

The Standard Bearer

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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at the Christian Reformed Synod

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THE STANDARD BEARER

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LE 4-0098

MEDITATION—

Search Me, O God

by Rev. J. Kortering

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalms 139:23, 24

Search me, O God!

What a paradoxical petition. It just doesn't seem to make sense to ask God to do something that will bring us to grief.

Yet this is exactly what we do when we sincerely pray with the Psalmist, "Search me, O God and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

The prospect is frightening.

Ask God to examine us? Our inclination is the very opposite: hide from God! We even try to hide from our fellow man. We don't like the thought of going to a psychiatrist and having to lay bare before the analytical mind of man our secret thoughts. Many a time we revolt against the penetrating questions doctors like to ask. To us it appears as an unnecessary waste of time to answer so many trivial questions. Besides it

is quite exhausting to recall things from the distant past. In our complacency we would just as well leave the past alone. There are too many foul pools that will begin to stink anew if we stir them up before our conscience. And this is fear of *man*. If we take this prayer of the Psalmist as our own, we ask *God* to be the examiner and thoroughly analyze our whole life. Before His face nothing is hid and His judgment is always in strictest righteousness.

Yet, we pray, Search me, O God. We recognize that without this divine examination we are hopelessly lost forever. We desire to see ourselves as God sees us, terrible though it may be, in order that through repentance of sin and striving after righteousness we may enjoy precious fellowship with Him.

David was awed by the omniscience of Jehovah. In the context he reflects upon this virtue of God. He begins by declaring, "O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways." He muses upon Jehovah's presence in the earth; it is so great that nothing takes place apart from His direction and knowledge. This omniscience is antithetically expressed. Since God knows all about the wicked he will surely slay them. His righteousness will not be cast aside, He is jealous in His holiness. Therefore David declares that he will not be counted among the friends of those that hate God; rather he will hate them that hate God and count them his enemies. Concerning the righteous however, David reflects that they may dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea and even there God leads and holds with His right hand.

This contemplation upon the omniscience of God occasions the petition of our text. We desire to know all about ourselves and to whom else can we go to learn this? Can we discover it for ourselves? Can our fellow man tell us? The answer is an emphatic, no! Only God can, and therefore we turn to Him.

We express the desire for a thorough examination.

David mentions three aspects of the human personality: the heart, thoughts, and way. He presents them in this order since our heart is the spiritual core and affects both our thoughts and way. Our way is the most apparent, for it has to do with our relationships with each other. Our bodies are the houses for our souls. When we use our eyes, ears, hands, for example we are busy in the things that can be visibly seen. Our way consists of our family life, our daily work, whether in the home or out of it. It involves our working hours and leisure hours. Our activities in church, home, and school all constitute our way. Whether we are good citizens and obey those in authority or revolt against those whom God has placed over us determines whether our way is good or not. This way is the fruit of our thoughts. There is more to our life than that which meets the eye. Beneath the surface lies the soul which is as a full time factory producing these deeds. Our minds possess the ability to retain thoughts, to recall ideas, to reason out certain things. Our human will arouses within us the desire to seek something outside

of ourselves. We long for certain things and thus are motivated to action. We respond to many things about us, we laugh and cry, we love and hate, sometimes we are placid and other times violent with rage. All these things are expressions of our soul which are included in the simple designation of "thoughts." Still deeper within each one of us lies the human heart. Man is a spiritual person. His spirituality is either good or evil. The condition of this spirituality is determined by the heart. That which David designates here as heart is really the spiritual source of all our activity. What the physical heart does to the physical body, viz., pumps through our veins the fluid of life, so our heart gives spiritual impetus to all our thoughts and consequently also our way. The love of God or the hatred of God lies at the bottom of all our deeds. This love or hatred is in our heart.

God's examination is thorough. He knows the motives of man. He knows the secret thoughts. Nothing is hidden from his holy eyes. All our deeds are written in the book of His remembrance. This knowledge prompts David to say, "Search me and know my heart." Literally this means that God looks into us and digs into our heart and uncovers for us what motivates us to act the way we do. Do we think about the things we do and act the way we do because we really love God or do we do it to be seen of men? Are we hypocrites or are we sincere? We desire to know and therefore we request that God examine our heart and communicate to us what He finds. Still more, we know there is an area of human experience which is secret to other people, but known to us and God. This is the area of our thoughts. Hence we pray that God likewise try our thoughts, weigh them upon the scales of His divine judgment and view them according to His holy law and see how they compare to what God demands of us. Finally we also include a petition for our way, "See if there be any evil way in me." Are we walking on the straight and narrow way that leads to the kingdom of heaven or are we on the broad and crooked that leads to destruction? With this petition we request of God an answer.

Perhaps you face a problem at this point. Why do we ask God to do the examining? Why is it not sufficient for us to look at our own heart and search it out, to try our thoughts, and see our own way. Why do we request God to be the examiner?

The answer is simply this; man cannot examine himself properly. Any examination which has the purpose of analyzing our spiritual condition and is done apart from God is destined for failure. The natural man is not qualified to conduct such an examination. There are two reasons for this. There are natural reasons first of all. Our heart lies beneath our conscious experience; we can only see the fruits of the heart, but not the heart itself. Besides, even if we were to judge our heart by the fruits, there are many works that are lost to the scope of our finite experience. We cannot possibly recall all the past thoughts, much less deeds. Some are forgotten because they didn't make much of an impression, others are willfully repressed. Add to this the whole world of dreams,

which also forms a large part of our thoughts. Many of these things are lost to us; we cannot even examine them. Besides these, there also are spiritual reasons for our inadequacy to examine ourselves. The natural man does not call sin by its proper name; we try to find some other designation like, weakness, shortcomings, or such like. If we are to judge our deeds to learn whether they are spiritually good or evil, we most certainly would not use God's holy law; we would use our own fickle standard. This is true because the human heart is evil. We do not have the love of God in our hearts; by nature we hate Him. Therefore our judgment of ourselves from a spiritual point of view is not trustworthy. We excuse sin and imagine hypocritically that all is well with our soul. We need but look at the world about us and see how they find "hope" in a life hereafter on the basis of all kinds of foolish works. Man likes to sin with impunity.

Only God Himself is qualified to examine us. His way is the only way that leads to covenant peace. He maintains that only in the way of perfect love can one ever find His divine favor. This mandate to love is spelled out clearly in His holy law. The law tells us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. This objective law is the standard for God's judgment of our spiritual condition. He searches out our inmost being with the penetrating light of His holy law.

All this sounds terrible, doesn't it? We ask the righteous God who is a consuming fire against all who violate His perfect ordinance to examine us? Indeed, because this God is also merciful. His justice is irrevocable. His mercy satisfies His justice. What a thrill to make this petition with our eye fixed upon the cross. This constitutes our only hope. Our prayer for examination by God is brought to the throne of grace in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If so, why do we desire that God *examine* us? Are

not our sins washed away once for all? Indeed they are, but the conscious appropriation of the forgiveness of sins becomes ours only in the way of the repentance from sin. This is the heart of this prayer. And how can we repent from sins we do not even know? How can we repent if we excuse our sins? We cannot, and therefore the natural man doesn't know repentance. The spiritual man of God cries unto the Almighty that He examine us and according to His holy law know our heart, try our thoughts, and see our way, and that He communicate to us what He finds, that we may repent of all our sins and seek His forgiveness for the sake of Christ Jesus.

God answers this prayer. It leaves us smitten and broken hearted. No, He doesn't answer with a voice from heaven. He calls to us through the preaching of the Word and tells us who we are and what our heart, thoughts, and way really is. He holds the mirror of His law before us and gives us insight through the working of the Holy Spirit. Then we begin to see ourselves as God sees us.

And what a sight!

We tremble at the horror of death that lurks within us and is so frequently manifest without us. Our trembling knees sink to the earth and our burdened heart cries out: God be merciful to me, a sinner. We tell God that we hate our evil way, we desire to do what He wills us to do, for deeply within our hearts we love Him. We pray, lead me on the way everlasting. That way is the faithful way of His perfect law.

Shall we make this our daily prayer?

The way everlasting is moistened with the tears of those that walk thereon. The more earnestly that we pray this petition, the more we will weep. Our sorrow is not as those that have no hope, we know the joy of forgiveness.

After the final searching before the great white throne we will rejoice evermore in the God of mercy. Search me, O God!

Yes, indeed, only through the power of God's marvellous grace in Christ Jesus, that redeemed us from sin, that delivered us from the dominion of corruption, that translated us out of darkness into His marvellous light, and that is still working within us to will and to do of His good pleasure, can this choice be made. By nature we will always choose the world, our present life, our name and job and earthly prosperity. The natural man cannot possibly understand that the reproach of Christ must be esteemed greater riches than the treasures of the world. How could he? Without God he is in the world, and with this world all his life is bound up. For, first of all, by grace it is given us to believe in Christ. And believing in Him, by that faith we live out of Him, and He lives in us. And living out of Him, we are new creatures, we have a radically new way of judging and evaluating things, so that we consider that the statutes of the Lord are more to be desired than much fine gold, and consider all things but dross for the excellency of Christ Jesus our Lord. In that light we do, indeed, discern that it is far better to lose the whole world than to be unfaithful to our Lord. But, secondly, through that grace we also look forward to a better resurrection, and know that if here we suffer with Christ, we shall also be glorified with Him.

-H. Hoeksema, "The Wonder of Grace," pp. 104, 105

EDITORIAL—

The "Dekker Case" at the Christian Reformed Synod

by Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

As reported previously in the *Standard Bearer*, there were several significant matters to be decided by the Christian Reformed Synod, all of which were more or less directly related to the current tension between liberals and conservatives in the Christian Reformed Church, as some would put it. Personally, I am convinced that it is more correct to speak not merely of a tension between liberal and conservative wings but of a growing trend toward liberalism, i.e., toward a non-distinctive and non-Reformed position, which is the direct and inevitable outgrowth of the fundamental position taken by the CRC in 1924. It is because of this latter conviction that the *Standard Bearer* also takes an interest in the current issues and tensions in the CRC and lets its testimony go forth, for the instruction and warning of all who may read it.

Undoubtedly the most important matter before the 1967 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church was a doctrinal matter, that of what is popularly called the "Dekker Case." Since the *Standard Bearer* has followed, reported on, and commented on this case from the very beginning, it is but proper that our readers be kept informed as to what has taken place. Undersigned, along with some of his colleagues, was present at as many sessions of the Synod as possible in order to present a prompt and accurate report especially, though not exclusively, on this matter.

An Advisory Committee on Doctrinal Matters, consisting of thirteen delegates, finally distributed its report toward the end of the second week of Synod's meetings, on Thursday, June 22. Late on Friday afternoon, June 23, the synod began to deliberate and to decide on the recommendations of the advisory committee. In its "Analysis" of the various Agenda materials committed to it, which is nothing but a brief summary of the reports and overtures on the "Dekker Case" appearing in the Agenda, the committee is unanimous. Also in its first set of recommendations, concerning "The Report of the Study Committee," the committee was unanimous. From that point on the Advisory Committee was divided, seven to six, and came with a Majority Report and a Minority Report.

DECISIONS TAKEN

The unanimous recommendations of the Advisory Committee, i.e., those under "C. The Report of the Study Committee" are as follows:

1. That Synod receive the report of the Doctrinal Committee as information and express its gratitude to this committee for its faithful and diligent work.

2. That Synod commend the report of the Doctrinal Committee to the churches for guidance and as a valuable contribution, within the Reformed tradition, to the discussion of the matters contained within the report.

3. That Synod refrain from adopting the recommendations contained in the report of the Doctrinal Committee (pp. 453-61).

Grounds:

a. Although the Doctrinal Committee proposes "that Synod do not make isolated extra-creedal statements," there is danger that adoption of these recommendations would make them just that.

(Note: Propositions not initially intended as extra-creedal statements are in fact being used as though they are creedal by the Doctrinal Committee in its present report to Synod (pp. 454-55).

b. Such propositions may be a hindrance to seeking unity with other Reformed Churches, as is evident from the report of the Contact Committee with Canadian Reformed Churches (Report No. 15, Agenda, 1967, pp. 56-57).

c. Such propositions may tend to curtail legitimate discussion in the churches.

d. This course of action is in keeping with that taken by the Synod of 1961 regarding the report on the doctrine of infallibility. (*Acts*, 1961, pp. 78-79).

By way of explanation, let me insert that the "Note" referring to "extra-creedal statements" being used "as though they are creedal by the Doctrinal Committee" refers to the Study Committee's first recommendation. That first recommendation claims that "In the light of Scripture and the Confessions a distinction must be maintained between God's benevolence toward all His creatures; His love of compassion for every sinner; and His unique love for His own (the elect). It is therefore unwarranted to speak of one love of God which is redemptive in nature for all men distributively." And for its alleged three-fold distinction in the love of God the committee, of course, could find no Scriptural and confessional proof. Hence, in their grounds they appeal to the First Point of 1924 and its proposition that "according to Scripture and the Confession it is evident that there is, besides the saving grace of God shown only to the elect unto eternal life, also a certain favor or grace of God, which He manifests toward His creatures in general." It is to this

"creedal" use of the First Point that the Advisory Committee refers in the above note.

What happened to the above recommendations?

They evoked very little discussion, pro or con. And with little ado, the Synod adopted all three. In fact, I was not a little amazed that there was no opposition to these decisions. Whether or not, from a Protestant Reformed point of view, one would agree with the recommendations of the Study Committee is not the question. But that from a Christian Reformed viewpoint recommendations "2" and "3" could simply be adopted amazed me. It would appear to me that any would-be opponents of Prof. Dekker's position gave away considerable ground in agreeing to these recommendations. But about the meaning and significance of these decisions I will comment later.

Now let me return to my report.

MAJORITY REPORT

At this point the Advisory Committee was confronted by the question of the doctrinal expressions of Prof. Dekker. And it is at this point that the committee became divided. The Majority Report is rather lengthy, but I will try to present the thrust of it, partly by summary and partly by quotation. It is very definitely an attempt at whitewashing the entire case. It leaves the impression of saying something while it actually says nothing definitive. It neither condemns the position of Prof. Dekker nor the position of those who disagree with him. It is a studied attempt to throw oil on the troubled waters of the CRC and to leave the real issues unsettled and the door open for further discussion.

Under "D. The Doctrinal Expressions of Professor H. Dekker," it makes, first of all, some "Preliminary Observations." These observations call attention, in the first place, to the statements of Professor Dekker which "have caused extensive discussion and controversy in the churches." These are Prof. Dekker's well-known and often quoted statements teaching a universal redemptive love of God and a universal atonement; they need not be quoted here. Then the report goes on to say: "Because of the confusion created by the faulty use of such expressions the advisory committee deems it necessary for Synod to issue warnings concerning them in the light of the Creeds." Notice the trend. The report speaks only of *confusion*. Moreover, it speaks not of *faulty expressions* or heretical expressions; but it speaks of the "faulty use of such expressions." The plain implication is that there is also a correct use of such expressions.

Next, in the typical language of compromise the report comes with a "however." It states, without any proof or motivation, the following:

b. However, we should not lose sight of the missionary concern which Professor Dekker has sought to express. Nor should we overlook the fact that it is possible to misuse statements such as, "Christ died for the elect only" and "Christ died only for his own." Misuse of such statements obscures and does not do justice to the well-meant gospel offer.

Notice here already the preoccupation with the First Point of 1924 and its well-meant gospel offer. Notice, too, that the committee does not state *how* it is possible to misuse the statement that Christ died for the elect only. Notice, too that the committee *injects* this matter into the discussion; this is not the issue in the Dekker Case whatsoever.

On the basis of the above preliminary observations the Majority Report next comes with three recommendations:

a. That Synod declare that such statements as mentioned in D, 1, a (Prof. Dekker's statements, HCH) should not be used in an isolated way because so used they are subject to interpretations not warranted by the Creeds.

b. That Synod warn against any use of such statements:

1) That denies the unique love-relationship of God to the elect. (Belgic Confession Art. 20; Heidelberg Catechism A. 37, 70; Canons of Dort II, 9; III-IV, 7, 16; V, 6)

2) That denies the unique benefits of the death of Christ for the elect. (Belgic Conf. Art. 21; Heid. Catechism A. 40, 67; Canons of Dort, I, 7; II, 8)

3) That denies the ultimate efficacy of God's love and of Christ's death for the redemption of the elect. (cf. references under immediately preceding statement)

4) That denies the unity of the work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in man's redemption. (Heid. Catechism, L. Day 20; Canons of Dort, V, 7)

5) That denies that "the wrath of God abides upon those who believe not the Gospel." (Canons of Dort, I, 4)

c. That Synod warn against the use of such statements as mentioned in D, 1, b:

1) That could undermine the Scriptural approach to men in preaching and witnessing which includes a most urgent invitation to faith in Christ, to repentance from sin and unbelief, and to service for Christ. (Heid. Catechism, A. 84; Canons of Dort, II, 5; III-IV, 8)

2) That suggests that the Scriptural and Creedal doctrine of election does not itself contribute to a loving concern for those who have not heard the gospel. (Heid. Catechism, L. Day 21, Canons of Dort, I, 6, 7)

3) That stifles the zeal and joy of the Church in proclaiming that "the death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin, and is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world." (Canons of Dort, II, 3)

Space does not permit a detailed analysis and criticism of the above at this time. Besides, it is still a question whether these recommendations will even come before the synod. But note three things: a) That there is no single word of condemnation of Dekker's doctrinal position as such; in fact, the first recommendation again presupposes that Prof. Dekker's statements can be used in a way consistent with the Creeds. Imagine! Arminianism justified by the Canons of Dordrecht! b) These recommendations are entirely negative; they are a warning with a double edge. But they fail completely to state positively either what is the correct use of Dekker's statements or what is the correct use of such statements as, "Christ died for the elect only." c) That the confessional proofs under

recommendation "c" do not prove what they are supposed to prove. The committee should have offered as its proof under this recommendation the First Point of 1924.

The next section of the Majority Report is "E. Actions with Respect to Professor Dekker." In this section is expressed the real thrust of the report from a practical point of view. It contains five recommendations which actually settle nothing, except that Prof. Dekker is doctrinally in the clear and that the door is open for further discussion, — that is, should the synod approve anything of this kind. Here they are:

1. That Synod commend Professor Dekker for his "desire to be biblically and theologically sound in mission motivation." (Report 41, Agenda, 1967, p. 379)
2. That Synod admonish Professor Dekker for the imprecise and indiscreet way in which he used the statements mentioned in D, 1, a above.

Grounds:

- a. He has not made clear that his use of these statements is in conformity with the creeds.
- b. He has publicly and dogmatically expressed his own underdeveloped interpretation of the creeds in opposition to a commonly accepted interpretation.
3. That Synod recognize the need for further theological discussion on the doctrinal issues raised in the writings of Professor Dekker.

Grounds:

- a. The confessions do not present a definitive or binding exegesis of the disputed passages.
- b. There are varying interpretations of the disputed passages among reformed scholars past and present.
4. That Synod warn that such discussion take place within the framework delineated in the recommendations under D-2.
5. That Synod accept Professor Dekker's oral statement that he is resolved to concur with the above recommendations.

This is followed, finally, by recommendations that a pastoral letter be addressed to the Christian Reformed Churches. This letter is to inform them of the decisions and counsel them to guide their thoughts and actions along the lines of these decisions. And the aim is to promote peace and unity within the churches. This letter is to be drawn up by the officers of Synod.

Thus far the Majority Report. It has not as yet been treated on the floor of Synod, although synod's president promised that before the Minority Report would be brought to a vote, there would be opportunity to consider the Majority Report.

THE MINORITY REPORT

Against this background the Minority Report must be considered.

What does it propose?

In the first place, it presents six statements for Synod to adopt which embody the negative part of the Study Committee's recommendations. The Study Committee's recommendations were quoted (without the grounds) in the June 1 issue of the *Standard Bearer* (see All Around Us); hence, I shall not quote the Minority Report in full. Its first six recommendations are those parts of the Study Committee's recommendations which read, "In the light of Scripture

and the confessions it is unwarranted to state....' Thus, for example, the first recommendation of the Minority Report read originally: "That Synod declare that in the light of Scripture and the confessions it is unwarranted to speak of one love of God which is redemptive in nature for all men distributively." The wording here was later changed to include a literal quotation of Prof. Dekker's statement, "that God loves all men with a redemptive love." To each of these six statements the Study Committee's grounds are appended.

In the second place, the Minority Report proposes "That Synod require Professor H. Dekker to refrain from using such statements in his future teaching, writing and preaching." Notice that no retraction or apology is required; only a promise to behave in the future!

And, finally, the Minority Report recommends "That Synod warn against the use of any statements" such as those mentioned by the Majority Report, "That could undermine the Scriptural approach to men in preaching and witnessing, etc." Here follow the same three statements against which the Majority Report warns and which we have already quoted.

Thus far the Minority Report.

WHAT HAPPENED AT SYNOD?

On Friday afternoon the first recommendation of the Minority Report was presented to the synod. It immediately became evident that there was no agreement on this proposition, and a prolonged debate began, which was continued in an evening session until about 11 o'clock. At this time synod adjourned for the night, but the debate was by no means finished. If memory serves me correctly, synod's president said that he still had fourteen names on his list of those who wanted to speak on this proposition. And this was only the first recommendation, though, undoubtedly the most fundamental one!

But on Saturday morning a motion was presented to recess. After a long discussion, this motion was passed. Synod is to reconvene on Tuesday, August 29. In the interim the Advisory Committee must meet again, and they may consult with Prof. Dekker, the Study Committee, and anyone else of their choosing. They are supposed to present a unified report if possible, and this report must be in the hands of the delegates two weeks prior to the date when Synod reconvenes. In the meantime, the various Christian Reformed papers are supposed to keep silence on the Dekker Case.

EVALUATION

I will not venture to prophesy what the Advisory Committee will advise nor what the synod will decide at the continued session. It seems to me, however, that it should not be very difficult to harmonize the two reports. There is only a difference of degree between them, and neither one really decides the crucial issues involved, all of which center about the impossibility of consistently maintaining the First Point and its general, well-meant offer of salvation along side the creedal position of sovereign predestination, particular grace,

and definite (limited) atonement. For that reason also, the synod is essentially no farther today than it was a year ago, when it postponed consideration of the Doctrinal Report. It has simply marked time for a year; and today it confronts the very same difficulties as a year ago. For that reason I believe that no matter what the Synod may decide, it will only decide something about the case without actually deciding the issues, UNLESS, — and that I do not expect, much as I could wish it, — it has the ecclesiastical honesty to face up to the errors of the First Point of 1924.

This, it seems to this observer, is substantiated by several items.

In the first place, there is the very fact that the Synod deliberately refrained from adopting the Study Committee's recommendations. It is in the positive part of these recommendations that a traditional but grossly inconsistent interpretation of the First Point is embodied. This very matter has been a burning issue in the Dekker Case. And the synod has already decided not to adopt the Study Committee's recommendations; and whether even the negative part of those recommendations will be passed in some form by the Synod is at this stage highly doubtful, apart from the fact that it will not really solve any problems.

In the second place, in the limited amount of debate thus far it has been very striking that the nub of the problem has been the First Point and the alleged "paradoxes" in which it involves one. And "paradoxes" is exactly the term employed more than once in the course of the debate. The difficulty is that these alleged paradoxes are plainly contradictions. And such paradoxes no one can leave unexplained; inevitably there will be those who can be satisfied only by following completely the Arminian line or by following consistently the Reformed line.

In the third place, listening to the debate, I gained

the distinct impression from some of the remarks that not only is Prof. Dekker correct when he claims that many of the Christian Reformed missionaries will be stymied because they want to preach and are preaching exactly what he teaches, but that there are also pastors in the home churches who want to preach and are preaching what Dekker proposes. Looking at it from a "pastoral situation," as one delegate put it, they would be at a loss as to what and how to preach if Dekker's doctrinal position should be ruled out.

But above all, to this observer it was an amazing thing that a synod which goes by the name "Reformed" could debate for hours without coming to a conclusion on the proposition which was debated: "That in the light of Scripture and the confessions it is unwarranted to say that God loves all men with a redemptive love."

A proposition like that should not require ten minutes to decide.

Or how long do you think the fathers of Dordrecht, or the fathers of the Afscheiding or of the Doleantie would have needed?

But the Christian Reformed Synod of 1967 recessed without having adopted that simple proposition!

This is a concrete example of just how far the cancer of the First Point has eaten into the vitals of the Christian Reformed denomination.

It is shameful; and it is sad!

When I see this, I am humbly glad that I am Protestant Reformed; and all our people should be thankful for it. They should be strengthened, too, in the conviction of their rightness.

And those in the Christian Reformed Church who earnestly desire to hold to the Reformed faith should begin to see that they and their generations cannot hope to do so in the Christian Reformed denomination and under the yoke of the First Point of 1924.

IN HIS FEAR—

Beautiful Feet

by Rev. J. A. Heys

No! Not really.

In the literal sense of the world the feet of man are never beautiful. The shriveled up, long, and slender feet of the newborn babe can hardly be called beautiful. The feet of a well-nourished baby may for a time display a fleeting beauty in comparison with what these feet were and will be; but although we speak of a beautiful face, even in this sin-cursed world, and

although we may concede that man's feet are quite functional and serviceable, we hardly consider them to be a thing of beauty. Especially after that child has begun to wear shoes and develops corns, callouses and bunions, or, because of lack of shoes, inherits cuts and bruises and scars and calloused soles because of the hot and cruel path upon which he must walk, do his feet lose any temporary beauty.

In the figurative sense of the word the feet of some are beautiful. Isaiah declares, and Paul quotes him in Romans 10:15, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things." Isaiah's version has it this way, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" We may note that the feet of some are beautiful, and not of all who claim the position of being a preacher in Zion. Those who come with the philosophy of men, with Satan's propaganda and the wiles of the Antichrist have ugly feet. And we shudder when we see these feet come over the mountains and must despise their appearance. How can we tell? Listen, the preacher sent by God declares, "Thy God *reigneth!*" Test all the preaching by that! Does the message say that He reigns, or only tries to reign? To me it is no good tidings that I am to look to one Who cannot reign unless I let Him. I need no such God. He needs ME! I have no use for a God Who will save me only if I let Him. He needs me, I do not need Him. Ugly and not beautiful are the feet of those who preach the philosophy, "Why not let God have His way?" Beautiful is the truth, "Our God reigneth!" And beautiful are the feet of those that preach that gospel, those good tidings, that comforting and reassuring message.

Undersigned, together with Mr. H. Zwak, expects, the Lord willing, to be with his feet upon the mountains of Jamaica when these lines appear in print (Due to the deadline for copy for the August 1 issue, this is being written June 20), leaving for Jamaica June 27 and arriving there late that afternoon. He is not boasting of how beautiful his feet are, but in humble gratitude to the living God acknowledges that which His people of another color, race and nation have expressed and we hope will again experience. Among those who in generations cannot and never will be able to say that they are of the fleshly seed of Abraham and of Seth, nor even of Japheth, God has His spiritual seed of Abraham; and to them the gospel of peace is beautiful. Therefore the feet of those that come over the mountains to preach these glad tidings are also beautiful. At this writing, therefore, we look forward in eager anticipation to having our feet walk the mountains of Jamaica from First Hill just south of Lucea through all Westmoreland and up Mt. Salem and Porters Mountain to the hills and mountains in the eastern end of the Island, where the Blue Mountains reach up out of the rich tropical vegetation toward the clear, blue sky. (O, yes, they even have occasionally a blue moon in the night sky of Jamaica.)

But share with us the enthusiasm of these Caribbean children of God for the appearance of our feet upon their mountains. For months and even years they have written of it and pleaded with our churches to send some one to preach these tidings. Elders Meulenberg and Zwak brought home the first urgent pleas, as the first emissaries from our churches to the Island. And later Elder Meulenberg returned with the Rev. C. Hanco, who gave them first hand the riches of the truth

that our covenant God has graciously given us. With baited breath they listened as the Rev. C. Hanco spoke, and broke forth with their sincere and enthusiastic "Amen"; "Praise God!"; "Blessed be God forever"; or else, walking along in the truth, they punctuated the sentences with a devout, sincere and quiet, "Yes, Yes." On our visit two years ago with Elder Zwak, we listened to their account of how the truth came to them as water upon a dry and thirsty land. It was therefore with some fear, yet eagerness, when it came our turn with Mr. Zwak to place our feet upon those same mountains and on those same paths with the gospel of peace, that we spoke to those who were total strangers in the physical sense and brethren and sisters spiritually by the grace of God.

We rejoiced when our feet also were beautiful to them and most welcome upon their mountains. We strove, as the Rev. C. Hanco did, to hold before them that truth, "Thy God reigneth!" And returning to the States it was also our privilege to underscore this by a correspondence course in Old Testament History wherein this truth was stressed from the view point of the Five Points of Calvinism, which in each point declare that He *reigns*. For He elects unconditionally a totally depraved people; and He by irresistible grace calls them to a salvation that is very particular, because of His limiting of the work of atonement by His own sovereign will, as is expressed in that unconditional election; and because He reigns, He preserves that people everlastingly to a sure and unchangeable salvation.

That truth was received as being so very, very beautiful; and we would share with you a few lines from recent letters—there were so many in the past as well—when they received knowledge that our Mission Board would again send feet to their mountains with that truth. A fellow labourer in the gospel in Jamaica wrote, "I notice carefully that plans have been made finally of a visit to this island on June 27, and we hope to greet each other again, as it pleased our Father above and our Mission Board and Synod. May our covenant God guide you to your destination on a safe voyage, for He is the Pilot of everything. Kindly excuse me of not meeting you at the airport (He lives about 100 miles away, has no car, nor extra money for bus fare.) to greet you with a holy kiss, since we hope to meet within a few days after (for the sessions of instruction to be given at Montego Bay)." Another colleague writes, "I am very glad, the Lord willing, that you will be with us here in Jamaica the 27th of June. All the brethren are eagerly awaiting your coming. Wishing you the Lord's blessing while I eagerly await your coming." And a third wrote, "I am happy to know that you will be with us for a second visit on the Island of Jamaica to embrace us with the Word of God in the power of God unto salvation. As to the meetings (those referred to above in Montego Bay) I would like to receive every blessing that you are desiring to bring for me through the leading of the Lord."

Then two days ago we received the following letter, which we are sorry we did not receive in time to pre-

sent to the Synod, "Dear Brethren, Some time ago I was informed by the Radio Committee that I was going to receive five special tapes that deal with the Five Points of Calvinism, and when I was satisfied with these Five Points of Calvinism to send some report either to Rev. Heys or to our Mission Board. Dear Brethren, we surely are satisfied with this doctrine. The preaching and teaching of Rev. H. Hanko (He received only the first two lectures on the Five Points of Calvinism when he wrote this letter.) is the same as the basic teaching of Rev. Heys and also as the preaching and teaching of the Protestant Reformed Churches, which is the Reformed Faith. Dear Esteemed Brethren, let me explain that we of the Protestant Reformed Churches in Jamaica by the help of our covenant God are growing daily more and more as God has promised.... May our covenant God ever bless this gospel field of the Reformed Faith throughout the world where said Reformed Witness Hour broadcast is voiced and proclaimed."

The above speaks for itself, but we want to call your attention to that "our" in that first letter. It is with deep respect, considering to be beautiful all the feet of those in our churches who were privileged to come there with the truth, that they have adopted our name, and call themselves the Protestant Reformed Churches of Jamaica. This is not plagerism. It is not theft; nor is it conceit. The truth of the Reformed Faith has taken hold of them; and they feel ONE with us more keenly and really than does any other group of churches, because they have heard the truth that our God reigneth! They speak, in these letters, of OUR Mission Board, OUR Synod because they believe that! As an institute we may stand far removed from them — although the decisions of our Mission Board and Synod show a deep sympathy and love for them — but organically we are one with them in the Body of Christ. And our labors in their midst have made them believe that we are one, and that color, race and nationality to do not count in this respect. One Lord, one baptism, one faith, one God and Father of all, one Spirit — and do not forget now ONE TRUTH, or one doctrine —

unites us in a way that Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea and the island of Cuba between us and them do not separate. As one of our Protestant Reformed members is reported to have said (and we agree one hundred percent and wish you all could experience that) after being with these brethren and sisters for only a short while, you do not notice a color difference between us...

You may therefore expect (rather believe that it happened) that also from their side, as they stand on the "waving gallery" of the Montego Bay airport on June 27 and look to the northwest, they will be straining to catch a glimpse of that little dot that soon has wings; and they will consider those wings of that plane to be beautiful because they bear up the feet of those who shall walk their mountains and preach the gospel of peace among them.

Sunday School children and teachers, can you not get enthusiastic about helping these Jamaican children? Can you not form your own mission project in harmony with the step taken by our Mission Board and Synod? Many of you have pen pals on the Island. When we return, the Lord willing, we can perhaps, show you their pictures in full color. You with your abundance, can you not give to those who have so little? You can be upon those mountains with your gifts and in the spirit. We must first of all minister to their spiritual needs. But their natural needs may not be ignored. And the truth which we preach to them speaks of loving them and of helping them in their natural life.

Undersigned's consistory and congregation are given much for these brethren and sisters in Jamaica. They are giving two whole months of the services of their pastor, even though he has been in their midst only two months, in order that he may serve those whom the congregation has never seen nor met. And Hudsonville's consistory and congregation gave up the services of their very capable and respected elder, Mr. Harry Zwak. Such deeds do not go unrewarded. May our covenant God prosper the labor in Jamaica and bring us back to our congregations for them to share with us the benefits and the joy of that gospel of peace.

TRYING THE SPIRITS—

Dispensationalism and the Christian Under Law

by Rev. R. C. Harbach

We have pointed out that the law of God from the beginning of history was the standard by which men were to live, and that before the law of Moses was revealed. Very early in history Job knew the law. But C. I. Scofield denies that "the law had then been known." Says he: "It would have been impossible, in

a discussion covering the whole field of sin, of the providential government of God, and of man's relation to Him, to avoid all reference to the law if the law had then been known (SRB, p. 569) But unquestionably the law had been known then as any "discussion covering the *whole* field of sin" could not possibly ensue without

reference to the law. Therefore, Scofield errs, holding that this book "avoids all reference to the law," since it "was certainly written before the giving of the law (ibid.)." We saw how faulty this thinking is in view of the fact that Israel had the law before it was formally given on tables of stone at Sinai (Ex. 13:9; 16:4, 28, 29). Besides, the book of Job makes frequent reference to the law of God! This is evident in Job's confession of his *transgressions* (31:33), which he did not hide as Adam. It being true that "where no law is, there is no transgression," (Rom. 4:5) then the law must have been revealed to Job. *Iniquity* is also an evil Job confessed, but he also denied certain forms of iniquity of which he was not guilty (Job 31:3, 11, 28). The N.T. explains iniquity to be *lawlessness*, as a comparison of Ps. 32:2 with Rom. 4:7 (Gk.) will show. But how could Job speak of crimes of lawlessness deserving of punishment, not only by earthly judges, but by *the* Judge, if the law of God did not appear until the day of Moses? But since God's judgment and justice were known (8:3; 37:23), then His law must have been known. Job in that early era learned his high principles of righteousness from no other source than the moral law of God! This is literally stated in the book, Job maintaining, "I have not concealed the words of the Holy One," (6:10) "neither have I gone back from *the commandment* of His lips; I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." (23:12) Job also was counselled, "Receive, I pray thee, the *law* from His mouth, and lay up His words in thine heart," (22:22)

Now we go on to only briefly deal with the dispensational error that the moral law was given only to the nation of Israel. For we have already shown to some length from Scripture that the law was in force well before there was a Jewish nation. Let one more plain Scripture suffice. "Now we know what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." (Rom. 3:19) The law is represented as speaking. It "saith," not "said"; that is, it is always in inspired utterance, continually commanding and prohibiting. It is directed to those under it, and they are "every mouth," "all the world." Guilty and condemned before the law is all the world because the whole world is responsible for keeping the law. Here is a blanket condemnation of the whole human race, none excepted. On what basis? on that of the law; and therefore the universal condemnation stands, because the law stands over "all the world."

More particularly, we want to examine the error of Dispensationalism which teaches that Christians are not under the law in any sense, that it is not their only infallible rule of faith and conduct. Perhaps this series on Dispensationalism will provide either directly or indirectly some enlightenment which will dispel the mists of confusion these errors bring and cause to hang over the minds of many for years. In that case, it is our duty as a teacher of the Word to "take up the stumblingblock out of the way of My people." (Isa. 57:14)

Naturally, dispensationalists have pet texts they like to quote in support of their antinomian theories. They

will therefore point to, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ ...But now we are delivered from the law" (Rom. 7:4, 6) and to this, "For I through the law died to the law." (Gal. 2:19) Passages like these are supposed to show that the law has nothing to do with the Christian and the Christian has nothing to do with the law. But these very words of Scripture so appealed to flatly deny what would be maintained by them, namely, that none but the nation of Israel were under the moral law. Why were Roman (Gentile) Christians "delivered from the law" if they were never under it? They had never been placed under the ceremonial law. But the moral law, taken in its largest extent, was manifested to all mankind, whether Jew or Gentile, so that the will of God was not utterly unknown (Rom. 1:19, ASV). To have died to the law and been delivered from it is a reference to its penalty, not to its precepts. In the context of this chapter Paul refers to the moral law exclusively, and testifies that in it he delights (7:22).

"The Gentiles...have not the law." (Rom. 2:14) "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." (6:14) "To them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law." (I Cor. 9:21) What is this that we read that the Christian is "not under the law" yet is "under the law"? In the sense intended in Romans 6, even the O.T. saints were not under the law. We are not under the law as represented by Adam the first. For we are delivered from the law as to its curse (Gal. 3:13), but not as to its requirement. We are delivered from the law as to its condemning power (Rom. 3:19), but not as to its precepts (Ps. 119:93). The Gentiles were without law in the sense that they had no written revelation from God, and never had the ceremonial law imposed on or even suggested to them. When Paul was among them, he did not conform to the Jewish ceremonial law. In this sense he was without law. But at all times did he conform to the moral law of God. He never acted as without law to God, for he was under the law to Christ. When among Jews, he did not mind conforming to their ceremonial law, as no principle was involved. But when among Gentile Christians, he refused conformity to such regulations, even for an hour. The whole human race had the law from the beginning, but transgressed. Also "they knew God," (Rom. 1:21) and so had the truth (and therefore the law: Ps. 119:142), but held it down in unrighteousness (v. 18), because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge (v. 28).

When we take a calm look at the Ten Commandments, is it not evident, that whether Christian or not, it is right to have no other god but God? Is it not in harmony with grace that the Christian may make no graven image or bow down to one? Is it below the spirit of the Gospel to prohibit the taking of God's name in vain? Is it legalism to require the keeping of the Sabbath day holy? Has the law to honor parents been cancelled out of the epistles? Do not the laws prohibiting murder, adultery, stealing and coveting commend themselves to the conscience of every *honest* man? If

one does not have the same attitude as David had to the law of God in Psalm 119, is he not an enemy to God? Yes, and to one's own flesh and blood, and to the state as well.

This attitude Jesus Himself had. He never taught that the law was to be set aside, or that its perfect standard was to be lowered. He assured the new covenant church, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, til heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Mt. 5:17, 18) Christ is the great prophet of the law, but that does not eliminate Him as the greatest preacher of divine grace. For grace does not abrogate the law. Neither does faith, for "by faith we establish the law." (Rom. 3:31) Grace and law are aspects of the truth which have their different emphases, but are nevertheless in perfect agreement. It is a mistake to think the two are avowed enemies. The idea destroys the unity of the Word of God. Moses, the O.T. mediator of the law, demonstrated the blessed consonance between law and grace when he offered sacrifice and sprinkled the blood of the covenant on the book of the law and upon the covenant people! The shed blood of Christ perfectly harmonizes the law with grace, because the pierced hand of Christ upholds the law. There is no conflict between Moses and Christ. Jesus also taught here that the law is both immutable and eternal. Heaven and earth do not abide *semper idem*; they pass away. But the law is unchangeable and perpetual. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the

Word of our God endureth forever, which means the O.T. as much as the N.T., the law as much as the Gospel. Christ came not to annul the law, but to magnify it and make it honorable.

No one can deny that the Psalmist had marvelous God-given insight into the death of Christ, but he also saw that this saving death would in no wise repeal God's law. "Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Thy law is the truth. The righteousness of Thy testimonies is everlasting. Concerning Thy testimonies, I have known of old that Thou hast founded them for ever. Thy Word is true from the beginning, and every one of Thy righteous judgments endureth forever (Ps. 119:142, 144, 152, 160). All His commandments are sure; they stand fast forever and ever." (111:7, 8) Our Lord manifested such a holy jealousy over His holy law that He not only warned that "who-soever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 5:19) but also that "the Lord sitteth King forever" (Ps. 29:10) and will therefore execute justice against those who will not be ruled by His law: "But those Mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them bring hither, and slay them before Me." (Lk. 19:27) For the meaning of "shall be called least in the kingdom," see Isa. 9:14-16, and try reading the verses in their reverse order. But from the above Lucan passage we learn the true character of regeneration and conversion, a change from a lawless rebel to a loving bondslave, one who says, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." (Rom. 7:22)

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES—

David and the Piece of Skirt

by Rev. B. Woudenberg

And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily.

And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt.

And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he had cut off Saul's skirt.

To Saul it must have appeared as nothing less than what would be called today a plain case of "rotten luck." To David and to us who observe in faith from history's sideline, it was a clear case of God's providence overshadowing and keeping a servant whom

He loved. For the first time, it appeared as though Saul had David shut up in an inescapable trap. All that remained was for him to close in and stamp out that curse which David had become to his life. But it was not to be. In the last moment, a messenger appeared

to inform Saul that the Philistines had invaded the land. There was no choice left but to hasten to that front, while David was left free to flee. As it had been from the time of Babel on, the strife of the nations had been used again for the purpose of sparing one of God's elect.

The relief that David obtained, however, was only temporary. No sooner had Saul driven the Philistines back behind their own borders than he returned to the wilderness to take up his pursuit of David. David and his men had time only to locate and establish for themselves a more suitable hiding place. But this time the place which they did find was much more suited for their needs. In the wilderness of Engedi there were numerous caves that went back into the limestone cliffs, some of them very far. From their entrances one could hardly determine how deep these caverns were, how large their capacity was, nor if anything was in them or not. One such cave David located, which, although very ordinary appearing at its entrance, was able to shelter all of his company of men and keep them safely hidden in its remote recesses. From the cavern's entrance, it was quite impossible to tell that it was any different from countless others in the area.

The most amazing fact was, though, that through this all David had not become bitter toward his persecutor. He did feel badly about the actions and attitude of Saul, of course; and we know from the Psalms that he felt very deeply the injustice of that which he had to suffer. He even realized that the reason for Saul's actions was to be found in the fact that he was trying to prevent David from obtaining that which God had ordained for him to have, the very throne of Israel itself. Yet through it all, he could not come to really hate Saul personally and to want any revenge. Through long years of instruction and dedication in faith, he had come to recognize in respectful awe all those who had been appointed by God to serve in the rule of Israel. Even though he had received from the Lord the promise that he would himself some day sit upon the throne, he felt no immediate desire to obtain it. He was quite satisfied, if only he might, to serve faithfully in the capacity of a humble servant until such a time as the Lord should see well to give to him a higher place. Thus, even after all he had gone through at the hand of Saul, there was nothing that he would have desired more than to be reconciled to his king. Surely he could find in his heart not the least desire to hurt him. This became quite evident there in that cave at Engedi.

Coming back as he did to continue his pursuit of David, Saul found himself quite at a loss to know just where to go. He knew the general area in which David had to be, but of the specific location he could find no trace. But Saul was determined, even to the point of taking three thousand of his choice men and sending them out to search the land in quest of David. In fact, so heavily did this whole matter weigh upon the mind of King Saul that he himself joined this party of searchers to tramp through the hot and dry valleys of that wilderness region in search of some indication of where David and his men had gone.

How long the search continued, we do not know; but it happened one day as Saul was tramping through a hot, dusty valley that he came to a group of deserted sheep pens which at times were used by shepherds who grazed their sheep in the area. They were conveniently located near to some caves in the hillside where the shepherds could themselves live during the times that they spent in the district. To Saul the sudden appearance of those caves so conveniently located seemed most fortunate. The afternoon was hot and the search so far had proved quite futile. The only cool place one could find anywhere about was in caverns such as these. A short nap in one of these caves would no doubt go unnoticed by the other men and would be most refreshing for him. Quickly Saul slipped into the mouth of the nearest one and went to sleep.

Little did Saul realize how the providence of God had once again guided his step. For the cave in which Saul now slept was one of those that went deep into the hillside to open up into a vast cavern — it was the very one in which David and his men were now hiding. Each move that Saul made was carefully watched by many attentive eyes. He had been seen already when first he entered this valley by the guards of David stationed at the cavern's mouth. Only when Saul's footsteps turned directly to their cave itself had they backed up into the darker recesses to watch while with suppressed glee a message was quickly sent to David to inform him of the good fortune that had come his way. Soon, much sooner than had been expected, David would be able to sit upon the throne of Israel — so it seemed to the men that carried the report. There was nothing now that could prevent David from ending his enemy's life. "Behold," they exuberantly whispered in his ear, "The day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee."

Little did the men realize it, but their words struck deep and painfully into David's heart. If there was one thing that he had always feared, it was the possibility that some day that he might find himself under the necessity of fighting against his own countrymen, and especially of inflicting harm directly upon the royal family of Saul. He could not forget that the king of Israel was appointed by God and must be respected as God Himself. Again and again he prayed to God to prevent a direct conflict between his forces and those of Saul, lest he should find himself under the necessity of inflicting harm upon the people of God. Now as he crouched in the back of that cave watching the sleeping Saul, he was only too thankful that Saul was unaware of their presence, and he was satisfied to leave it at that.

It was evident, however, that David's men were not. To them the presence of Saul was as a sign from God that the time had come for David to strike back. They would never be satisfied if David merely let Saul depart again without doing anything at all. And, as David thought about it, it struck him that maybe some good use could be made of this opportunity after all, maybe he could use it to prove to Saul once and for all how completely one-sided and unjustified was his hatred of

David. Slowly and silently David arose, took his sword, and crept toward the sleeping king while his men with bated breath eagerly watched his every move. But David's intent was far from what they were anticipating. Coming to the prostrate king, David took his sword only to reach down and cut a small swatch of cloth from the edge of the royal robe. That was all, and with the piece of cloth in his hand David retreated to the back of the cave again. Yet, even as he did so, David's conscience began to pain him. Somehow there was something symbolic of rebellion in wilfully damaging the royal robe of the king. His action has been impulsive, and now that it was done he knew it was wrong.

No sooner had David returned to the back of the cave, however, than it became evident how completely different was his thinking from that of his men. They were utterly dismayed by the triviality of David's gesture. Here was surely an opportunity which would never be repeated. What reason could there be for failing to put an end to this meaningless, wicked conflict? Surely, if anyone deserved to die at David's hand, Saul was the one. Or at least he could be taken as a hostage until some fair and permanent guarantee of safety would be given. And, of course, from the point of view of all human logic, the men were quite right. But with David there was something deeper and more decisive than mere logic; it was the way of faith in the will of God. David was left with no choice but to use his authority to still the restiveness of his men. With a finality that forbade any further debate, he said, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD."

Nevertheless, David was not as yet through with the matter. Still there lingered in the back of his heart the hope that something might be done to heal the relationship between him and Saul; at least, he was determined to do all that he could to bring this about. Patiently he waited until Saul awoke and left the cave, then he followed. Coming to the opening of the cave he called to the departing Saul, "My lord the king," and when Saul turned he bowed himself to the ground in a gesture of humble submission. Then, before Saul had a chance to grasp the meaning of it all, he added, "Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the LORD had delivered thee to

day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee; but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the LORD's anointed. Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand; for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it. The LORD judge between me and thee, and the LORD avenge me of thee; but mine hand shall not be upon thee. As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked; but mine hand shall not be upon thee. After whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea. The LORD therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and please my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand."

Nothing could have hurt Saul more than these words of David and the deed which proved them. Suddenly there was no more pretense, no more hiding; all the wickedness of his heart stood exposed. As accustomed as Saul was to denying the truth, he stood now as though naked in his shame. The words of David were as coals of fire upon his head so that with flushed and completely unnatural humility he could only think to answer, "Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. And thou has shewed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the LORD had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not. For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? wherefore the LORD reward thee good for that thou has done unto me this day. And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand. Swear now therefore unto me by the LORD, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house." These were hard words for Saul, the most painful he could ever be asked to utter, and the pain of them even the willing promise of David could not alleviate. All he had ever found worthy of living for was his own pride, and now he stood humbled. For the moment there was nothing more that he could do than turn from the mouth of that cave and call his forces home. But the pain of that moment would never forsake him. Because of it he would come to hate David even more bitterly than he had before.

To suffer with Christ is a great blessing. For, first of all, the very consciousness that we are deemed worthy, together with all the saints, to suffer in His behalf and for righteousness' sake, affords us unspeakable joy and profound peace. Secondly, there is a present fruit that is reaped in the way of this suffering: for tribulation worketh patience, and patience the approved state, and the approved state hope, and hope maketh not ashamed! And, finally, there is at the end of this road of suffering for Christ's sake, — and mark you well: at the end of no other road, — the crown of life, the glory with Christ! And the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with that glory. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven!

—H. Hoeksema, "The Wonder of Grace," p. 105

ALL AROUND US—

Ecumenism and Mergers Controversy on Abortion

by Prof. H. Hanko

ECUMENISM AND MERGERS

The time of Synods and Church Assemblies is once again almost past. While a host of decisions on a variety of subjects were taken, ecumenism dominated the discussions of the broadest assemblies of the nation's churches. A survey of what happened includes the following.

— *Christianity Today* has proposed and is pushing hard for a union of evangelicals in a new ecumenical movement. This proposal, rising out of last year's Berlin Congress on Evangelism, is not specifically aimed at the formation of a new denomination to compete with the COCU talks (cf. below), but is rather aimed at greater cooperation between evangelicals in various areas of church work. In a recent editorial the following comments were made:

Our editorial (a former editorial proposing this alliance of evangelicals) specifically said that the call for evangelical cooperation did not envision an organizational counterpart or competitor of the conciliar movement. Yet the promotion of evangelical distinctives surely would conflict with certain conciliar aims. In some areas, however, evangelicals and conciliarists might have similar objectives. Evangelical unity cannot be built negatively on the basis of either separation or the complaints of disgruntled former "ecumaniacs." It must be positive.

Going on to discuss the number of evangelicals who would potentially figure in such a plan, the editorial goes on to say.

The potential for evangelical cooperation is numerically staggering. The National Council of Churches lists 42,000,000 persons in its member churches. Nearly 3,000,000 of these are in the Eastern Orthodox and Polish National Catholic Churches, so that the council's Protestant representation is about 39,000,000. But Protestants in the United States now number over 69,000,000. Most of those unaligned with the NCC are theologically conservative, while at least one-third of the NCC constituency is also considered conservative. The total number of evangelicals, in fact, is estimated at more than 45,000,000: 13,000,000 in the NCC; 2,500,000 in the National Association of Evangelicals; 1,000,000 in the ACCC; and 29,000,000 unaligned. This means that if evangelicals ever band together, they will outnumber the present NCC constituency. At most the non-evangelical wing of Protestants in the NCC totals 26,000,000.

What would be the purpose for creating such an association? The answer given includes the following specific points:

...to coordinate evangelistic and missionary effort more effectively....

Evangelicals will benefit greatly by getting together for prayer, for worship, for interchange of ideas, and for fellowship.... Evangelicals working together can test new ideas, develop a needed sense of community, and show the world more clearly than ever before what they believe in and what steps they intend to take to implement their visions.

....Evangelical unity would lead to involvement in depth of service.... Evangelicals ought to be making a far greater impact on communications, in the arts, in the inner city, in the small towns and rural areas, and among minority groups....

...a compelling reason why evangelicals must cooperate is that the Holy Spirit works most mightily where believers are gathered together in one accord. There were no party labels on the lapels of the believers at Pentecost. There were no tribal axes to grind when the Paraclete came down in power. There were diversities of gifts and understanding; yet the original churchmen took their stand together upon the great facts of the Christian revelation and proclaimed them boldly to a needy and alienated world. They inscribed their convictions on this kind of a doctrinal charter, and so must we.

All this is somewhat nebulous and fuzzy. Perhaps it can be no different at this point. But what needs to be done first of all, is to discuss thoroughly doctrinal differences which separate evangelicals. It is not enough to propose unity on the basis of belief in the "fundamentals" of the Christian faith. There are other important differences which are of a confessional nature which must be resolved; differences in views of the millennium, differences in the idea of the kingdom of God, differences in the all-important subject of the application of the blessings of salvation—many evangelicals are thoroughly Arminian, differences in the doctrine of the atonement. The question must also be answered: Will evangelicals be willing to discuss the unique *Reformed* heritage of the truth? These are not peripheral topics which can be ignored; these are creedal matters which must be resolved if the creeds are still to serve their purpose as forms of unity.

It might be argued that no denominational union is

being proposed; that the remarks above are therefore irrelevant. But this is not true. Unity in the work of the kingdom must be based upon unity in the truth or the work will flounder.

What will come of this remains to be seen.

—While the *Gereformeerde Kerken* in the Netherlands have decided that there is no obstacle to membership in the World Council of Churches, they have not yet joined while they await the opinions of their fellow Reformed Churches. Three particular Synods in the Netherlands (Friesland South, Gelderland and Groningen) have asked the General Synod not to join. But apparently none of the Particular Synods had principal objections. According to the RES Newsbulletin, one did not want the denomination to join for fear of destroying cooperation with other Reformed Church bodies. Gelderland did not want to join thinking that to send observers was sufficient. And Groningen wanted opportunity for the churches to get used to the idea first. The general Synod will meet later this summer.

—The Christian Reformed Church, at its Synod last June, decided against approving of membership in the WCC. The study committee appointed last year was split on the issue. The majority of the committee (whose report was substantially adopted by Synod) had very principal reasons for advising against joining. The minority did not want to join at the present, but wanted Synod to express that there was no basic reason for withholding membership. Yet this strong stand was weakened somewhat by another decision to send observers to the Fourth Assembly of the WCC meeting at Uppsala in 1968.

--The union talks between the Presbyterian Church US (Southern) and the Reformed Church in America are somewhat more complicated. A committee of 24 has been studying merger for several years now. And both the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church US and the Synod of the Reformed Church in America decided by large majorities to continue the Committee of 24. In fact, the committee was given instructions to present both churches with a specific plan of union next year. This is a large step in the direction of merger. If the plan is received by both major assemblies next year, it will be submitted to the churches for approval. Approval necessary to put the merger in effect will require a favorable vote by 3/4 of the Southern Presbyterian presbyteries and by 2/3 of the classes of the Reformed Church. The merger then would be completed by 1969.

The complication in these merger talks arises out of the decision (taken last year) of the Southern Presbyterians to join the COCU talks (Consultation on Church Union, originally called the "Blake-Pike Plan"). At their last Synod, the RCA decided against joining these talks, although the vote was close: 140-128. But the Southern Presbyterians decided to continue as participants. So now there are merger talks going on between two denominations, one of which has joined COCU, the other of which has decided not to join. The trouble is that there is some difference of opinion among Southern Presbyterians concerning just what this

participation involves. Some argue that participation means that the Southern Presbyterians have really cast their lot with this proposed 25,000,000 member church. Others argue that participation means no such thing, but that the Church has committed herself to nothing until a formal plan of union is proposed and submitted for a vote to the presbyteries of the Southern Presbyterian Church.

But this latter argument is evidently a ploy designed to beguile those opposed to participation in COCU. The fact of the matter seems to be that the leaders of COCU are determined to press ahead for merger between the denominations involved even before a formal plan of union is drawn up. The opinion is that first the churches must unite to form a new denomination, and then the churches together can draw up their plan of union. This is all strange procedure, but the idea is that a final constitution will be deferred for a generation or two and that a formal plan of union will be postponed till 1970, or 1980, or later — that is, indefinitely. The result is that, in the meantime, the participating churches of COCU are already merging their boards, agencies, programs and mission work. And a merger will come about in fact before the member churches ever get an opportunity to vote on it.

This is very deceptive and the Reformed Church had better make up its collective mind very shortly. It is just possible that it will become a part of COCU by a very devious and deceptive method and lose entirely what little Reformed witness it has left.

CONTROVERSY ON ABORTION

The rightness of abortion has become a deeply controversial issue. Legally, in this country, abortion is not allowed except in cases when the life of the mother depends upon it. But, in fact, an estimated one million illegal abortions are performed every year. The state of Colorado was the first to alter this law; it has now made abortions legal in three instances: 1) where pregnancies resulted from rape or incest; 2) where a pregnancy threatens grave damage to a mother's physical or mental health; 3) where a pregnancy is likely to result in the birth of a child with mental or physical defects.

There is a strong movement in this country to make the laws even more liberal. This movement is closely tied up with the fear of the population explosion and with the social problems which arise from unwanted children. But the movement is directed towards making abortions available legally to anyone who desires it for any reason whatsoever.

The churches are caught up in the controversy. The Roman Catholic Church has (at least officially) maintained its historic stand that any abortion is a violation of the sixth commandment: "Thou shalt not kill." But the voices within the Romish Church which disagree with this official stand are becoming louder. Protestants are divided deeply on the matter: generally the more liberal they are, the more favorable attitude they take towards legalized abortion.

But it is all part of the general movement in this and foreign countries towards moral anarchy. Those

who are pushing the hardest for legalized abortion are the same ones who have favored contraception as a method of family planning. And these same ones are not going to be content with legalized abortion. The next step is going to be some form of total family control. Already there is talk (Interior Secretary Stewart Udall speaking in Denver and Joseph Spenger from Duke University) of passing legislation on a federal level which would financially penalize those who have more than three children and giving financial rewards to married couples who have none. And the day will surely come when this becomes law.

As if all this were not enough, leaders of Christian churches have been recently promoting what they call "trial marriages". In harmony with the general acceptance of the "new morality" or "situation ethics," as it has recently been called, these men are urging that the act of marriage be divided into several stages. One stage would be a "recognized premarriage" in which a young couple would live together as man and

wife although not yet married. These could be dissolved at any time. Of course, the couple would have to promise to practice birth control. But it is hoped that this would alleviate the problem of divorce and broken homes.

And the day is coming too when this will be accepted practice in this country.

Such is the fruit of hatred of God's law. God's law, it is said, is nothing but an outdated system of laws which were of some value to nations in earlier years, but they are of no value in our enlightened times. All objective moral law is to be discarded. A new code of ethics is needed and no rules of behavior are required by our times. And this new code of ethics is based upon the passing whims of man. But the result is a growth in immorality and sexual depravity such as this world has never seen. In the midst of such a generation, the church is called to keep herself unspotted from the world.

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH—

The Doctrine of Sin

The First Period, 80-250 A.D.

Effects of the Fall

by Rev. H. Veldman

We concluded our preceding article with a quotation from Irenaeus' Writings against Heresies. Of Irenaeus, Hagenbach writes as follows, Vol. I, 167:

According to Duncker, the doctrine of original sin and hereditary evil is so fully developed in the writings of Irenaeus, *"that the characteristic features of the western type of doctrine may be distinctly recognized."* Irenaeus indeed asserts that man, freely yielding to the voice of the tempter, has become a child, disciple, and servant of the devil, etc. He also thinks that, in consequence of the sin of Adam, men are already in a state of guilt. On the question whether Irenaeus understands by that death which we have inherited, merely physical death (V. 1, 3 and other passages), see Duncker, l. c.

Origin, by insisting upon the freedom of the human will, forms a strong contrast with Augustine. He also maintains that concupiscence is not reckoned as sin, so long as it has not ripened into purpose (here we are able to recognize the Roman Catholic position on this subject; — Rome maintains that evil desires are sin only when carried out and practiced — H.V.) guilt arises only when we yield to it. In his *De Principiis*, III, II, 2, he writes:

I am of opinion, indeed, that the same course of reasoning must be understood to apply to other natural movements, as those of covetousness, or of anger, or of sorrow, or of all those generally which through the vice of intemperance exceed the natural bounds of moderation. There are therefore manifest reasons for hold the opinion, that as in good things the human will is of itself too weak to accomplish any good (for it is by divine help that it is brought to perfection in everything); so also, in things of an opposite nature we receive certain initial elements, and, as it were, seeds of sins, from those things which we use agreeably to nature; but when we have indulged them beyond what is proper, and have not resisted the first movements to intemperance, then the hostile power, seizing the occasion of this first transgression, incites and presses us hard in every way, and furnishing us human beings with occasions and beginnings of sins, which these hostile powers spread far and wide, and, if possible, beyond all limits.

Origin, however, also seems to teach that sin is not merely reckoned to be sin when ripened into purpose, as when he writes in the following paragraph:

That there are certain sins, however, which do not proceed from the opposing powers, but take their

beginnings from the natural movements of the body, is manifestly declared by the Apostle Paul in the passage: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." If, then, the flesh lust against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, we have occasionally to wrestle against flesh and blood, i.e., as being men, and walking according to the flesh, and not capable of being tempted by greater than human temptations.

In the above passage Origin writes that there are certain sins which do not proceed from the opposing powers, hence outside of us, but take their beginnings from the natural movements of the body, therefore within us.

On the other hand, Origin also formally adopts the idea of original sin, by asserting that the human soul does not come into the world in a state of innocence, because it has already sinned in a former state. Nevertheless, subsequent times, especially after Jerome have seen in Origin the precursor of Pelagius.

According to Tertullian, the soul itself is propagated with all its defects, as matter is propagated. Tertullian speaks of this in his Treatise on the Soul. He writes in chapter 40:

Every soul, then, by reason of its birth, has its nature in Adam until it is born again in Christ; moreover, it is unclean all the while that it remains without this regeneration; and because unclean, it is actively sinful, and suffuses even the flesh (by reason of their conjunction) with its own shame.

And in chapter 39 of this same treatise Tertullian speaks of the corruption of the human soul:

All these endowments of the soul which are bestowed on it at birth are still obscured and depraved by the malignant being who, in the beginning, regarded them with envious eye, so that they are never seen in their spontaneous action; nor are they administered as they ought to be. For to what individual of the human race will not the evil spirit cleave, ready to entrap their souls from the very portal of their birth, at which he is invited to be present in all those superstitious processes which accompany childbearing? Thus it comes to pass that all men are brought to the birth with idolatry for the midwife, whilst the very wombs that bear them, still bound with the fillets that have been wreathed before the idols, declare their offspring to be consecrated to demons.

For the rest, as far as Tertullian is concerned, Hagenbach writes as follows:

That, e.g., Tertullian was far from imputing original sin to children as real sin, may be seen from his remarkable expression concerning the baptism of infants;His disciple Cyprian also acknowledges inherent depravity, and defends infant baptism on *this ground*, but yet only to purify infants from a *foreign* guilt which is imputed to them, but not from any guilt which is properly their own.

We conclude our discussion of the doctrine of sin during the early period, 80-250 A.D. with a quotation from the History of the Christian Church by Philip Schaff, pages 541-543:

It was the universal faith of the church that man was

made in the image of God, pure and holy, and fell by his own guilt and the temptation of Satan who himself fell from his original state. But the extent of sin and the consequences of the fall were not fully discussed before the Pelagian controversy in the fifth century. The same is true of the metaphysical problem concerning the origin of the human soul. Yet three theories appear already in germ.

Tertullian is the author of *traducianism*, which derives soul and body from the parents through the process of generation. It assumes that God's creation *de nihilo* (from nothing — H.V.) was finished on the sixth day, and that Adam's soul was endowed with the power of reproducing itself in individual souls, just as the first created seed in the vegetable world has the power of reproduction in its own kind. Most Western divines followed Tertullian in this theory because it most easily explains the propagation of original sin by generation, but it materializes sin which originates in the mind. Adam had fallen inwardly by doubt and disobedience before he ate of the forbidden fruit.

The Aristotelian theory of *creationism* traces the origin of each individual soul to a direct agency of God and assumes a subsequent corruption of the soul by its contact with the body, but destroys the organic unity of soul and body, and derives sin from the material part. It was advocated by Eastern divines, and by Jerome in the West. Augustine wavered between the two theories, and the church has never decided the question.

The third theory, that of *pre-existence*, was taught by Origin, as before by Plato and Philo. It assumes the pre-historic existence and fall of every human being, and thus accounts for original sin and individual guilt; but as it has no support in Scripture or human consciousness — except in an ideal sense — it was condemned under Justinian as one of the Origenistic heresies. Nevertheless it has been revived from time to time as an isolated speculative opinion.

The cause of the Christian faith demanded the assertion both of man's need of redemption, against Epicurean levity and Stoical self-sufficiency, and man's capacity for redemption, against the Gnostic and Manichaean idea of the intrinsic evil of nature, and against every form of fatalism.

The Greek fathers, especially the Alexandrian, are very strenuous for the freedom of the will, as the ground of the accountability and the whole moral nature of man, and as indispensable to the distinction of virtue and vice. It was impaired and weakened by the fall, but not destroyed. In the case of Origin freedom of choice is the main pillar of his theological system. Irenaeus and Hippolytus cannot conceive of man without the two inseparable predicates of intelligence and freedom. And Tertullian asserts expressly, against Marcion and Hermogenes, free will as one of the innate properties of the soul, like its derivation from God, immortality, instinct of dominion, and power of divination. On the other side, however, Irenaeus, by his Pauline doctrine of the casual connection of the original sin of Adam with the sinfulness of the whole race, and especially Tertullian, by his view of hereditary sin and its propagation by generation, looked towards the Augustinian system which the greatest of the Latin fathers developed in his controversy with the Pelagian heresy, and which exerted such a powerful influence upon the Reformers, but had no effect whatever on the Oriental church and was practically disowned in part by the church of Rome.

So we can see that the groundwork is laid for the struggle that would unfold in the early church of the New Dispensation between the forces that would defend the goodness of the natural man and those who would adhere to the Scriptural doctrine that man is conceived and born dead in sins and intrespases. The opponents in this struggle would be Pelagius and Augustine. But the seeds for the pelagian heresy were already laid in the ages prior to the historical appearance of these two men. Although the church of God did recognize the sin of Adam and the fall of the human race because of Adam's sin, it did not express clearly on the doctrine of sin. They were inclined to emphasize the freedom

of the human will. Sentiments were expressed to the effect that man was either good or evil as he was taught and received instruction. Men, therefore, became corrupt because of the influence of outward circumstances upon them. And this, we know, is nothing less than the heresy of Pelagianism. Of course, the heresy of Pelagianism is inherent in man's human nature. It is a doctrine that appeals to the natural man. But, to this struggle between pelagianism and the Scriptural doctrine of the absolute bondage of the human heart and mind and will we will call attention, the Lord willing, in subsequent articles.

THE CHURCH AT WORSHIP—

The Office of the Deacon

by Rev. G. Vanden Berg

The second part of the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons deals with the office of the deacon. This Form is rather brief, dealing with just two matters. First of all the origin and institution of the office is recorded, and this is followed by a brief description of the office itself. To these matters we will return presently, but let us first make some general observations.

The term *diakonos* (deacon) denotes "a servant, an attendant, a minister." In its generic sense it is used in Scripture of all ministers of the gospel. We may, for example, confer such passages as I Thess. 3:2, I Cor. 3:5, II Cor. 6:4, 11:23, Col. 1:7, 4:7, I Tim. 4:6. In Romans 13:4 it is also used of civil magistrates. Only in Acts 6, Phil. 1:1 and I Tim. 3:2, 8, 12 is the term used in the direct or technical sense to denote a particular class of congregational officers who are distinct from the presbyter-bishops (elders). There is then nothing in the term that lends support to the view that this office in the church is to be regarded as inferior or subordinate to that of the elders and ministers. There was a time in the history of the church in which this view was rather commonly held, and even in our day there are often indications in the church that we have not yet been completely weaned of this notion. By some the office of deacon is looked upon as a sort of stepping stone to that of elder. By others it is regarded as no more than a position or office in which one is entrusted with the care and man-

agement of the earthly possessions of the church. Needless to say, both of these views are in error, and we must emphasize and maintain, in practice as well as in theory, that the office of the deacon is a ministry in which is reflected the priestly functions of Christ Himself. It is a service of mercy, a spiritual dispensing of the riches of grace, and only when the diaconate so functions does it fulfill its instituted purpose.

T. Schafer, in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, writes:

"After the departure of the apostles, during the mysterious period between 70 and 150 A.D., where information is so scant, that change in the ecclesiastical organization must have taken place which is found pretty generally established toward the close of the second century. The Didache knows only two classes of officers for the local churches, bishops and deacons; they were to be elected by the congregations, and are to receive honor 'together with the prophets and teacher.' Ignatius mentions deacons as a necessary part of the governing body of the local church. With him the bishops are raised above their fellow presbyters, and later they were regarded as successors of the apostles; the presbyters, at first simply pastors and teachers, were clothed with sacerdotal dignity, which in the New Testament appears as the common property of all Christians; and the deacons became Levites, subject to the priests. They are often compared to the Levites of the Old Testament. These three

officers constituted the three clerical orders in distinction from the laity. An act of ordination marked the entrance. No one could become a bishop without passing first through the two lower orders; but in some cases a distinguished layman, as Cyprian or Ambrose, was elected bishop by the voice of the people, and hurried through the three ordinations. The subdeacon was later associated with the deacon and was declared a member of the 'major orders' by Innocent III. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church and the canon law have never formally decided whether the episcopate is a distinct order or not. The Council of Trent did not decide the question, although it speaks of the hierarchy of bishops, priests, and deacons. The schoolmen, including Peter Lombard, Hugo of St. Victor, Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura say again and again that the episcopate is not a distinct order, but an office or function. They regarded the presbyters, deacons, and subdeacons as constituting the three major orders. The prevailing view today in the Roman Catholic Church, if not the universal one, is that the episcopate is a distinct order and that the subdeaconate is not." (Pages 370, 371, Vol. III)

The same author also writes: "In the Reformed churches the apostolic diaconate was revived, as far as circumstances would permit, with different degrees of success. In the Reformation of the Church of Hesse (1526) it was prescribed that each pastor should have at least three deacons as assistants in the care of the poor. The Church of Basel in 1529 made a similar provision. Calvin regards the diaconate as one of the indispensable offices of the Church, and the care of the poor as their proper duty (Institutes, Bk. IV., Chaps. 3, 9). The Reformed confessions acknowledge this office (Conf. Gallicana, Art. XXIX; Conf. Belgica, Art. XXX and XXXI). In the Dutch and German Reformed churches the deacons are 'to collect and to distribute the alms and other contributions for the relief of the poor, or the necessities of the congregation, and to provide for the support of the ministry of the Gospel.' The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America teaches, in its form of government (Chapt. VI): 'The Scriptures clearly point out deacons as distinct officers in the church, whose business it is to take care of the poor, and to distribute among them the collections which may be raised for their use. To them, also, may be properly committed the management of the temporal affairs of the church.' (In accordance with this principle, deacons are a normal part of the machinery of the local churches and receive ordination, though they are not members of the church session.)" (Ibid, Pgs. 371, 372)

It may then safely be affirmed that in the church there is a place for the office of deacon. That office answers to a very real need as much as does the office of the elder. That need is not the same and neither are the offices the same. They are distinct but also equal ministrations to the spiritual as well as to the temporal needs of the church. The office of the deacon certainly implies instruction as well as bodily relief.

The Origin of the Office

The view of the origin of the office of the deacon as expressed in our Ordination Form is a common one. In this Form we read:

"Of the origin and institution of their office we may read, Acts 6, where we find that the apostles themselves did in the beginning serve the poor, 'At whose feet was brought the price of the things that were sold: and distribution was made unto every man, according as he had need. But afterwards, when a murmuring arose, because the widows of the Grecians were neglected in the daily ministrations,' men were chosen (by the advice of the apostles) who should make the service of the poor their peculiar business, to the end that the apostles might continually give themselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word."

The Ordination Form then draws this conclusion: "And this has been continued from that time forward in the Church, as appears from Rom. 12, where the apostle, speaking of this office, saith, 'he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity.' And I Cor. 12:28 speaking of helps, he means those, who are appointed in the Church to help and assist the poor and indigent in time of need."

With this view Lightfoot also agrees in his commentary on Acts 6, and in his interpretation of Philipians he makes the observation that "the office (of deacons) grew out of a special emergency in the congregation at Jerusalem."

In the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia this view of the origin of the office is also held. We quote: "As related in Acts 6:1-6, the office grew out of a special emergency in the congregation of Jerusalem in consequence of the complaint of the Hellenists, or Greek Jews, against the Hebrews, or Palestinian Jews, that their widows were neglected in the daily ministration at the common love-feasts. Hence the apostles, who had hitherto themselves attended to this duty, instructed the congregation to elect from their midst seven brethren, and ordained them by prayer and the laying on of hands. The diaconate, therefore, like the presbytero-episcopate, grew out of the apostolic office, which at first embraced all the functions and duties of the ministry—the ministry of tables and of the word. Christ chose apostles only, and left them to divide their labor under the guidance of His Spirit, with proper regard to times and circumstances, and to found such additional offices in the Church as were useful and necessary." (Pg. 370)

Not all, however, are agreed with this view. For example, W. Heidel, in the International Bible Encyclopedia, has this to say:

"Many have sought the origin of the diaconate in the institution of the Seven at Jerusalem (Acts 6), and this view was countenanced by many of the church Fathers. The Seven were appointed to 'serve tables,' in order to permit the Twelve to 'continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word.' They are not called deacons (*diakonoi*), and the qualifications required are not the same as those prescribed by Paul in I Timothy 3:8-12; furthermore, Stephen appears

in Acts preeminently as a preacher, and Philip as an evangelist. Paul clearly recognizes women as deaconesses, but will not permit a woman to teach (I Tim. 2:12). The obvious conclusion is that the Seven may be called the first deacons only in the sense that they were the earliest recorded helpers of the Twelve as directors of the church, and that they served in the capacity, among others, of specially appointed ministrants to the poor." (Vol. II, pg. 800)

The same author, commenting on Philippians 1:1, writes: "Here then we find mention of 'deacons' in a way to suggest a formal diaconate; but the want of definition as to their qualifications and duties renders it impossible to affirm with certainty the existence of the office."

It would be unfair to leave the impression, in light of the above, that this author then denies the existence of the diaconate in the church. That this is not so is evident from his concluding statement which reads: "We conclude, therefore, that the Seven and Phoebe did not exercise the diaconate in a technical sense, which appears first certainly in I Timothy 3, although it is not improbably recognized in Philippians 1:1, and was

foreshadowed in the various agencies for the dispensing of alms and the care of the poor of the church instituted in various churches at an earlier date."

Whether then the diaconate was instituted in Acts 6 or not, in our judgment, must remain an open question. There is not sufficient evidence in Scripture to substantiate either position. Even the statement in our Ordination Form that "this has been continued from that time forward in the Church, as appears from Romans 12...and I Cor. 12:28," lacks proof. There is nothing here that rules out the possibility that the office mentioned in these two texts is of a later origin. Neither is the determination of the exact historical origin of this office a crucial matter. The important thing is that according to the Scriptures there is sufficient evidence to sanction the existence of the diaconate as a particular office in the church. The office has an important and necessary place in the church. This is true in spite of the fact that in Ephesians 4:11 deacons are not mentioned. *When* the office originated then is not important but the *fact* that it has been instituted and is sanctioned by the Word of God itself is significant.

EXAMINING ECUMENICALISM—

"Fiddling While Rome Burns"

by Rev. G. Van Baren

If the world's problems are to be faced responsibly, there must be cooperation economically, politically, educationally, and scientifically. This few will deny. But also ecclesiastically! Christians from everywhere need to meet and talk and learn from one another. To do anything less is to exceed the sin of Nero. He only fiddled while a city burned. Today the world's on fire! Because it is, churches need to seek one another in a *significant* worldwide ecclesiastical community. For these are not ordinary days. There is more to do than we have ever done before.

So wrote the Rev. Jacob Eppinga in the *Banner* of April 28, 1967 in an article entitled: "WCC? Yes." Eppinga attempts to show why the Christian Reformed Churches must join the W.C.C. One receives the impression that Eppinga regards failure to join this "worthwhile" organization to be worse than the sin of that godless Nero who supposedly cared not at all that Rome was being destroyed by fire—on the contrary, he enjoyed it. Is he accusing the Christian Reformed Churches of committing such terrible sin at this time? Is the C.R.C. (and our own churches too) committing the terrible sin of watching the world being destroyed

by all manner of evil and corruption—while refusing to join that one organization through which there would seem to be the only hope of "putting out the fire?" That is a terrible charge, if true.

THE W.C.C. DISCUSSION

Why does there arise within the Christian Reformed Church now a debate about the W.C.C.? The present discussion begins because of a decision of the Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands. Those churches adopted a position that there are no principle objections that a church of reformed persuasion should join the World Council of Churches. At the same time, that denomination requested answers from member denominations of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod concerning this stand. In response to this, the Synod of 1966 of the C.R.C. appointed a committee to formulate an answer for Synod's adoption in 1967. From the 1966 Acts of Synod I quote the following (pp. 59-60):

B. Historical Synopsis (Acts of Synod, 1962, pp. 392-393). From 1914 to 1924 the Christian Reformed Church was affiliated with the Federal Council of Churches. In 1924 Synod voted to withdraw on the fol-

lowing grounds: 1) Ecclesiastical alliances between orthodox and liberals are contrary to God's Word. 2) Liberalism is strongly in evidence in the Federal Council. 3) The Federal Council has broad programs in industrial, national and international affairs which do not belong to the proper work of the Church as an organization.

In more recent years the official attention of Synod has been drawn to the World Council of Churches largely through the actions taken by the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, which made pronouncements in 1949, 1953, and 1959, and again in 1963. Presently one member of the R.E.S. is affiliated with the W.C.C. (Indonesia) and the Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands have announced that they have no principal objection to membership in the W.C.C. In a number of instances the Synod of our Churches has shown to be in substantial agreement with the R.E.S.'s position regarding the World Council of Churches.

C. Recommendations:

1. Synod appoint a special committee including members of the standing Committee on Inter-Church Relations to

a) define our position with respect to the World Council of Churches

b) prepare a statement which could serve as our reply to the resolution of the Gereformeerde Kerken

c) report to the Synod of 1967, if at all possible.

Grounds:

a. Synod has never explicitly defined its position.

b. The Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands are awaiting our reaction to their decisions, before they take any further action.

c. In order to promote a helpful confrontation at the meeting of the R.E.S. in 1968, our position should be articulated and published in 1967.

- Adopted.

The above decision is, evidently, the occasion for considerable discussion in the Christian Reformed Church whether or not *it* should join the W.C.C. Of course, that was not the question at all. Certain "liberals" (if I may term them such) in the C.R.C. have made this the subject of discussion in their churches and the "moderates" have taken it upon themselves to enter into this debate.

First, it must be born in mind that the C.R.C. has a very definite stand against membership in the W.C.C. At the last Synod a committee was appointed to "define our position," but it is very evident that the C.R.C. had a *position* long before 1966 over against the W.C.C. In 1924 the C.R.C. withdrew as member of the Federal Council of Churches (a forerunner of the National Council of Churches) on some very cogent grounds (see quotation above). These same grounds apply with even more force today with respect to membership in the W.C.C. But in addition to this, the C.R.C. Synods have adopted decisions of the Reformed Ecumenical Synods which opposed (on good grounds) membership in the W.C.C. At various other times the Synod of the C.R.C. has made decisions against membership in such church councils which include liberal churches. So the question is not: what position must the C.R.C. take toward the W.C.C.? They *have* a very clear-cut position.

Secondly, it is evident then that the duty of the

committee appointed at the last Synod was to *define* that position. That is, this committee was not to debate or question the *position* taken by the C.R.C., they were not called to re-consider the position, but simply to *define* it. That must mean that the committee was called to review all pertinent former decisions, to formulate these in a single statement for the approval of the Synod of 1967, and present this as answer to the stand of the Gereformeerde Kerken.

Nevertheless, there have been many attempts in the past year not to present a possible answer to the Gereformeerde Kerken, but to show why the C.R.C. should join the W.C.C. This is very disturbing.

To join....

Several arguments (old ones, repeatedly offered) are given in favor of union with the W.C.C. Below I will summarize these as presented in the *Banner* of April 28, 1967 by Rev. J. Eppinga and in the *Federation Messenger* of March 1967 by Dr. J. Kromminga and Dr. D. Holwerda.

First, the nature of the Church (it must be *one*) "is the first consideration for the establishment of, or if established, affiliation with, a *significant* worldwide ecclesiastical community." (Eppinga). Or again: "The unity of the church is, of course, spiritual in essence; but this spiritual unity must express itself in visible forms (as Jesus' unity with the Father was visible in his person and work). Otherwise the life of the church cannot function as a sign to the world. This unity is not primarily, or even necessarily, organizational; yet it does not preclude a manifestation also on the level of organization." (Holwerda). These are old arguments which, incidentally, could be used to support involvement with something like COCU too.

Secondly, "the unity of the Church is intended to be a source of mutual blessing for the various members of the Church." (Holwerda). One must be willing and able to make use of the many Spirit-given gifts found in other denominations—and therefore must seek some organization where this can be done. The W.C.C. "fills the bill."

Thirdly, because of the present unrest, poverty, race problems, population explosion, etc., there must be some sort of co-operation between churches in order that through united action these problems may be dealt with. This too points the church to the one large protestant organization where this is possible: the W.C.C.

...or not to join.

But arguments, often repeated before, have been offered against joining the W.C.C. The Rev. E. Bradford presents some of these in the *Banner* of April 28, 1967. Others are given in various other articles and letters written in the *Banner* and other magazines.

First reason for continuing opposition to this organization is the question whether the W.C.C. is a church or super-church. At present it is not. Nevertheless, Bradford points out, the W.C.C. is headed in that direction. He rightly insists that the W.C.C. is not the organization in which the unity of the church can find expression.

Secondly, Bradford points to the "neoorthodoxy" of the W.C.C. and emphasizes that the faithful church can not participate in that. He says, "The Council statements represent typical neoorthodox or Barthian theology. Accepting the method and conclusions of higher criticism, neoorthodoxy (and the W.C.C.) does not regard the Bible as objective, infallible word-revelation, but rather as a human record of search for and encounter with God. The Bible is said to *become* the Word of God as one experiences encounter with God. How can revelation be a private, subjective matter and at the same time provide a solid basis for resolving differences?"

He is right. And many, many other arguments have been, and can be, given to show that it is wrong to belong to the W.C.C.

But will the C.R.C. decide to join the W.C.C.? I doubt it—at least for the present. But the winds of

change are strongly blowing regarding this matter too. The same Dr. John Kromminga who wrote some twelve years ago, "...the confessional churches certainly ought to seek unity; but the question is very much in point whether the World Council of Churches is the organization through which that unity ought to be sought;" now writes, "The Bible, the creeds, the position of the Christian Reformed Church (as seen in a report adopted by Synod in 1944), and the world situation all commit us to concern for the other Christians and the other Churches of the world. The question must then be asked, 'If not the World Council, then what?' How is our concern to be manifested and expressed? How are we to show that we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church? Are we our brother's keeper?" (The first quotation is from the *Banner*, April 28, 1967; the second from the *Federation Messenger*, March, 1967.)

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Society of the Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church extends its heartfelt sympathy to Rev. and Mrs. G. Lanting and family in the recent passing of their Mother and Grandmother,

MRS. JENNIE RUTGERS

May the bereaved be comforted in the word of God found in Psalm 116:15 "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints".

Mrs. G. Broekhouse, Vice Pres.

Mrs. A. Ver Hey, Sec'y.

inform the clerk of the Loveland consistory of their need.

Rev. David Engelsma, Stated Clerk

ANNIVERSARY

On July 28, 1967, our beloved parents,

MR. AND MRS. DICK KOOIENGA

commemorated their 40th wedding anniversary. We give thanks to our covenant God for sparing them for each other and us these many years. Our earnest prayer is that they may continue to experience God's loving kindness in their remaining years.

Their children:

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Miedema

Mr. and Mrs. Earl Dykstra

Mr. and Mrs. Roger Kooienga

Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Dykstra

Mr. and Mrs. Donald Sall

Mr. and Mrs. Donald Kooienga

Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Dykstra

and 31 grand children

CLASSIS WEST

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Loveland, Colorado on September 20, 1967 at 9:00 A.M.

All material for the Agenda must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk thirty days before Classis convenes, that is, August 21. Delegates in need of lodging should

Now, Christ is no more personally in this world. He was crucified and was raised from the dead, and is exalted to the highest glory at the right hand of God. However, He is very really in His Church, in His saints, in whom He dwells by His Spirit, and whom He calls and instructs through His Word. Through them He still represents and contends for the cause of God in the world. He becomes manifest in and through them. And so, by His grace, believers represent the cause of Christ. And if you suffer in the behalf of Christ and for His sake, it is this fact, that Christ becomes revealed in you, your walk and confession, in this world, that is the occasion of your suffering. You suffer literally because of the person of Christ. It is Christ that is hated by the world. It is Christ they want to fill with their reproach. They really want to kill Christ and empty the vials of their hatred over His head. And since they cannot reach Him personally any more, seeing He is in glory, they hate and persecute those that represent Him, in whom He becomes manifest in the world.

-H. Hoeksema, "The Wonder of Grace," pp. 101, 102

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES—

July 15, 1967

Rev. C. Hanko, of Redlands, has received the call from our church in South Holland; Hull's congregation has called Rev. G. Vanden Berg, of Oak Lawn; Randolph has called Candidate D. Kuiper from a trio which included Revs. C. Hanko and G. Vanden Berg; and, Forbes had named the following trio: Revs. R. C. Harbach and G. Vanden Berg and Candidate D. Kuiper, with the Candidate receiving the call.

* * *

The Outing of the Protestant Reformed Young People's Convention will be held in Hull Park and Newton Hills. Candidate D. Kuiper will be the speaker.

* * *

Rev. Woudenberg's "Studies in Biblical Doctrine" project is going apace. Volunteers who help in the preparation and mailing of these sheets worked at an accelerated pace during the month prior to the pastor's vacation. Recently a reader from Grand Rapids wrote: "I am very appreciative of the Doctrine Series. I do some teaching in the adult Bible Class in my church and find the questions thought provoking. I also find the doctrine to be sound and Biblical to my liking. Thank you and bless you in your ministry."

* * *

Rev. and Mrs. C. Hanko have returned to Redlands and the pastor has plunged into his work trying to catch up and get back into routine. His summer "vacation" will include Church Visitation and preaching in Lynden in August. He, like all the ministers in the outlying churches, mix work with pleasure: church work and vacation.

* * *

This notice appeared in the June 25 bulletin of Redlands' church: "The Young People's Society will have their annual outing this Saturday, July 1, and go skiing to Lake Elsinor." You may be sure that the "Redlanders" know if that sport is to be enjoyed on water or on the snow-covered mountain slopes.

* * *

Rev. Heys and Elder Zwak have arrived in Jamaica and are making good use of their two month stay. They have over 300 Bibles and about 100 Psalters to distribute besides the distribution of the beneficence of the people of our churches whose combined offering will alleviate the needs of food, clothing, medical supplies, and repairs to the churches of the Island. Rev.

Heys is active in conducting a course in sermonizing to a class of some twenty Ministers and Elders. Rev. Heys' correspondence course has been taken up by Rev. C. Hanko, to which Rev. Elliott referred in a recent letter as follows: "We are surely satisfied with the doctrine and teaching of Rev. C. Hanko on the same basic teachings of Rev. Heys. We of the Protestant Reformed Churches of Jamaica are growing daily in the faith, for God has promised to add to His Church, and new converts are coming day by day." May the blessing of our God rest upon the labors of our "Missionaries" in their short stay there.

* * *

One of Synod's decisions was to instruct the Mission Board to conduct another Lecture Series this winter in the Grand Rapids area. This will be accomplished through a committee drawn from the various churches in the area.

* * *

Rev. Kortering began the annual Family Visitation in his new charge during the month of June, before vacation time prevents a day-to-day scheduling.

* * *

Bulletin Quote (Oak Lawn): "Even though the tongue weighs practically nothing, it is surprising how few persons are able to hold it."

* * *

The 1967-1968 drive for our High School netted \$26,000.00 in cash and pledges. The Board's "thank you" said, "The Board thanks all those who took part in this drive, especially the collectors and captains and all who contributed their time and money, and also their prayers without which our high school could never hope to be realized."

* * *

To the sick and sorrowing and the shut-ins who find it difficult to read Psalm 23 with pleasure we give this little gem found in First Church's bulletin:

In pastures green? Not always; sometimes He
Who knows best, in kindness leadeth me
In weary ways, where heavy shadows be.
So, whether on the hill-tops high and fair
I dwell, or in the sunless valleys, where
The shadows lie, what matter? He is there.

—Barry

. . . see you in church

J.M.F.