of cooperation between Christians and non-Christians possible." Persenaire's view of the actual situation in the world is this: The unregenerate man is as Paul says, "dead in trespasses and sin" and therefore, "incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all evil." The "good" referred to here is spiritual good, the good which the Heidelberg Catechism explains is "done out of faith, in accordance with God's law, and to his glory." This good the unregenerate cannot perform. But in spite of the unregenerate condition of his heart, the non-Christian often does things that can be called "good" in a sense. He does natural civil and moral good. Moreover, he does not break out into all sin, as might be expected if he were left entirely to the imagination of the thoughts of his evil heart. This, the Reverend says, we account for on the basis of the doctrine of God's common grace. This grace does not change the unregenerate heart; but it checks the sinner, and enables him to do what we call natural good and civil righteousness. From this it follows that the non-Christian can also desire to do those things which are outwardly in conformity with God's law, and which are, to that extent, for the common welfare of humanity.

The Reverend warns, however, that common grace has reference only to the unregenerate. It is not common in the sense that it forms a common basis upon which both the Christian and the non-Christian can stand. The non-Christian never lives by special grace, and the Christian never lives by common grace. The latter must always live out of the principle of regeneration. Hence, there is never a situation wherein a Christian can step out of the realm of special grace and enter into that of common grace, and thus form a common, neutral ground of action with the non-Christian. The non-Christian lives out of the principle of sin, checked and corrected by the influence of God's common grace upon him. It is this latter check-



ing and correcting influence of God's common grace that allows for a certain amount of cooperation between Christians and non-Christians. But this cooperation must always be on an "as if" basis. It can never be a full cooperation. The temporary aims may be the same, but the underlying principles from which these aims are pursued will always differ. "To put it succinctly," he says, "Christians may cooperate with non-Christians in the pursuit of certain aims which are in harmony with the law of God; but only when such cooperation does not endanger their relationship to Christ, and thereby would make their Christian witness in word and deed, virtually impossible. In other words, a Christian can cooperate as long as in this cooperation he may remain different."

Persenaire believes that "some day, when God will withdraw more and more of this grace from the world, the antichrist will be revealed, who will virtually make it impossible for the people of God to dwell on the earth." "But as long as God's common grace is still operative in this world, there is an opportunity for collective Christian action and for Christian activities on this earth. Moreover, then there can also be a certain amount of cooperative action between Christians and non-Christians."

What shall we say about all this? It seems to me that Persenaire does not tell his readers anything they have not heard or read many times before. I fail to see how those who do not believe in the doctrine of common grace, or who misunderstand the doctrine as set forth in the Christian Reformed Churches, or who misuse the doctrine, are going to be corrected by this editorial.

When he writes about the good that the unregenerate may perform, he leaves the impression that if God would only give him a little more common grace he might be able to gain the full approval of God. He writes: "The good that the unregenerate may perform, due to the influence of God's common grace, is not good enough for the Christian, nor sufficient in the sight of God to obtain his full approval. It is not saving good."

When Persenaire, following Dr. A. Kuyper, writes about the checking influence of common grace on the depravity of natural man, and he tells us that if common grace were not present, we would not be able to dwell on the earth, he must mean too that this common grace began immediately after the fall of man. And if this is the case, it follows that if common grace had not come, the world would have reached its end at the beginning. How could that ever be? It means that hell would have been realized before all the lost had

even been born or filled their cup of iniquity. This I could never believe.

I am also interested in that "good" that sinners do, according to his common grace theory. If he would be consistent, must he not do as Kuyper did, deny the total depravity of man? Surely he would not say that common grace works only on the fingers, the ears and feet of the unregenerate. He must say that it works on his heart also. If he says this, must he not also say with Kuyper that man died only in principle when he ate of the forbidden tree? Surely he is not as dead as Paul makes him, is he?

It grieves me when I read an editorial like this. Why doesn't Rev. Persenaire simply leave off the whole philosophy of common grace, and tell his readers that as Christians they are not, according to the Word of God, to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, and in the midst of the world they are to live antithetically in every department of life, to let their light shine, live out of the principle of regeneration, and be a savory salt to God? Then, I believe, his people will no more be guilty of "loose thinking" and "dangerous reasoning", but they will know the truth, and the truth will make them free.

—M. Schipper

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O all ye peoples, bless our God,  
Aloud proclaim His praise,  
Who safely holds our soul in life,  
And steadfast makes our ways.  
Thou, Lord, hast proved and tested us  
As silver tried by fire,  
Thy hand has made our burden great  
And thwarted our desire.

Through pain and trouble Thou hast led,  
And humbled all our pride;  
But, in the end, to liberty  
And wealth Thy hand did guide.  
Here in Thy house I give to Thee  
The life that Thou didst bless,  
And pay the solemn vows I made  
When I was in distress.

Come, ye that fear the Lord, and hear  
What He has done for me;  
My cry for help is turned to praise,  
For He has set me free.  
If in my heart I sin regard,  
My prayer He will not hear;  
But truly God has heard my voice,  
My prayer has reached His ear.