

The Standard Bearer

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

IN THIS ISSUE:

Meditation: The Birthright Despiser

Editorial: Dr. Daane On "Limited Atonement"

R.C.A. — P.C.U.S.: Proposed Merger

The Beginning of Wisdom

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THE STANDARD BEARER

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NOTICE

Never let it be said that the men of our churches do not have a good evening the night of the Men's League Meeting.

When	October 18	8:00 P.M.
Where	Hope Prot. Ref. Church	
Who Speaks	Prof. H.C. Hoeksema	
What Topic	Our Mission Activity	
Why Not?		

Hollis Heemstra, Sec'y.

MEDITATION—

The Birthright Despiser

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

And Jacob sod pottage; and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.
Genesis 25:29-34

Tragic picture!

He ate, and he drank, and he rose up, and he went his way, and Esau despised his birthright. In other words, he despised his birthright as easily as he wiped his mouth and rose up and walked away. How sad!

Pointed lesson!

For we must remember that the sad picture of Esau's fornication is drawn for us in Scripture with a purpose. That purpose concerns the people of God.

There is here a word of God, of the God of our salvation. The question is: what is the nature of that lesson?

Indeed, Esau is the typical reprobate in Scripture. For it had been sovereignly determined by the Lord that not Esau should have the blessing, but Jacob. Thus it is written: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

But the reprobate appear on the scene of history for a *purpose*. That is especially the case with Esau.

For the striking thing about Esau was that he was the *firstborn*, and as the firstborn he *had* the birthright. He had it so very really that he was able to sell it and exchange it for Jacob's bean-soup. Jacob knew that he had it, and Esau himself was well aware of the fact. The question is: why? Why did Esau have the birthright if it was determined from before the foundation of the world that he should after all not have it? God gave Esau a chance, say some; and thus Esau serves as a warning example to the reprobate, or, perhaps, to men in general not to become reprobate. But seeing that according to Scripture the matter was determined from before the foundation of the world, and therefore was not at all a matter of free will, this is impossible. Esau serves not as a warning example to the reprobate, but to God's people. The pointed lesson of Esau's conduct, viewed from the practical point of view, is that it teaches the people of God how not to act and how not to live.

. . . .Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright! (Hebrews 12:16).

. . . .And he ate, and he drank, and he rose up, and he went his way: and Esau despised his birthright! Tragic picture! Pointed lesson!

These things are written for our ensample!

Not merely the double portion, but the title to all the blessings of God's covenant was implied in the birthright.

In later days, as the seed of the covenant developed and embraced a multitude, the blessing of the birthright was naturally limited. That one had the birthright in those later days did not mean that all the other children were excluded from salvation and from the blessings of the covenant. Rather did the birthright in later times imply the right to the double portion for the eldest son. Yet in the case of Esau and Jacob there was far more at stake. God's counsel had been once more that but one of the children should inherit the promise. Even as to Abraham the Word of God had been, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," so to Rebekah (and Isaac) His Word was: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

Thus, as we know, while Esau was from a natural point of view the firstborn, nevertheless Jacob was the heir of the promise and of the blessings of God's everlasting covenant of grace. The birthright was for the one, to the exclusion of the other.

Very much was involved in that birthright. It included rule over the brethren: a symbol and type of Christ's royal dominion as the first-born of every creature and the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, it included all the blessings of the promise. To these belonged the possession of the land of Canaan, the type of heaven, and therefore the promise of the eternal inheritance. To these blessings belonged the promised Great Seed, Christ, in Whom all the promises of God converged and upon Whom, centrally, all the blessings of the covenant were bestowed. To these belonged also the assurance of Jehovah's covenant fellowship: the promise, "I will be thy God and the

God of thy seed."

Pointed lesson!

For our place in the church in the midst of the world is like unto the position of him who had the birthright. The church has the title to all the blessings of the covenant, all the blessings of salvation, all the spiritual blessings that are in Christ Jesus. Such is the birthright of the church and her children!

Esau's was the birthright: for he was firstborn.

Whether any special reason may be assigned for this right of the firstborn, and whether, in view of the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ as the firstborn from the dead leads His brethren into life eternal, we may find a symbolical-typical significance in this peculiar position of the firstborn and his birthright—this we may pass over at this time. The fact is that the birthright belonged to the firstborn. And in the family of Isaac and Rebekah Esau was that firstborn. Before his twin brother Jacob he had been born although Jacob already at birth had struggled for the position of firstborn and had his brother by the heel.

Hence, as far as his natural birth was concerned, as far as his outward position was concerned, as far as his position according to the flesh was concerned, Esau, being the firstborn, was born with the title to the inheritance of all the blessings of God's covenant!

Moreover, in that respect we all are like Esau. Outwardly, we are born in the church, born of believing parents. We are of the generations of God's covenant. In infancy we are baptized in the name of the covenant God. We are from earliest childhood in contact with that birthright. We are under the preaching of the Word. We are catechized. We are under the training and discipline of covenant parents. As far as our natural, outward position is concerned, our title and place is that of the firstborn. The title and place of the firstborn, who has the birthright, is certainly ours!

Responsible position!

Pointed lesson!

For of Esau it may be said in a sense that he was "so near, and yet so far." For when Esau despised his birthright and chose rather Jacob's bean-soup, that meant essentially that he despised God and His covenant, that he despised Christ and His salvation, that he despised all the unseen things of the heavenly inheritance and eternal life. For all these he cared not. All these he contemned. So near was he, -- near to the kingdom and covenant of God, -- that *from a natural point of view*, as far as his birth was concerned, as far as his outward position was concerned, he had the birthright, the title, to the blessings of God's covenant. All the more serious was his calling, therefore, with respect to that covenant of God.

But he despised that covenant! A fornicator was he! So very far from the kingdom of God!

Tragic?

Yes; but how earnest a warning! Take heed!

A fine man was Esau, -- that is, from a natural point of view.

For twenty years the faith of Isaac and Rebekah was tried. The Lord taught them to expect the heir of the promise from Him! It had to be evident that the promised seed was a gift of grace. When Rebekah was barren, Isaac intreated the Lord: by faith he had done this, with a view to the continuation of God's covenant, of course. For if Isaac had no heir, what could it ever mean that Abraham's seed was to be called in Isaac? At last, when that prayer was heard, and when Rebekah expected to become mother in the covenant, she could not understand her own condition and she inquired of the Lord. The Lord's answer had been, in effect, that she was the mother of election and reprobation, even as the church would be ever after. The elder of the twins in her womb, though he were the stronger, would serve the younger. Thus, in process of time she had become the mother of twins: Esau, the hairy one, and Jacob, the heel-holder. And struggling for the birthright they had come into the world.

Physically strong and robust was Esau: tall, muscular, a man of the woods, a hunter, brave, accustomed to face dangers. And as far as his character was concerned, he must have been an open-hearted man: probably a man of whom you would say, "You can read him like a book." He was not a mean and sneaky kind, not the kind who would bear a grudge. According to the standards of this world, Esau was the sort whom you would like. He was the type who would make a fine hero for a novel; and, in fact, it just exactly Esau's kind who is the hero in many a modern novel.

And Jacob?

He was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. Evidently he was a stay-at-home. Still more, he would be classified, I suppose, as a sissy: for not only did he stay at home, but he stayed close to his mother, and he seems to have busied himself with the culinary arts. Plainly he was the weaker physically. But also as far as his character was concerned, he was in the natural sense the weaker. True, he was not lacking in mental ability: on the contrary, he was shrewd and intelligent. But even from a mere natural point of view, he was morally unattractive. Whether it was incidental or intentional that he was cooking this red beansoup at this propitious moment, his action is certainly to be condemned: for he tempted Esau when he was ravenously hungry. And the same kind of deceit Jacob practiced later, as we know, when he wanted the blessing from father Isaac.

But now look at these sons from the spiritual point of view.

While we would certainly have chosen Esau, God had chosen Jacob. For does He not choose that which is nought in order that He may put to shame that which is ought? (I Cor. 1:26-31)

And thus grace made distinction between these sons. Esau was wicked!

If he had lived in our day, he would be the man who is always ready for a fishing trip, for a hunting party, for an outing, for the enjoyments of this present time. But for church, for catechism, for Sunday school, for all spiritual things, for anything connected with the service of God, -- for such things Esau could spare no

time or effort. Nor was this incident of the birthright the only occasion when he had revealed this attitude.

And Jacob?

Say what you will about Jacob and about his dishonest dealing, -- and there is an altogether unattractive element in Jacob, -- but the fundamental thing is that Jacob had an eye for God's covenant and for the things above. That was the main passion of his life! As much as Esau held the birthright in contempt so much did Jacob earnestly desire it. We should beware lest we lose this from view when considering Jacob. After all, God's Word *had* assigned the birthright to Jacob; and it *was* a shame that such a man as Esau should have the birthright!

But Esau, however attractive naturally, would not make a fit life's travelling companion! He was an example not to be imitated!

"Feed me some of that red!"

"Sell me this day thy birthright!"

It makes little difference whether Jacob's cooking of that pottage was incidental or intentional. Nor is the point of the text to emphasize the method whereby Jacob obtained the birthright and made Esau swear to "a deal."

The point is that Jacob was cooking pottage of lentiles, a brownish red in color. And when Esau came home faint from hunger and was confronted by the choice of birthright or beansoup, he chose the latter.

Consider it!

Birthright for beansoup! For the flesh over against the spirit, for the moment over against eternity, for the world and its lusts over against the covenant of God, -- such was Esau's choice!

And such is the choice of any Esau today! For what, after all, is the very best of the world in comparison with the riches of Christ but a mess of pottage? And every time we choose the former we conduct ourselves as Esau did!

Warning example!

For Esau had no eye for unseen things, only for the things seen. He lived for this present world. His attitude was: "What is my birthright to me? The heavenly inheritance? Nonsense! I am going to die after a while, and that will end it all."

He knew better, and he had been taught differently.

But he was a fornicator, -- careless and profane!

And thus you have the end: he ate, and he drank, he arose and went his way.

His birthright he despised; and he kept on despising it and never came to repentance.

And he perished!

Pointed lesson!

My brethren, be not fornicators like Esau!

"At this present it seems to us that our adversaries have been far more acute in assailing the Gospel than the Church in defending it. Still on God's side it is true that though his ministers may not be as faithful as they should be, yet He raises up one and another to stand as bulwarks for the truth, and so, after all, the grand old cause is not quite overborne." -- Spurgeon

EDITORIALS—

Dr. Daane On "Limited Atonement"

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

In his series of articles concerning the Dekker Case, Dr. James Daane turns his attention to the subject of limited atonement in an article in the December, 1964 issue of the *Reformed Journal*. The main thrust of the article seems to be that there is not and never has been a Reformed doctrine of limited atonement. This is also indicated in the title of the article, "What Doctrine of Limited Atonement?" To this bit of confused, unscriptural, and un-Reformed argumentation we now give our attention.

PROFESSOR DEKKER ON THE ATONEMENT

For a proper understanding of Dr. Daane's "theologizings" on this matter, we should remind ourselves, first of all, of Prof. Dekker's position.

The reader will recall that Prof. Dekker maintains, in the first place, that God loves all men *redemptively*. A distinction has been attempted between a *redemptive* love of God and a *redeeming* love of God in this connection. But no one has been able to prove that this distinction is legitimate on the basis of Scripture and the confessions, nor has anyone shown that with respect to God this distinction has any significance.

Secondly, when Prof. Dekker began to speak of a redemptive love of God for all men, he was naturally confronted with problems concerning the *revelation* of that so-called redemptive love of God. This landed him squarely in the domain of the doctrine of the atoning death of Christ. In this connection, Dekker taught that it is proper to say to every man, "Christ died for you."

In the third place, however, the latter teaching of Dekker immediately raised problems concerning the nature of Christ's atoning death, in connection with the question of the extent of the death of Christ. Dekker was accused of denying what is commonly known as the doctrine of limited atonement and of teaching general, or universal, atonement. And in an attempt to divorce himself from the out-and-out Arminian heresy that Christ died for all men and every man, Prof. Dekker attempted to distinguish four factors in speaking of the *design* of Christ's atoning death. These four factors are: *sufficiency*, *availability*, *desire*, and *efficacy*. Concerning these four factors Prof. Dekker wrote:

"There are, therefore, three senses in which we may legitimately speak of the atonement as being universal in design, i.e., the *sufficiency* and *availability* of salvation for all men and the divine *desire* that all will receive it. The only point at which Scripture and

the Reformed confessions point to a limited design in the atonement is at the point of *efficacy*. Only there can a doctrine of limited atonement be formulated which does not do clear violence to Biblical teaching concerning the universal love of God."

I do not intend at this point in the discussion to repeat all that has been written by way of criticism of the above view in these columns. Certainly, neither the terminology nor the distinctions expressed by it can stand the test of Scripture and the confessions. From a dogmatical point of view, however, I deem it important to note at this point:

1) That Prof. Dekker speaks here of *design*. This surely places the whole matter in the realm of God's eternal counsel, according to which the *design* of the atonement was established. This is true of all four distinctions which Dekker makes here, and more particularly of the third one, i.e., the divine *desire*.

2) That when Prof. Dekker maintains that in the first three senses the atonement is universal and only in the last sense limited, the criticism is certainly justified that he has a doctrine of universal atonement which is *non-efficacious* and a doctrine of limited atonement which is *efficacious*. But then the question presses to the fore: what is a non-*efficacious* atonement? And the answer is ready at hand: a non-*efficacious* atonement is no atonement whatsoever, for it does not *atone*. And if we press this a bit farther and turn it on Dekker's factors of *sufficiency* and *availability* and *desire*, it becomes evident that they are all three vanity. They are air. They are nothing! And I want to emphasize that this is not just a bit of adroit but specious reasoning. This is precisely what becomes of any idea of the atonement as soon as you make it universal: you have no real atonement left.

3) That on Christian Reformed grounds (of the First Point of 1924 and its well-meant offer of salvation) Prof. Dekker nevertheless stands on solid ground. Dekker's point is, from a Christian Reformed point of view, well-taken when he writes in connection with his element of *availability*: "Otherwise the well-meant offer of the gospel is a farce, for it then offers sincerely to all men what cannot be sincerely said to be available to all." We, on the basis of Scripture and the confessions, deny both the *availability* and the well-meant offer of salvation to all. Prof. Dekker tries to maintain both. The defenders of the First Point wanted to avoid the former and to maintain the latter. Consistency demands that one either maintain both or deny both. And Scripture and the confessions

demand the latter.

4) That the writings of both Dekker and Daane on this subject of Christ's atonement are sorely lacking in definition and preciseness. There are several important instances of this. Here are just a few: a) What is the meaning of the *atonement*? I have yet to see from either one an adequate definition. b) Dekker fails often to distinguish between the concepts *atonement*, *redemption*, and *salvation*. It would seem to be evident that when you discuss the death of Christ and the atonement, you are operating in the field of *Christology* and of the objective work of Christ for His people. Frequently, however, both Dekker and Daane seem to be operating in the field of *Soteriology*, i.e., the doctrine of the application of the blessings of Christ to His people. While the two are related, they must be carefully distinguished; if they are not, the result will be confusion. c) In close connection with "b", neither Dekker nor Daane has furnished an adequate definition of the *efficacy* of the atonement. Certainly, this is not the same as the doctrine of efficacious, or irresistible grace. The latter has to do with the *application* of the blessings of salvation to the elect sinner. The former has to do with the question what was *objectively accomplished and realized* in behalf of the elect through the substitutionary death of Christ. Yet, again, when speaking supposedly of the atonement and its efficacy and its extent, both Daane and Dekker fail to distinguish and seem to be operating in the field of the *application* of salvation to man. d) What is the main subject of Canons II, 8, which has so often entered this discussion? Is it speaking of the efficacy of the atonement as such, or is it speaking of the efficacy of the grace whereby the benefits of the atonement are actually applied to the beneficiaries?

The above are all fundamental questions to which there ought to be clear and well-defined answers. I invite Prof. Dekker and Dr. Daane to speak out on these matters and furnish some definitions. I am fairly certain that my definitions cannot agree with theirs. But then at least we can clearly discern one another's positions.

DR. DAANE ON "LIMITED ATONEMENT"

As I already indicated above, Dr. Daane, in taking up the theological cudgels for Dekker, appears to go farther than the latter. The thrust of Daane's article seems to be that there is no Reformed doctrine of limited atonement.

Permit me, without quoting extensively, to attempt a summary of Dr. Daane's at-times-confusing theological meanderings.

1) Daane approaches the subject from the point of view of what he calls "the nature" of the atonement. He attributes this approach to those who oppose and those who are uncertain about Dekker's doctrine of the atonement, as well as to the mandate given the synodical study committee in the Dekker Case. The first question in said mandate speaks of "the nature of the atonement." Prof. Dekker speaks of the "design" of the atonement. Apparently, therefore, since Daane interprets Dekker as asserting "that the atoning work

of Christ on the cross is of such *nature* (italics added) that it expresses a redemptive love of God for all men," Daane here equates *nature* and *design*.

2) Daane asserts that both groups in the Chr. Ref. Church who are troubled about Dekker's doctrine (those who are opposed and those who are merely uncertain) "are rather less than wholly satisfied (i.e., with Dekker's simple assertion that nevertheless Christ's atonement saves the elect only) because they feel that the *nature* of the atonement determines the end-results." According to this reasoning, "if the nature of the atonement is a redemptive love for all men, then all men must finally be saved. . . . (but) if only the elect are saved, then the atonement as a universal redemptive love for all men loses its sovereign character."

3) Daane asserts that both groups "make the mistake of thinking that the limited end-result of the atonement (the salvation of the elect only) means that the atonement is limited in its *nature*." According to this method of reasoning, the results are read back into the nature of the atonement: if the results are limited, the atonement itself must be limited. Moreover, Daane ascribes this same kind of reasoning to the mandate of the synodical committee because this mandate calls for a "study in the light of Scripture and the Creeds of the doctrine of limited atonement. . . ." and because the first question asks, "Whether the nature of the atonement and the decree of election allow for. . . ."

4) Daane confidently asserts that this approach (of studying Dekker's position from the nature of the atonement is limited) will lead nowhere. And apparently he thinks to "pull the rug from under" both Dekker's opponents and the synodical committee by asserting that the study is unnecessary and the conclusions foregone. The ground of this assertion is that Prof. Dekker "bases his whole case upon, and argues from, the *unlimited* character of the atonement. Dekker, according to Daane, appeals "to the accepted Reformed view that the atonement is unlimited in its sufficiency, in its availability, and in its expression of God's unwillingness that any should perish, and that therefore there is a redemptive love for all men, and that therefore it is permissible in preaching the gospel to say to every creature: God loves you, and Christ died for you."

5) On the contrary, Daane asserts that what is popularly meant by the doctrine of limited atonement is not a doctrine at all, but a mere slogan. He maintains this again and again throughout his article. He asserts emphatically that neither the creeds of the Christian Reformed Church, nor for that matter any other Reformed creed, teach the doctrine of limited atonement. He maintains that the Canons teach the very opposite in Articles 3 and 4 of the Second Head, and that the Heidelberg Catechism teaches the same. Finally, he asserts in italics: "The atonement in its nature is not in any sense limited; if it were, we would yet be in our sins." Further Daane appeals to both Articles 6 and 8 of Canons II in order to show that "limited atonement" is not a proper term even to designate the truth that the atonement does not save all men. And he concludes that no objections can be

raised against Prof. Dekker's doctrinal assertions on the basis of the nature of the atonement, and that, on the contrary, if anyone is skirting the heretical on the matter of the nature of the atonement, it is not Prof. Dekker, but his critics.

The remainder of Daane's article is devoted to an attempted explanation of the reasoning of Dekker's opponents, a relating of this entire subject to the matter of gospel preaching, and to an amazing assertion that Christ died at least for the original sin of every man. To this part of Daane's article we shall give our attention later.

For the present, we must discuss the major thrust of his article. In it he makes some amazing and un-

tenable assertions. To these we will give our attention next time, D.V., and show that Daane's reasoning is altogether wrong, that it is not Reformed, and that it is thoroughly confused and confusing.

Meanwhile, let us remember again that while Daane is dead wrong, his position, according to his own admission, is in essential harmony with the general, well-meant offer of the gospel which was established as Christian Reformed dogma in the First Point of 1924. As long as the First Point is maintained, no one can effectively destroy (nor even do they have the moral right to oppose) the doctrinal position of that Arminianizing quartet of Dekker, Daane, Boer, and H. Stob.

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH—

THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION

Rev. H. Veldman

Before calling attention to the writings of Hodge and Calvin on the Scriptural doctrine of creation, we wish to quote briefly from two or three others.

First, we would quote from St. Hilary of Poitiers. He is declared to have been of the greatest, yet least studied, of the Fathers of the Western Church. This disciple of Origin was born about the year 300 A. D., and he died in the year 367. He became bishop of Poitiers about the year 350, but later went into exile and was replaced by an Arian, one who denied the eternal Godhead of the Son.

Of the doctrine of creation, Hilary writes, "Since, therefore, the words of the Apostle, *One God the Father, from Whom are all things, and one Jesus Christ, our Lord through Whom are all things*, form an accurate and complete confession concerning God, let us see what Moses has to say of the beginning of the world. His words are, *And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the water, and let it divide the water from the water. And it was so, and God made the firmament, and God divided the water through the midst*. Here, then, you have the God from Whom, and the God through Whom. If you deny it, you must tell us through whom it was that God's work in creation was done, or else point for your explanation to an obedience in things yet uncreated, which, when God said *Let there be a firmament*, impelled the firmament to establish itself. Such suggestions are inconsistent with the clear sense of Scripture. For all things, as the Prophet says, were made out of nothing; it was no transformation of existing things, but the creation into a perfect form of non-existent. Through Whom? Hear the Evangelist: *All things were made through Him*. If you

ask: Who this is, the same Evangelist will tell you: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him.*" In this quotation Hilary clearly states that creation is a work of God and that all things were made out of nothing.

Emphasizing that the Wisdom, whereof we read in the Book of Proverbs, is none other than the Christ, the Son of God, Hilary writes as follows: "And furthermore, to make all self-deception unlawful, that Wisdom, which you have yourself confessed to be Christ, shall confront you with the words, *When He was establishing the fountains under the heaven, when He was making strong the foundations of the earth, I was with Him, setting them in order. It was I, over Whom He rejoiced. Moreover, I was daily rejoicing in His sight, all the while that He was rejoicing in the world that He had made, and in the sons of men*. Every difficulty is removed; error itself must recognize the truth. There is with God Wisdom, begotten before the worlds, and not only present with Him, but setting in order, for She was *with Him, setting them in order*. Mark this work of setting in order, or arranging. The Father, by His commands, is the Cause; the Son, by His execution of the things commanded, sets in order. The distinction between the Persons is marked by the work assigned to Each. When it says *Let us make*, creation is identified with the word of command; but when it is written, *I was with Him, setting them in order*, God reveals that He did not do the work in isolation. For He was rejoicing before Him, Who, He tells us, rejoiced in return; *Moreover, I was daily rejoicing in His sight, all the while that He was rejoicing in the world that He had*

made, and in the sons of men. Wisdom has taught us the reason of Her joy. She rejoiced because of *the joy* of the Father, Who rejoices over the completion of the world and over the sons of men. For it is written, *And God saw that they were good.* She rejoices that God is well pleased with His work, which has been made through Her, at His command. She avows that Her joy results from the Father's gladness over the finished world and over the sons of men; over the sons of men, because in the one man Adam the whole human race had begun its course. Thus in the creation of the world there is no mere soliloquy of an isolated Father; His Wisdom is His partner in the work, and rejoices with Him when their conjoint labour ends." Here St. Hilary sets forth the truth that the work of creation is the work of the living God and that God did not work in isolation, but that the Divine Persons were active in the creation of the heavens and the earth.

And speaking of Christ, in refutation of the Arian heresy which makes of the Son of God a creature, Hilary writes: "For we recognize the Lord Christ as no creature, for indeed He is none such; nor as something that has been made, since He is Himself the Lord of all things that are made; but we know Him to be God, God the true veneration of God the Father. All we indeed, as His goodness has thought fit, have been named and adopted as sons of God: but He is to God the Father the one, true Son, and the true and perfect birth, which abides only in the knowledge of the Father and the Son." And, then, continuing to speak of this Christ in his treatise on the Trinity, the author writes: "Does Christ, Who is God, speaking in Paul, fail to refute this impiety of falsehood? Does He fail to condemn this lying perversion of truth? For through the Lord Christ all things were created; and therefore it is His proper name that He should be the Creator. Does not both the reality and the title of His creative power belong to Him? Melchisedec is our witness, thus declaring God to be Creator of heaven and earth: *Blessed by Abraham of God most high, Who created heaven and earth.* The prophet Hosea also is witness, saying, *I am the Lord thy God, that establish the heavens and create the earth, Whose hands have created all the hosts of heaven.*"

We also wish to call attention to John of Damascus. He was called Chrysorrhoas, "streaming with gold," i.e., the golden speaker). He was the last of the Greek Fathers and the most authoritative theologian for the whole Eastern Church. He was born presumably in Damascus and before 700, and he died in all probability shortly before 754. Our quotations from his writings, as they appear in Vol. IX of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, will be brief. Writing on "Concerning the creation," he writes: "Since, then, God, Who is good and more than good, did not find satisfaction in self-contemplation, but in His exceeding goodness wished certain things to come into existence which would enjoy His benefits and share in His goodness, He brought all things out of nothing into being and created them, both what is invisible and what is visible. Yea, even man, who is a compound of the visible and the invisible. And it is by thought that He creates, and thought is the basis of the work, the Word filling it and the Spirit

perfecting it." Also John of Damascus writes, therefore, that the Lord created all things out of nothing, the things that are visible and the things that are invisible. And then he proceeds to write on the Divine creation of the world of angels. Later, in a brief paragraph, entitled, "Concerning the visible creation," he writes in the same vein, and we again quote: "Our God Himself, Whom we glorify as Three in One, *created the heaven and the earth and all that they contain,* and brought all things out of nothing into being: some He made out of no pre-existing basis of matter, such as heaven, earth, air, fire, water: and the rest out of these elements that He had created, such as living creatures, plants, seeds. For these are made up of earth, and water, and air, and fire, at the bidding of the Creator."

We also wish to present some excerpts from the writings of Augustine. We do not have access to the works of Augustine. We quote from the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. IV. Distinguishing between creating and forming, Augustine writes: "To create is to form and arrange. So in some copies it is written, 'I make good things and form evil things.' To make is used of things previously not in existence; but to form is to arrange what had some kind of existence, so as to improve and enlarge it." Also Augustine speaks of creation as a making of things not previously in existence, and therefore of a making out of nothing. And in Chapter 26, "That Creatures are made of nothing," he writes: "Because therefore God made all things which He did not beget of Himself, not of those things that already existed, but of those things that did not exist at all, that is, of nothing," the Apostle Paul says: "Who calls the things that are not as if they are." But still more plainly it is written in the book of Macca-bees: "I pray thee, son, look at the heaven and the earth and all the things that are in them; see and know that it was not these of which the Lord God made us." And from this that is written in the Psalm: "He spake, and they were made." It is manifest, that not of Himself He begat these things, but that He made them by word and command. But what is not of Himself is assuredly of nothing. For there was not anything of which he should make them, concerning which the apostle says most openly: "For from Him, and through Him, and in Him are all things."

CALVIN

Calvin, as we may surely expect, writes extensively on the subject of creation in his Institutes of the Christian Religion. Chapter XIV of Book I is entitled: "The true God distinguished in the Scripture from all fictitious ones, by the creation of the world." In the rest of this article we would quote the following from Calvin, Book I, Chapter XIV, II: "To the same purpose is the narration of Moses, that the work of God was completed, not in one moment, but in six days. For by this circumstance also we are called away from all false deities to the only true God, who distributed his work into six days, that it might not be tedious to us to occupy the whole of life in the consideration of it. For though, whithersoever we turn our eyes, they are constrained to behold the works of God, yet we see how transient our attention is, and, if we are touched with

any pious reflections, how soon they leave us again. Here, also, human reason murmurs, as though such progressive works were inconsistent with the power of Deity; till, subdued to the obedience of faith, it learns to observe that rest, to which the sanctification of the seventh day invites us. Now, in the order of those things, we must diligently consider the paternal love of God towards the human race, in not creating Adam before he had enriched the earth with an abundant supply of every thing conducive to his happiness. For had he placed him in the earth while it remained barren and vacant, had he given him life before there was any light, he would have appeared not very attentive to his benefit. Now, when he has regulated the motions of the sun and the stars for the service of man, replenished the earth, the air, and the waters, with living creatures,

and caused the earth to produce an abundance of all kinds of fruits sufficient for sustenance, he acts the part of a provident and sedulous father of a family, and displays his wonderful goodness towards us. If the reader will more attentively consider with himself these things, which I only hint at as I proceed, he will be convinced that Moses was an authentic witness and herald of the one God, the Creator of the world." The Lord willing, we will continue with the writings of Calvin in our following article. Following upon this quotation, Calvin devotes several paragraphs to the creation of the world of angels, and then returns to Scripture's account of the creation of the world. But it is already obvious from the above quotation that Calvin certainly maintains the Scriptural truth that the Divine Creator made the heavens and the earth in six days.

FROM HOLY WRIT—

Stephen's Apology Before The Sanhedrin

Acts 6:7 — 7:60

Rev. G. Lubbers

THE GENERAL SITUATION

Great things were happening in Jerusalem in these days of which Luke writes in the "Acts Of The Apostles". Christ was continuing from out of heaven what he had begun in the days of his flesh upon earth! Strictly speaking, these are not the *acts* of the Apostles, but the work of Christ through them by his power and Spirit. It was, indeed, becoming more and more evident that this was "of God", and that there was no power of man, no opposition of unbelief, no decree of despots and no anathema of the Sanhedrin which could or did alter the course of the Gospel, or frustrate its purpose. The gates of hell could not prevail against it.

Up to this time the church was being mightily and irresistibly gathered by the Son of God in the ancient city of David, Jerusalem. However, she would be gathered in an ever greater radius, in ever widening circle, beginning at Jerusalem, then to Judea, Samaria and even to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8) Luke relates of a twofold futile attempt on the part of the ruling caste in Jerusalem to stop the Gospel-course by casting the preachers into prison, only to find that the Lord was with these unlearned fisher-men. He sent His angel to miraculously deliver them from prison and its closed doors. (Acts 4:1-22; 5:11-44). The outcome was that a Gamaliel gives the rather prudent counsel that it is better to leave well enough

alone; that if it is from God they can do nothing, and if it is from man it will come to nought, as all false-messianic attempts at liberation had in the past!

These were the days of the great Reformation in Israel from the shackles of the law. Christ had gone to heaven, and the heavens did receive him until the times of the restitution of all things. (Hebrews 9:10; Acts 3:21) All things will be set in proper order according to the image of the heavenly as shown to Moses by the Lord Himself on the mount. (Exodus 25:40; Acts 7:44, Hebrews 8:5) The Lord had suddenly come to His temple and the old shadows had been fulfilled: the temple had been broken down by men and Christ had rebuilt it in three days. It was the day of the salvation of God when Japheth would dwell in the tents of Shem, and all nations be blessed in Abraham. (Genesis 9:27; 12:3) These were days when the old paths would be sought once more and the violent would take the Kingdom by force. Truly the poor had the Gospel preached to them! Meanwhile the corrupt Israel would have their house desolate to them. (Matthew 23:38) Unbelievers would live in utter desolation, while the Lord from heaven would grant the times of refreshment to bedew His true Israel, granting them faith and conversion from heaven.

Truly this is a Reformation which eclipses that of Hezekiah, for now Jerusalem shall be on the top of the mountains, and the true worshippers shall worship the

Lord in Spirit and in truth, and the church out of all nations shall come to Zion!

The kingdom of God had come upon Israel!

Great is the glory of the Lord in the land of Emanuel!

THE SITUATION AT THE TIME OF STEPHEN

Yes, there was no slackening in the gathering of the church. In fact, it was rather a matter which went from strength to strength. We read the notice in Acts 6:7 that "the Word of God was growing". It was growing in its efficacious power in the hearts of the elect. Men and women and children were being called out of darkness into God's marvelous light and were being made a chosen generation, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar treasure to the Lord. God's covenant was being realized in the hearts of men, so that they believed with the heart and confessed with their mouth. They were being saved, as many as were ordained to eternal life.

Hand in hand with this internal and efficacious growth was also an increase in the number of those who were saved. Jerusalem was seeing something which many prophets had foretold and desired to see. Says Luke "the number in Jerusalem increased greatly". It was an exceedingly great growth. There was holy violence of heaven being manifested. How else could it be explained that many of the priests, of those who were of the regular order of the temple service were "obedient to the faith"? It was too undeniably true and gave cause for the enemy of the Church, those who despised the Cross, to reflect. It was all due to preaching Jesus and the resurrection, by which he was powerfully revealed and set forth as the Son of God. (Romans 1:4) From the humble amongst Israel through the hierarchy of the priesthood at the altar, the Lord was gathering his saints from the Old Testament church and giving them a place in the fulfilment. For that is the meaning of "faith". It refers not to subjective faith but to the objective faith of what is believed. This clearly also in such passages as Galatians 1:23; Romans 1:5 and Jude 3.

Not only were the Hebrew Jews gathered but also the Grecian Jews were gathered. These were the Hellenists. They were Jews of the western dispersion, who were carried away under Pompey to the several cities of Asia Minor and Europe, and who learned the common Greek language, known as the *Koine*! Amongst these Grecians there were also widows in the church at Jerusalem, and it seems that these widows were not being cared for as they should at the tables. There arose a murmuring amongst the congregation because of these widows. Measures were taken to correct this. Deacons were appointed, seven in number, who were all evidently Hellenistic Jews, as appears from their names: Stephen, Phillip, Prochorus, Nikanorus, Timon, Parmenos and Nicalaus. They were men of good report and full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom.

We know from our Chapter that there were synagogues too of these Hellenists, Grecian Jews. These were from Cyrene in Africa, from whence can the well-known Simon of Cyrene; they were from Alexan-

dria in Egypt where the Septuagint Bible was translated (The Hebrew into the Greek); they were from Cilicia and Asia both in Asia Minor.

Such was the situation in the church at Jerusalem, the mother-church, so to speak. And it is against this background that we must understand the place of Stephen in God's church, and the transition, which Stephen's preaching, trial and death form, in the history of the church at this point. For the Gospel course from here on will be to Judea, Samaria and even to the ends of the earth. Here we see that the Greeks, who would see Jesus, will have the Gospel proclaimed in their home-land. And in a course which is at once natural, and still most supernatural, will the great preacher of the gospel to the Gentiles come to be called in the church. Saul of Tarsus will be led by the Lord through this history to the apostleship; him who was a persecutor and injurious we will see, in this trial of Stephen in which the latter makes his great apology! And they "cast their clothing at the feet of a young man named Saul" Acts 7:58

STEPHEN BROUGHT TO TRIAL

Stephen had been brought by the Lord into the front ranks of the preachers. He had been chosen a deacon being accounted "full of wisdom and of the Spirit". But the Lord made something more of Stephen. He gave him "grace and power". This evidently refers to special gifts of grace which are sometimes called *charismatic gifts*! These were not simply the grace of the forgiveness of sins and joy in the Lord, but the ability to perform signs and wonders, such as opening the eyes of the blind, healing the sick, raising the dead to life in the power of Christ as did Peter and John. These works were "wonders" causing amazement and awe and they were positive "signs" which spoke of the great grace of salvation, that the day of salvation had come from the Day-spring from on High.

Gauging Stephen's preaching by his interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures in his "apology" before the Sanhedrin, there can be no doubt but what Stephen must have preached already which Paul later writes and develops in such epistles as Romans and Galatians and in other of his letters.

It has been suggested by some, and perhaps not amiss, that Saul was in the audience of Stephen, a Hellenist, when the latter preached in Jerusalem the resurrection of Christ, touching upon the broader implications of the meaning of Israel's history in the light of the death and resurrection of Christ, namely, that God had fulfilled the promise made to the fathers unto us the children, through the resurrection of Christ from the dead. If so, then Paul must have been violently confronted with the "faith", in opposition to the works of law as a Pharisee, which works he later will account to be so much loss and dung for the sake of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, our Lord. (Phil. 3:8)

Such a Stephen must be stopped in his tracks!

He is attacked by certain men from the resident Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem. The Greek text shows that there are two groups here referred to, The one

group is from the synagogue of the Libertines and Cyrenians and Alexandrians; the other group are from Cilicia and Asia. The Libertines were "freedmen and their descendants, the Latin *libertini*. The term is geographical like the rest, for to hear it mentioned was to think of Rome, whither two generations before, in 61 B.C., Pompey had taken many hundreds of captive Jews who were sold as slaves. Numbers of them and their descendants gained their liberty and were considered Romans. They were rapidly Hellenized." (Lenski). These together with the Cilicians, Alexandrians and those of Asia Minor, were residents now at Jerusalem, and accost Stephen. Perhaps it was on the street that they meet him, or went to look for him. And they come to debate on the meaning of Israel's existence, the intent of the temple and of the ceremonial laws given by Moses. They were many. They outnumber Stephen. Perhaps Saul of Tarsus was also in the fray and tried his learning, which he acquired

at the feet of Gamaliel, against Stephen. If so, he had reasons to look back upon it as so much worthlessness which he had sought to defend so futilely and fruitlessly!

What was the secret of the power and insight of this Stephen?

Stephen was speaking, both in his preaching and in his debate, by a wisdom which is from above. It was the wisdom of God in the spiritual man who has the mind of Christ. It was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit who gave him to see all things in the light of Christ. He takes it out of Christ and gives it to Stephen. Christ had opened the Scriptures unerringly and that, too, because he had received the Spirit without measure. This same Spirit is in Stephen. For this Spirit these Hellenists, even though they had all the learning of Jewry, were no match. The debate was too unequal. These antagonists were overcome!

In their futility they will bring Stephen before the Sanhedrin.

IN HIS FEAR—

The Beginning of Wisdom (2)

Rev. J. A. Heys

There is fear in faith.

As we pointed out last time, the fear of the Lord is the Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament concept of faith. And fear is reverence, awe, a profound respect; but fear as the fear of the Lord also contains the element of being afraid. The believer is afraid of displeasing God. There is a fear that faith produces and which is lacking in the unbeliever. Do we not even read in Philippians 2:12,13? "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." The believer is afraid to sin against God.

Adam was deceived into becoming bold enough to dare to eat of the forbidden fruit and defy God. He lost his fear of the Lord wherewith he had been created. He no longer believed God to be the God that He is, and believing himself to be that which he is not, he sought his own glory in the conviction that, rather than punishment for his disobedience, he was going to be like this God whom he learned to envy and hate. When he no longer believed in God according to the truth wherewith he was created, Adam was no longer afraid of sinning against Him. He had no faith in God, and he had no fear of the Lord.

The beginning of wisdom is faith in God as the God

that He is. The believer knows Him as a sovereign, almighty, unchangeable, holy, righteous and just God. He knows and believes that God is exact and demands nothing less than perfection. He knows and believes that God is everywhere present and all-knowing. He believes with the psalmist that he cannot hide from God's presence, that every thought and secret of his heart and mind are open and known by God. He knows and believes that God hates all sin and is a consuming fire against all iniquity. He knows and believes that God is light and that there is no darkness in Him at all, so that He can have before His face none of the workers of darkness. He knows and believes that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!

The unbeliever does not fear God because he does not believe the above truth concerning God. O, indeed, unbelievers have fear. They fear men. They fear storms and pestilence. They wash their hands, fumigate their buildings, use their antiseptics, boil their water and rush for their "shots" to make them immune from this disease and from that. They build air raid shelters and fear the rain of death from the skies. They affix their lightning rods and take out insurance. Indeed, they have fear upon fear, and terror grips their hearts. The atheists in the fox holes (There surely were such in the last world war and there are such today.) may make their prayer to the heavens, when the bombs and shells begin to fall round about

them. In their fear of death they may become suddenly very "religious". But they fear death and not the Lord. They fear injury and trouble. At the very best, let us credit them with as much as we can, they live in fear of their gods; but the fear of God is not in them. In that light it can be said that they are afraid of a god, will seek to please that god, will strive to appease its wrath, will cry unto it for rain and safety, for food and health, but they are not afraid of Him Who ALONE IS God. Each sin which they commit, as an outgrowth and fruit of Adam's original sin, is simply a declaration that they are not afraid of Jehovah the one and only true God!

When presently they shall know Him, when all the mists are rolled away and He appears in the glory and day of Christ, so that they cannot deny Him any more, they shall be gripped with awful terror! They shall call for the hills to fall on them and for the mountains to cover them. As Adam so foolishly did, so will they do. They will try to hide away from this God in Whom they would not and could not put their trust, Whom they continually denied and defied. But fig leaf aprons will not help. The trees of the garden will not prove to be a fire-proof wall between them and this Consuming Fire! The mountains and hills will not remove the terror in their souls nor insulate them from the fierce wrath of the Holy One of Israel! Faith in Him they did not have in this life, and in that day they will have no faith nor hope of safety from this terrible punishment which is upon them.

Before sin entered the world, God wrought His fear in Adam with the command, "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." God wrought the fear of the Lord in Adam. God held before his eyes the terrible punishment of disobedience. And Adam, as a believer, was afraid of that God and afraid to disobey Him! Indeed, added to this is also his love to God, whereby he did not want to disobey him. But that fear cannot and may not be denied. And we do not understand the lie, nor the boldness and purpose of Satan in the temptation unless we see that his whole purpose was to take away that fear and to work within man the courage to come up against so great and glorious a God! Man must first be made to believe that God is not what He truly is. Man must be deceived into believing that his fears are unfounded and that to disobey will bring blessed dividends and rewards to man. And to combat that lie today, to make man walk the way of faith, we admonish, that is, *we warn them* of the dire consequences of their evil walk. The Scripture is full of such warnings. The law hurls at us the THOU SHALT NOTS from the mount with fire, smoke, a powerful trumpet blast, lightning and an earthquake! And if we believe in God, we will tremble at the thought of what becomes of us, if we run up against such an holy God. Faith never denies any of the truths of Scripture. But faith believes that God is a consuming fire and that everlasting terror awaits the ungodly.

What is more, faith expects that punishment to come from Jehovah the one and only true God. Faith does not simply believe in punishment. Faith does not try even to reason away the curse that is upon

this earth. It does not try, as unbelief does, to find a reason for earthquakes and storms *apart from* this holy God. It does not expect salvation from death and curse in spite of and divorced from this God. All this is utter folly and evidence that such do not fear Him. They fear the curse, punishment, the storm, men and death. But they do not see all this, and they do not believe all this as the punishment of the one and only true God upon their sins. They wonder why calamities strike. They are puzzled that such a "good man" suffers so much affliction. They concede that all men must and will die, although they live in hope of extending his life a little longer than the modern average. Why man dies, they cannot say. Well, yes, they will say that his body wears out. They will find a natural reason for all that which occurs. But they do not believe and do not know all history in all its detail as the work of a sovereign and holy and righteous God. They simply do not believe in this God, and therefore they are bold and dare to rebel against His holy will. At one moment, when it is convenient they may speak of a kind Providence. And then before the words have made their sound, they are ready to ridicule the idea of a Supreme Being. And they want nothing of a sovereign God Who must be served always with all the creatures and talents and life that a man may have.

We said last time that it would seem as though Satan has more wisdom than those whom he has deceived. It only seems that way. He *knows* that there is one God, and he knows Who that God is. He *knows* that all the curse is in the world by the power and wrath of that God. But knowledge is not wisdom; and neither Satan nor his fallen angels have wisdom, nor even its beginning, for they do not have the fear of the Lord. In spite of all their correct and detailed knowledge of God, they still dare to go ahead and oppose Him. They still go their devilish way of rebellion. They tremble as they work spiritual wickedness. But they go ahead and perpetrate their evil nevertheless. They know that there is one God, and they believe, in fact, that He is God. But they do not believe *in Him*.

The fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom is faith in Him. It knows God and believes in God as He has manifested Himself in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son and our Lord and Redeemer. It knows and believes His holy wrath against sin, but it also knows and believes in a full redemption through the blood of the cross. He fears the punishment of sin and fears the God Who punishes sin. He is terrified to think of sin apart from and in denial of Christ. Although there is fear in faith, it is a fear that is conquered by the conviction of God's love in Christ. John declares that perfect love casteth out fear, for in fear there is torment. Believing in God as He has manifested Himself in Christ the man regenerated by God's Spirit is confident of God's love to him. And knowing and believing that love he can have no fear of the punishment which he knows and believes that he deserves. He still fears to sin against God. You can still warn him of dire consequences, if he continues in sin, because he has assurance of belonging to Christ only by doing the works of Christ. If he did not

fear and tremble when his sins rise up against him, he would not run to the cross with these sins. As the Heidelberg Catechism points out, in the measure that we know our misery, in the measure that we are aware of the spiritual disease that grips us, will we seek the Great Physician. Knowledge of the fact and belief that our God is a consuming fire is necessary for belief in Him as the God of our salvation. There is a gospel, a good news exactly because of these terrible realities of everlasting punishment and woe in hell for the sinner. And there is this good news only for those who, by the power of regeneration, fear this God and in love to Him desire to have His friendship and fellowship.

There is fear in faith, but there is also confidence in faith. And there is love in faith. Without it our faith is as a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. It is worthless! It is nothing better than the reprobate shall have in hell when he can no longer deny that it is this one true God Who punishes and Who brought all that curse upon the world in His righteous wrath and hatred of sin and the sinner. In hell they shall know and believe that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:10,11. No longer will they be able to rebel against this God. No longer shall they believe that it pays to disobey Him. No longer will they be bold and dare to think evil of Him. But they shall not love Him. And they shall have absolutely no hope or belief that they can ever come out of their everlasting torment.

They shall believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. They

shall know God as He has manifested Himself in His Son. But they shall not believe *in Him*. They shall not, and they shall not be able to, put their trust in Him. They shall not even be able to call upon Him for pity and compassion in their hellish woes. They will know and believe that they have no right to any good and to any relief from Him. The tables will be turned completely. For the elect in the glory of heaven shall have absolutely no fear of the punishment of sin any more. They will know themselves as everlastingly safe in the arms of Jesus. Their fear will be one of wondrous, ever-abiding awe and amazement at the great, unchangeable love and grace of God. They will in profound and sincere respect and reverence before Him humble themselves in the dust with abounding thanksgiving. The reprobate however will no longer dare to oppose Him. the agony of his suffering will take from him all desire to think an evil thought of Him Who sitteth on the throne. The believer will look forward in confidence to more and more joy. The unbeliever will cringe in the awareness of more and more terror. The believer will thank the living God for the gift of wisdom. The unbeliever will rue his folly and acknowledge it in everlasting shame. The believer who heeded the warning in the fear of the Lord will rejoice ever more. The unbeliever who laughed and ridiculed the truth of God's holy wrath and punishment will weep forever more. Wise in this life, we will be wise everlastingly. A fool in this life is a fool everlastingly.

Once again, are your children to be trained to be wise or to be fools?

TRYING THE SPIRITS—

AGNOSTICISM

Rev. R. C. Harbach

The term Agnosticism, probably invented by T. Huxley (1869), is used to express the philosophy that no knowledge of absolute reality is possible. It holds that man can not have any real, valid knowledge, but can know only phenomena (Kant), or only impressions (Hume). Certain half-agnostics, denying theoretically all objective truth did nevertheless practically speak of a rough approximation to what we might loosely and colloquially call "truth" under some such designation as "value judgments" (Ritschl). Agnosticism philosophizes that the being of God can neither be proved nor disproved, and so remains unknown or unknowable. Sir Wm. Hamilton thought that "the last and highest consecration of all true religion must be an altar Agnosto Theo, 'To the unknown and unknowable God'" (C. Hodge,

Sys. Theol., I, i, 4, p. 351). The reasoning is that the finite cannot know the infinite, which being absolute cannot come into relation to finite beings, and therefore God cannot reveal Himself to man. The implication is that knowledge, to be true and valid, must be absolute comprehension of knowledge. There is not the remotest possibility of truth in limitation. But this is, we believe, assumption without foundation or evidence. Theosophy is burdened with this form of Agnosticism. It is a denial of divine revelation and a denial that the Bible is the Word of God. The Bible teaches that God is not discovered by us, but revealed to us. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" It also teaches that we can know God truly, though not absolutely. "Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfec-

tion?" It further teaches that God is known through His own self-revelation and specifically and supremely through His Son Jesus Christ. "The only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (Jn. 1:18, Gk.). Christianity maintains that "God hath spoken unto us by His Son." If the agnostic find his doubt whether there be a God the least bit annoying, let him heed the word of Christ, "If any man will to do His will, he shall know the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself." Jesus denied the whole of Agnosticism when He said "that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." Paul possessing this knowledge said, "I know whom I have believed."

The "Absolute" and the "Infinite" said to be beyond the reach of knowledge and unknowable are but mere abstractions. They exist only in words. They are the product of thinking away all conditions and all limitations. This then makes the Absolute described to be nothing, which, by the way, is also the view of Theosophy. "God" is an infinite Zero. When we speak of the vibrations of the air, we have not the least idea what we are talking about. We do not know what either air, or what vibrations are. From this it may be seen that Agnosticism is intellectual suicide and the destruction of science. For it makes all the findings of science mere semblance. But the mind of an intelligent person cannot permanently rest in the agnostic position. The negation of God, knowledge and thought itself is not persistently possible to the human mind. Nothing that has objective existence can be inherently unknowable. Thus Agnosticism logically demands non-existence in order to arrive at reality. It is fundamentally nihilistic. To the agnostic knowledge is noxious.

Agnosticism, although it does not flatly deny the existence of God, as does Atheism, nevertheless denies the personality of God (Spencer). God is an inscrutable "energy." There is then no basis even for believing the personality of man. Man may just as well be a more complex mechanical development in the evolution of the universe. Man is but a mechanical manifestation or effect of matter, motion and force.

Why do men turn to Agnosticism? Because the mind is driven to that pessimistic position as a result of its denial of supernaturalism; of the supernatural God, the supernatural Christ and of supernatural revelation. It is one of the fatal alternatives to rejection of the Christian faith. But the theory comes in a neat little "scientific," even pious, package. All it intends to claim is that it "does not know." It does not deny that there is a God. It merely does not know that there is one. It of necessity pleads ignorance, lack of evidence, judgment therefore being held in reserve. Its philosophy does not furnish it with enough knowledge to make positive denial. It does set aside a certain category into which truth may be admitted only after the most stringent tests determine the right to be included in such a category. But Agnosticism never gets to see, much less, enjoy the truth, as this category is left in the condition of old Mother Hubbard's cupboard.

Agnosticism presupposes that God is the absolutely

unknown and unknowable. If He is unknowable, how can we know that much about Him, that He cannot be known? God is said to be energy, power, force, and that infinite, eternal and omnipresent. God is the cause of the universe. This already implies so much knowledge of the unknowable that rather than to call it Agnosticism, it would be more correct to call it a modified Gnosticism. Now, if Agnosticism in its pious ignorance and its scientific bravado, can speak of God as force, why should it hesitate in ascribing to Him personal intelligence? If it can call Him the Cause of all, why shrink from attributing personality to Him? Why presuppose that the infinite God can have no relation to finite man, yet find it impossible to grant that man was made in the image of God, after His likeness, and is still capable of bearing the divine image? Why presuppose the certain knowledge of God and of spiritual things to be unattainable, only, on that presupposition, to deem it necessary to think, feel and act as if there were no God, no spiritual life and no future existence? Agnosticism is hypocritical atheism.

The religious liberals a generation or more ago, having rejected the inspiration and authority of Scripture, accepted as sufficient ground or authority for their religion that of religious feeling or experience. Whatever lies beyond the range of experience was thought to be beyond the mind of man. McGiffert, one of the past presidents of that socialist-mill, Union Theological Seminary, said, "Agnosticism touching many matters, formerly deemed fundamental, has come to be the common attitude on the part of religious men, and even of theologians." (Mod. Relig. Liblism, J. Horsch, 1924, p.44). However, many liberal theologians came to see that experience is in itself no standard, and that the experience of one can never be the norm for anyone else. What foundation then did the liberals have, now that they had jettisoned both Scripture and experience as religious authority? They adopted no foundation. The agnostic liberals asserted that their religion needed no foundation. For, like Freemasonry, they asserted that their system is a method, rather than a doctrine, or a religion. There is no absolute truth. Nothing is true in itself, or in fact. The agnostic says he does not know anything about the truth, or whether there be any truth. But his ignorance is no excuse, for he rejects the source of all truth, God and His Word. He claims not to know whether there be a God, whether the Bible is His Word. The agnostic is not ashamed to hide behind a sissified atheism.

Dr. Augustus Hopkins Strong, the great Baptist theologian, said of the student in the Modernist seminary, "He has all his early conceptions of Scripture and of Christian doctrine weakened, has no longer any positive message to deliver, loses the ardor of his love for Christ, and at his graduation leaves the seminary, not to become pastor or preacher, as he had once hoped, but to sow his doubts broadcast, as teacher in some college, as editor of some religious journal, as secretary of some Y.M.C.A., or as agent of some mutual life insurance company." (ibid., 242). This will illustrate how religious and political liberals in-

filtrate every human institution to begin their tactic of boring from within.

One of those institutions is the public school movement which since the days of Horace Mann has become increasingly pagan. In 1885 Prof. A.A. Hodge said of the public school system of education: "The tendency is to hold that this system must be altogether secular. The atheistic doctrine is gaining currency, even among professed Christians and even among some bewildered Christian ministers, that an education provided by the common government for the children of diverse religious parties should be entirely emptied of all religious character. The Protestants object to the government schools being used for the purpose of inculcating the doctrines of the Catholic church, and Romanists object to the use of the Protestant version of the Bible and to the inculcation of the peculiar doctrines of the Protestant churches. The Jews protest against the schools being used to inculcate Christianity in any form, and the atheists and agnostics protest any teaching that implies the existence and moral government of God. . . then he that believes most must give way to him that believes least, and then he that believes least must give way to him that believes nothing, no matter in how small a minority the atheists or the agnostics may be. It is self-evident that on this

scheme, if it is consistently and persistently carried out in all parts of the country, the U. S. system of national popular education will be the most efficient and wide instrument for the propagation of atheism which the world has ever seen. . . A comprehensive and centralized system of national education, separated from religion, as is now commonly proposed, will prove the most appalling engine for the propagation of anti-Christian and atheistic unbelief, and of anti-social nihilistic ethics, individual, social and political, which this sin-rent world has even seen." (Pop. Lect. on Theol. Themes, 280-81, -83).

When brought to a cross-road, the skeptic stops to get his bearings. He does not think much of either possibility. He may rather carefully test out each way in order to prove to himself that both are equally bad, or that both equally lead nowhere, or that both are mere mental projections with no foundation in fact. But the agnostic at the sight of a cross-road gives up his journey altogether. He has no reason to take another step, for at the moment he knows only what he presently experiences and feels, and that is that he knows nothing, and so is lost. Thus the agnostic is a sort of intellectual "beatnik." He is philosophically (and may we say, epistemologically) "beat." The agnostic is a cowardly atheist.

AS TO BOOKS—

Rev. G. Lubbers

Open Letter To Evangelicals

Open Letter To Evangelicals by Dr. R.E.O. White, published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

This book is of merit for anyone interested in the deep and ultimate ground of Christian hope, joy and certainty of faith, notwithstanding its limitation that its author does not sound the depths of faith's certainty in the rock-bed of God's elective love and sovereign predestination, but is satisfied by simply showing that we need more than shallow emotionalism, that we need a faith revealing itself in fruits of faith.

Dr. White, prolific writer of six other books, has a lucid style, clear and concise diction, and proves himself, in the main, to be a sound and orthodox scholar in the field of exegesis and textual criticism, as well as having a stimulating, constructive pen.

The section of the book "Notes and Quotes" are largely from the Baptist authors of England, both contemporary and of the late nineteenth century, the exception being the extensive reference to Dr. J.E. Huther in the "Meyer's Commentary Series" on I John. We hear throughout what such scholars as Robert Law, C.H. Dodd, William Barclay, A.M. Hunter and others have said about John's epistle. These gleanings are well-chosen and shed a great deal of light on the "De-

votional Interpretations" of Dr. White.

The author holds that the key to the understanding of I John, which he calls "An Open Letter", since it is anonymous, without "address, personal greetings, and reminiscences", is to remember that John writes against the rising menace of Gnosticism. This is the ever recurring theme in each Chapter under "Devotional Interpretations". This section of the book treats the entire epistle under twenty one different headings. In many ways Dr. White opens new vistas of thought in these chapters.

The section called "Contemporary Reflections" itself reflects Dr. White's Pelagian-Arminian bias, and, at once, evidences the "Achilles' Heel" in Dr. White's Theological presuppositions. In spite of the author's highly commendable attack on Evangelicalism's tendency to subjectivism, and emotional moodiness, and the centrality of religious experience based on a shallow, inward-looking "cheap grace" preaching, he falls short of the mark of attaining to the jubilant note of faith which confesses of "observing in ourselves, with spiritual joy and holy pleasure, the infallible fruits of election pointed out in the word of God."

Keeping the latter in mind, we recommend this book to the readers of Reformed persuasion.

THE CHURCH AT WORSHIP— (“O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” Ps. 96:9a)

THE LORD’S SUPPER FORM

Preparatory Self-Examination (Continued)

Rev. G. Vanden Berg

PREPARATORY SELF-EXAMINATION (Con’t.)

“Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling.”

Such is the confession and experience of the child of God throughout his life in the midst of a sinful world where the powers of darkness not only continually assail him but where sin itself adheres to him and pollutes even the best of his works. To have the day by day assurance that God, to quote the Communion form, “forgives all our sins only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ and freely imputes to us as our own, the perfect righteousness of Christ”, is to experience the blessing of communion with God.

This possession is ours *by faith*.

To the burden of self-examination belongs the task of discovering within ourselves the real presence of that faith as well as the presence of that real faith. Faith in us must be both genuine and consciously active or it cannot be said that we are “in the faith”. (II Cor. 13:5) Without this consciousness we are unable to *participate* in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper even though, being physically present when the sacrament is administered by the church, we observe the outward form and even taste the physical elements. Doing no more than this we have not yet partaken of His communion, neither have we reaped the saving benefits of His death. The latter is ours only through faith.

The accomplishment of this self-examination necessitates that we understand and recognize unmistakably the characteristics of genuine faith in Christ. All the more important does this become when the world (church-world) is filled with pseudo-faith. Certainly all is not gold that glitters and all is not faith that is called faith. Many there have been and many there are now who say, “Lord, Lord”, but fail to enter the Kingdom of God. They are and remain outside of the communion of our Lord.

We must ask the question: What is faith?

Our purpose with this question is not that we may dogmatically explore this theological term in order to arrive at a suitable scientific definition. We do not aim to lead our readers into the catechism class to interrogate them on the seventh Lord’s Day of our Heidelberg Catechism. Rather, the scope of our exploration is limited to the matter of *self-examination* and with this in mind the question may be rephrased in the following forms: What is *my* faith? Do I really believe the promises of God? Does my faith make these promises of God actual realities for me?

Faith, we then discover, is not a mere defining of

terms. Its essence consists of more than attaining an intellectual comprehension of the doctrines of the church so that I can feel that, having reached such intellectual attainment, I am ready to “confess my faith”. However important and necessary it is that we strive to understand thoroughly the instruction of the church from the Word of God, the point we establish here is that this alone does not make us believers. It does not give us faith.

Neither does faith consist in a blind trust in the church. Not uncommon is it to encounter those who confuse a certain religious loyalty to the church with faith. These people do not know what they believe, if they really believe anything at all, but in any discussion of matters of the truth they will hasten to inform you that they believe what they do because the church says it is so. The church, they think, will give them a passport to heaven and that is all that counts. Now we may not minimize the important place that the church has as a means which it pleases God to use to gather His people but the fact nevertheless remains that the church has never saved a single soul.

In examining our heart for the evidence of faith we must be careful that we do not get off to a wrong start in thinking, as many do, that faith is some hidden faculty which is resident in all men and that can be activated simply by the exercise of the will. All men, it is claimed, have faith or at least the potential of faith. It has to be admitted that all do not use it and therefore it does not come to expression in all men, but the potential is nevertheless there. With such a notion the task of self-examination concerns itself more with the will than with the heart. The pressing question becomes: Have I *willed* to accept the promises of God? Recognizing an act or action of our own will and identifying that with faith is wrong and cannot lead us to a real assurance of salvation. Does not every child of God know from experience that of himself he cannot and will not will to believe because his will is also totally depraved?

What then is faith?

In addressing ourselves to this question we must point out also that faith is not something that is totally divorced from the intellect and will of the child of God. Neither is faith an entity that has no relation to the doctrines of Holy Writ which are taught by the church. Faith, in its conscious activity, certainly embraces the truth by means of the mind and will of the child of God but this may more properly be set forth as the effect and fruit of faith rather than its essence.

Faith, we wrote last time, is the gift of God. This must be emphasized because by means of this gift God performs His sovereign work of salvation in which He unites His people with Christ and makes them one. Throughout, therefore, faith is His sovereign gift bestowed upon His people exclusively by sovereign choice. Thus the Canons in Chapter I, Article 6: "That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree. . . . According to which decree, He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy." And that it is not something which God gives for man to use as he pleases is evident from Canons III-IV, Article 14: "Faith is therefore to be considered the gift of God. . . .because it is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him (man). . . .or nor even because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will, consent to the terms of salvation, and actually believe in Christ; but because He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe, and the act of believing also."

From the foregoing we may now point out the particular viewpoint or idea of faith which we desire to emphasize in connection with the matter of self-examination. It is that sovereign power of God's grace whereby He brings us into a real, spiritual, living communion with Christ, His Son. By it we are made new creatures in Christ, radically and completely changed so that Christ lives in us and we in Him. Faith is that power of God which "casts down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ". (II Cor. 10:5) Having faith, we do not walk after the flesh to do the works of the flesh, but we are led by the Spirit to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit in which our Heavenly Father is glorified. This radical transformation is so pronounced that it becomes evident to all the world that although we are still in the world, we are not of it. We become identified unmistakably as that people that has no abiding place here but is seeking a new and better city, the heavenly. This change, wrought in us through the power of faith, cannot be hid in the whole of our life. Our speech, dress, entertainment, labor and everything we do manifests it for it becomes the dominating and motivating force in our whole life. In reality, it is no longer we that live, but Christ Who lives in us and faith is that power of God that brings Christ to expression in our lives.

This gift of faith God implants in our hearts and therefore it is the heart that must be examined. Out of it proceeds the issues of life. Where faith is absent the mind and will of man function in accord with the sinful and depraved heart. Quite different is this where the heart is renewed. From that heart the power of faith influences and controls the mind and gives proper direction to the will. We then no longer want and seek the things that are evil but we abhor them and we think

upon and seek "whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report". (Philippians 4:8) With delight we muse upon the commandments of God, esteeming them more precious than silver and gold. To keep them in all our walk of life is our singular desire and our faith will not allow us to deviate from them even when we are made to suffer reproach and scorn, are persecuted in the world for Christ's sake and denied a name and place. "We glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." (Rom. 5:5)

The evidence of faith in us is marked by the experience of the love of God. That love is not a sentimental, superficial emotion of the flesh but it is the unbreakable bond of oneness that binds us to God in the fellowship of His covenant. Neither may this love be identified with a meaningless "lip-profession" that is supposedly then authenticated by our going to church at least once a week but it is that zealous and energetic seeking after the things of God's Kingdom day by day. Love dictates that the things of His Kingdom are first, and that not simply in the temporal sense but principally and, therefore, God's Cause is ALL! To the children of faith there is no serving of "God and Mammon". There can be no division of love between two masters. If God is loved, He is loved with "all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength" and otherwise He is not loved at all.

Living by that faith we are called to fight a battle. It cannot be otherwise for Scripture speaks of the "battle of faith". Faith is militant in character and it is simply impossible for one to be a true believer without encountering the opposition of unbelief. That battle is not only one that is waged against the ungodly world and its unrighteousness and the outcome of which is the sure victory of faith, but it is a battle that begins within one's self. There is a constant warring of the flesh and the spirit within the Christian. Then that battle projects itself into the sphere of the church in the midst of this world where all things have not yet been made perfect and where, as we learn from the history of Israel, the carnal element is very much present to spoil and destroy God's cause. Indifference to the battle and unwillingness to be engaged as a good soldier of Jesus Christ in the conflict of the church throughout the ages is not a mark of faith. The believer dons the armour of God willingly and stands ready to serve in the day of battle. Believing the faithful promise of God, he is confident of victory.

Our Communion Form enjoins every one to examine his own heart that he may know whether he possesses that faith. Having it we know and are assured that Christ has died for us and delivered us by His death from the power of sin. He has imputed to us His own righteousness so that for us old things have passed away and all things are become new. A new life with Christ is the essence of communion and without it there can be no fellowship with Him at the table of the Lord.

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

The Ark's Return From Philistia

Rev. B. Woudenberg

And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home:

And they laid the ark of the LORD upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods,

And the kine took the straight way to the way of Bethshemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Bethshemesh.

I Samuel 6:10-12

For seven months the ark of Israel's God had been in the land of the Philistines, and there was no longer any question with the Philistines that He was not under their power but that they were under His. The God of Israel had smitten them with the pestilence much in the same way he had smitten the Egyptians many years before. Everyone was covered with boils, open, sore and draining; many had died. It happened wherever the ark was brought, whether Ashdod, Gath or Ekron. No one could escape it. With swift destruction the hand of the God of Israel descended upon them. No incantation could drive it away. No form of medicine was able to heal. The invasion of mice which had gone before seemed bad at the time; but this was far worse. The damage done to Dagon in his temple was now all but forgotten because of the suffering that filled the land. The people cowered in fear.

At last the priests and diviners, the wise men of the Philistines, were called together to do something to save the nation. There was no longer any question what the trouble was. Everyone knew and took it for granted, as much as they disliked the thought. The ark of Israel's God had proved to be for them, not a great victory as they had first expected, but their curse. The only question for these learned men was, "What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place." The ark of Jehovah had to be sent away. The only thing they feared was that they might not do it in the right way so that still greater judgments might descend upon them.

For these wise men of Philistia, the answer did not seem difficult. Quickly they answered, "If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise return him a trespass offering; then ye

shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you." To them it was assumed an unquestionable fact that with sufficient offering anyone could be bought off, be he a god or be he a man. In fact, so sure were they of this that they considered it a way of proving whether it was actually the ark which brought this affliction to them or not, for they still cherished deep within them the hope that somehow it could be found that it was not Israel's God that was causing their troubles after all. But if it were, there could be little question that He could be bought off with an offering.

Moreover, when the people asked, "What shall be the trespass offering which we shall return to him?" they were ready with an answer for that too. They answered, "Five golden emerods, and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines: for one plague was on you all, and on your lords. Wherefore ye shall make images of your emerods, and images of your mice that mar the land; and ye shall give glory unto the God of Israel: peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land. Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed?" The temptation was just too great. With pious overtones, the Philistine priests could not resist acting as though this all was the fault of the people and not of them. They had to make it sound as though it had been evident to them all along that Israel's God was not to be tangled with. But at the same time they were quite convinced that He could be influenced and changed by the mere presentation of a little gold if it would be

molded in the proper shape, the shape of the curses which were upon them. These were the kind of incantations which they practiced upon their god, and they could not think of Jehovah as being any different from these.

But still underneath there was that nagging hope, that hope that some way could be found to show that it was not Israel's God at all. So piously but dishonestly, they continued their instructions, "Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them; and take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us." It was perfectly evident, by force of the pestilence that lay upon their land, they had to acknowledge the greatness of Israel's God. But they didn't want to. To the very last, they were looking for a way to prove that He had nothing to do with it, that everything that came upon them was merely chance. For this purpose they had devised this subtly clever plan. They knew of no stronger attachment in nature than that of a mother animal for its young. This attachment they would pit directly against Israel's God. If His ark was to be returned to its place, it would have to be by means of two fresh milk cows which would have to leave their young. It was very evidently their hope and wish that He would not be able to do it. They wanted so badly to believe that He wasn't really a god.

But such was not to be. No sooner had they built their cart, placed the ark and their offerings upon it, and attached their milk cows to it but these cows began to go directly along the road to Bethshemesh in Israel. The purpose of God was with Israel and not with the Philistines, and to them again He sent His ark. The milk cows of the Philistines left their young behind without swerving to left or to right. The hand of the Lord directed them. There was no stopping. As the lords of the Philistines looked on, the cart with the ark upon it came to the border, passed over it, and then stopped. It had come to its destination.

Most amazed were the men of Bethshemesh. They were busily engaged with the gathering of their wheat harvest in the field. Suddenly they looked up and saw the ark of Jehovah setting upon this new made cart. They recognized it immediately. For the last seven months in Israel, everyone had been very much aware of the fact that the ark of the covenant was in those heathen hands. It was their shame. They had often ignored it when it was with them; but once it was gone, they had been most conscious of its absence. Often these same people had gazed down this road into Philistia wondering what had become of the ark of their God. Now they knew. It had returned. Jehovah had restored the symbol of His presence to them.

The men of Bethshemesh were overjoyed. By the

place where the ark of the covenant stood there was a great rock conveniently located, and all that was needed was there. Quickly calling the Levites, they had the ark taken down off the cart. With the wood of the cart they made a fire upon the rock, and the milk cows that had pulled the cart they used for the sacrifice. There in the field of Joshua the Bethshemite, they offered a great sacrifice unto God. It was a feast of celebration and joy. The lords of the Philistines watching from their side of the border saw it. Silently, perhaps sullenly, they returned to their cities conscious as never before of the greatness of Israel's God whom they hated with all their heart.

But all was not well in Israel as that celebration might have seemed to indicate. There was still in Israel that sin which had led them into trouble in the first place. They honored Him with their lips and in visible ceremonies, but in their hearts they looked upon Him little differently than the heathen looked upon their gods. The ark of the covenant was to them a kind of idol, a sort of magical charm which they could use and manipulate in whatever way they chose. This was the way in which they had used it in the battle of Ebenezer. Hophni and Phinehas had carried the ark into battle without any regard to the commands of God, thinking that its presence there was bound to be an omen for their God. God had shown them the foolishness of this through their defeat; but as yet they had not understood and repented. Now as the ark was brought back to them again, they received it with a great celebration; but with their hearts they did not understand and repent.

The evidence of this superficial attitude which they held toward the ark of God was in that which they did at the conclusion of their celebration. Moved by curiosity, they suddenly decided that they would look into the ark to see what it really contained. They knew the commandments of the law concerning the ark. They, the common people, were not even supposed to see the ark uncovered, much less to handle it and look within it. Their knowledge of this statute was evident from the fact that they called the Levites in the first place to take the ark down from the cart which had brought it from Ekron. They observed this provision when it was convenient; but they also felt that they were quite free to ignore it. They had offered their sacrifice to God, they had given Him their celebration, now He ought to be satisfied and they wanted to know what was really in the ark. Perhaps they even offered the excuse among themselves that they had to see if the Philistines had taken anything out of it. But before God this was all as nothing. He saw the hearts of the people with all of their hypocrisy and insincerity. He would not be satisfied with a mere fancy celebration. In wrath He stretched forth His hand, until 50,070 men of Israel in the territory of Bethshemesh were dead.

Now suddenly the men of Bethshemesh knew. The God of Israel, their God, would not be satisfied to be treated lightly. He demanded the utmost in their service, even their all. But sadly they reacted little better to the judgment of God than had the Philistines. They cried out in fright, "Who is able to stand before

the holy LORD God? and to whom shall he go up from us?" They were moved to fright; but not unto repentance. Their only concern was where they could send the ark, how they could get rid of it. The ways of idolatry were deeply imprinted in their hearts. They thought that they could banish Jehovah merely by sending away His ark.

But it was an evil day in Israel, and it was actually difficult to find a place to send it. During the seven months which had passed since Eli's death, no high priest had been ordained to take his place. The tabernacle at Shiloh had been closed and was used no

longer. The official worship of Jehovah was discontinued. In desperation the men of Bethshemesh sent a message to the men of Kirjathjearim saying, "The Philistines have brought again the ark of the LORD; come ye down, and fetch it up to you." And rather than see the ark further dishonored they did it. But they had no proper place to keep it either. Quietly they stored it away in the house of one Abinadab, a Levite and a priest. There it remained unrecognized and unnoticed by the people until the days of David the king. It was still in captivity because of the sins of the people.

AS TO BOOKS—

Prof. H. Hanko

THE REFORMATION: Vol. III

in "The Pelican History Of The Church"

THE REFORMATION: Vol. III in "The Pelican History Of The Church"; by Owen Chadwick; published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 445 pp. \$5.95.

This new series on the history of the church is written by six different authors, Owen Chadwick, the author of this volume, the general editor. He is Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Master of Selwyn College.

The book discusses the Reformation Period from the time of Luther to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, including a discussion of the Spanish conquest in the Americas and the consequent Romish influences in this hemisphere.

The strength of the book is its bird's eye view of the history of the Reformation on the continent of Europe. It is written in popular style for the interest of those who are not making a scholarly study of Church History. It is good for those who want a brief survey of the Reformation without great detail. It makes for interesting and light reading, while giving the reader an understanding of the period.

But the book has its weaknesses. The treatment of the Reformation itself under Luther and Calvin is sketchy and much too brief. In all, less than 60 pages of this 445 page volume are devoted to the two great Reformers of the period.

The doctrinal questions involved in the Reformation are almost completely ignored. And when they are discussed, the discussion is distorted. Concerning Luther's emphasis on justification by faith, the author writes only: "The guiding principle was the doctrine of justification by faith, in other words a shift of emphasis from the external act in religion—cult and ritual and ceremonial—to the mind and heart, to the faith which needs external acts for the sacramental expression of an inward worship."

There is no evaluation of the Reformation, no interpretation of this all-important part of the history of the Church, no attempt to explain it as the God-ordained history of the Church of Jesus Christ. The author seems intent on shying away from any explanation of this great event in the history of God's people.

In close connection with all this, the author is at times unduly sympathetic with the Romish Church. He deplores the necessity of the Reformation in a few brief asides, wishes it could have been otherwise, sides with the Romish Church on certain questions of Romish practices which the Reformers condemned and spends a disproportionate amount of time discussing the Counter-reformation and the conquest of the Americas by the Spanish and Roman Catholic Conquistadors.

He is not very sympathetic with Calvinism and writes in a very brief statement: "The fortress of Calvinist teaching was assailable in its two weak bastions: whether the dogma of absolute predestination, however supported by texts of Scripture, was not incompatible with other texts of Scripture and with the total revelation of God's nature; and whether the text of the New Testament vindicated the claim that the polity of pastors, elders, and consistories was the only polity ordered by Scripture." He describes the great Calvinist of the Synod of Dordt, Francis Gomarus, as "a Calvinist with an inflexible mind and a conscientious talent for setting the eternal decrees in their most repellent guise."

But there are many interesting and informative passages concerning the history as a whole and a good discussion of religious practices among the Churches of the Reformation.

For a brief survey of the entire period, especially from a purely historical point of view, the book can be profitably read.

EXAMINING ECUMENICALISM—

R.C.A. - P.C.U.S.: Proposed Merger (4)

Rev. G. Van Baren

The process and proposals of merger are rather interesting to observe -- particularly when these take place in denominations which have, historically, close ties with our own. That is especially true today for us as we observe the developments taking place in the Reformed Church of America. And, of course, it is ever easiest for those on the sidelines to make remarks, suggestions, and criticisms. Yet for our own consideration and instruction, there are certain remarks which must be made.

REACTION TO THE PROPOSED MERGER

A rather strange aspect of the proposed merger between the Reformed Church of America and the Presbyterian Church U.S. is that the conservatives of the P.C.U.S. strongly favor the proposed union whereas the conservatives of the Reformed Church appear, for the most part, opposed to such merger. One well-known conservative in the P.C.U.S. wrote in a personal letter:

Actually one of the curious things about developments in our denomination is that the liberal wing of the Church is strongly opposed to the proposal. They feel that it will set up an unshakable conservative denomination which will be nation-wide and which will attract conservative elements from other Presbyterian and Reformed bodies, to the exclusion of the UPUSA and the so-called Blake-Pike plan. Consequently, the enthusiasm within our denomination for merger with RCA in the future will be a relatively accurate barometer of the conservative sentiment within our denomination.

Another article was brought to my attention which is worthy of consideration. It was the printed report of the speech of Dr. B. Brunsting, former president of the Synod of the Reformed Church, delivered before the Synod of North Carolina of the Presbyterian Church U.S. The speech appears in *The Presbyterian Journal* of July 8, 1964. He explains first the fact of varied reactions within his own denomination:

Although differing in age and geography, those continuing in the Reformed Church came to know each other, work together and regard each other with mutual respect and regard. There is no civil war. A remarkably good climate prevails in the Church. Those living in the East and those living in the West, those 100 years old and those 300 years old are more of a complement than a source of conflict to each other.

But a differing view concerning the conciliar movement (the movement supporting councils of churches) is beginning to emerge and it follows, somewhat, the place and time lines described above.

Differing points of view concerning Church union are being brought into focus by our conversations with your Church. There are those who are committed to the conciliar movement and those who are not. Those committed to it are favorable to union with the Southern Church and many would feel that union with the United Presbyterian Church must be included in ultimate plans. Those who reject the conciliar movement in the Church are hesitant about merger with your Church, largely because it is thought this would add to the strength of the conciliar movement.

BASIS OF OPPOSITION

Dr. Brunsting points out three areas of disagreement between proponents and opponents of merger in his church. He says:

The first concern is for the purity of the Church. James 3:17 is often quoted: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity."

Those who remain cool toward the conciliar movement are dedicated to the doctrine of a "pure" church. Two tests are most often used: one, the latitude allowed on the doctrine of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures; and, two, the place in religion given to a definite conversion experience.

A major source of distrust is the willingness of Churches to ordain men with an implied doubt as to the full authority of Scripture. . . .

The second source of difficulty is the anticipated size of merged denominations:

The second concern is about the so-called "monolithic character" of the conciliar movement.

There is a strong suspicion that decisions in the conciliar movement and in the denominational life of larger Churches are made at the top and imposed on the grass roots. There is fear of an ecclesiastical dictatorship. There is opposition to a few making decisions and pronouncements in the name of everybody.

Thirdly, there is the problem of, what appears to be, spiritual deadness and lack of concern for the calling of the church on earth:

Thirdly, there is the test of results. The question is raised, why has there been so little accomplished by those committed to the conciliar movement? Why has not the giving, the witness and missionary activity increased by merger?

Denominations not committed to the conciliar movement are the fastest-growing religious bodies in the nation. Some of the most effective extension work being done is by groups who are outside the ecumenical movement. . . .

The number of foreign missionaries of all agencies related to the Division of Foreign Missions of the National Council increased from 1952 to 1962 by 4.5%; those unrelated increased by 149.5%. The income of the former by 50%; of the latter by 167.3%. Overseas missionaries from member churches of the National Council numbered 10,324 in 1960; of those not related, 16,066.

Dr. Brunsting then proceeds to point out differences within the Eastern and Western sector of the Reformed Church. Remember, the Eastern sector, by and large, supports the "conciliar movement" and proposed mergers, whereas the Western sector (including the mid-west) opposes this. Brunsting points to figures of 1962 during which members of the Western sector of the Reformed Church contributed \$36.18 per member for all benevolences. The per-member contribution in the Eastern sector was \$14.74. Is there perhaps a relationship between the views toward ecumenism and spiritual fruits seen in the membership? That question seems to trouble Brunsting and others with him.

Dr. Brunsting calls first for understanding and respect between those "who hold differing views concerning the conciliar movement." Secondly, he declares that the matter of Church union must be resolved with dispatch, "not thoughtlessly or hastily, but nevertheless, with dispatch." Finally, he emphasizes that the Church must keep its eye on its purpose or mission. The watchword, says he, must be: "evangelize or die."

THE THREE ALTERNATIVES

Dr. Brunsting presents three alternatives in the merger negotiations. The first, which is presently being followed, is union with the Southern Presbyterian Church ultimately, with a plan of union to be drawn up by the Committee of 24 to be submitted to the Churches for decision. Secondly, if the above fails, there should be a halt to all union talk "so that we can get on with our work of witness." "We cannot," says he, "constantly live and work while we are embroiled with strong, differing opinions concerning Church merger."

The third "alternative" I found rather interesting, and (to my mind) preferable for the denominations involved. Brunsting points out a strong desire on the part of many both in the Reformed Church and the Southern Presbyterian Church to seek union with the United Presbyterian Church USA. He suggests the possibility that opportunity be given either churches or classes (presbyteries) to unite with that larger denomination if they wish. The remaining churches of both denominations could either unite together or con-

tinue independently as they wish. He maintains, correctly, I think:

Denominational lines should circumscribe people of similar viewpoint and conviction of doctrine, polity and ecumenicity. Unless they do, the strength of the denomination is dissipated in intra-denominational differences. Similarity of viewpoint produces denominational lines. The present denominational lines were drawn on bases which quite possibly have changed.

This third alternative, though I can not imagine that it should ever be the basis for any plan of action in these two denominations, has much in its favor. The sad fact of our day is that many have a denominational loyalty without any unity based upon the truth of Scripture nor of the old confessions of the church. Variations of belief are usually so wide that it can truly be said of many, formerly very orthodox, denominations: the variations between churches within a particular denomination often are greater than differences between two different denominations. That is true for those denominations presently under discussion too. Instances can be pointed out of liberalism in its worst sense in both denominations. On the other hand, both denominations contain men who appear rather staunchly Calvinistic and Reformed -- holding firmly to those Scriptural truths which are the backbone of the Church.

When such is the case within denominations, they have ceased to serve their purpose. When one denomination can encompass vast and fundamental differences concerning the truth, there is no more any basic reason why any or all denominations can not be united with this one denomination (except, possibly, a fear of its "monolithic character"). Denominations must exist on the basis of "similarity of viewpoint." Of course, that can not mean that every person in a denomination in every respect thinks exactly alike. Then denominations would have to consist, ultimately, of but one person. But there must be similarity of viewpoint with respect to the truths of Scripture as set forth in the confessions of a Church. If such is not true within a denomination, -- and usually it is not since there is almost a total lack of discipline today, -- there is no good reason for its existence. Union, then, even of churches which appear more "conservative" and Scriptural than others, can only perpetuate a sad situation in which the denomination will degenerate from bad to worse. Let the two denominations, if they can, draw firm lines of demarcation with respect to the fundamental truths of Scripture. Let them demand unequivocal subscription of both clergy and laymen. (Brunsting has a good beginning along this line when he sets forth "our faith." He points to the "sufficiency and supremacy of Holy Scripture," to the "total corruption of human nature," to Christ's death as the only "satisfaction for man's sin," and "no sonship without regeneration.") Those who agree to these truths of Scripture can form one denomination which is nationwide in scope. Those who disagree, can find readily a place in many other denominations who care no longer for the Word -- but welcome liberals and modernists with open arms.

AS TO BOOKS—*Rev. H. Veldman***Uitverkiezen En Uitverkiezing
In Het Nieuwe Testament**

"Uitverkiezen En Uitverkiezing In Het Nieuwe Testament," by H. Venema; J. H. Kok N.V., Netherlands; price: f8.90.

This book of 172 pages is a treatise on the subject mentioned above, which was written by H. Venema to obtain his degree as Doctor in Theology from the Theological School of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, at Kampen, Netherlands, and therefore from the Reformed Churches as maintaining Art. 31.

This document is introduced by eighteen propositions which are discussed in this treatise.

The author discusses the Scriptural doctrine of election as taught in the New Testament. In his introductory remarks he explains why he has confined himself to the New Testament.

In a review of this nature, it is, of course, impossible to treat this document in detail. I do not mind recommending this booklet to our readers who can read the Holland language, but with definite reservations. I am in complete disagreement with its content throughout.

The author would maintain a doctrine of election as in time. He rejects the Scriptural doctrine of eternal election. One reads this treatise and is amazed that passages such as Eph. 1:4, John 6:37-39, John 10:26-27, Acts 13:48, 2 Pet. 1:10, etc., are all explained as not referring to an eternal election. Speaking of an eternal election, Venema objects to it (page 48) that such a

view deprives history of all value, and that history is then merely the unfolding of a long predetermined film. Repeatedly he voices such objections against a Scriptural doctrine as an election from eternity. This doctrine simply would deny man's responsibility.

More could be said about this, but time and space forbid. Writing on Rom. 9-11, page 103, he writes: "Paul does not wish to say: no wonder, that so many Jews did not believe in Christ, for, although they had the promise, they were not elect. But: many Jews, although by nature Abraham's children, were not really children of him, because they did not live out of the promise. And that is all important (daar komt het op aan)." In my conviction, this is completely against Romans 9.

Venema also has something to say about the doctrine of reprobation. We read on page 168: "But it is plain, it seems to us, that, if we would say with Bavinck that Scripture causes reprobation to appear in history as an act of God, we must add that this reprobation is divine punishment, and that therefore the guilt of man precedes." In other words: sin is first, then reprobation. This is Arminianism, and contrary to Scripture and the Confessions.

Bearing all this in mind, and provided that we read the book carefully, we may recommend it to our Holland readers.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Society of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland express their deepest sympathy to Mrs. Edward Bruinsma in the death of her mother

MRS. R. L. REGNERUS

May our covenant God comfort the sister and her family.

Rev. J.A. Heys, Pres.
Mrs. R. Van Baren, Sec'y.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Auxiliary of the Association for Protestant Reformed Education at South Holland expresses its deepest sympathy to one of our members, Mrs. Edward Bruinsma in the death of her mother

MRS. R. L. REGNERUS

May the God of all grace comfort the hearts of the bereaved.

Mrs. Geo. D. Vroom, Pres.
Mrs. R. Van Baren, Sec'y.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory of the Loveland Protestant Reformed Church, on behalf of the entire congregation, herewith extends its deepest sympathy to the family of Rev. H. Hoeksema in the death of their father. May they in their grief and sorrow be sustained by the grace of our heavenly Father and comforted in the promise of His word that He does all things well.

Rev. D. Engelsma, Pres.
Wm. A. Griess, Sec'y.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Young Peoples Society of the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Ill., herewith expresses its sincere sympathy to our fellow-member, Irene Bruinsma, in the loss of her grandmother,

MRS. R. L. REGNERUS

Psalms 116:15 "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints".

Rev. J.A. Heys, Pres.
Judie Bruinsma, Sec'y.

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES—

October 1, 1965

Report of Classis West

Classis West convened on Wednesday, Sept. 15, 1965, at South Holland, Illinois. All the churches were represented, with two churches represented by only one delegate.

Rev. C. Hanko capably served as chairman and Rev. D. Engelsma recorded the minutes. The *delegates ad-examina* of Classis East, Revs. G. Lubbers, M. Schipper, and H. Veldman, were present for the classical examination of Candidate Robert Decker who had accepted the call to our Doon, Iowa church. Candidate Decker preached a sermon from Eph. 2:10 and successfully answered the many and varied questions on the designated subjects. On the basis of this examination, with the concurrence of the *delegates ad-examina*, Classis unanimously approved the motion to advise Doon to proceed with the ordination of Decker. So, by the grace of God, another man has been added to the ministry in our churches.

Five churches (Lynden, Pella, Isabel, Forbes, Randolph) requested classical appointments. This was granted in part by Classis West, and a request was sent to Classis East to assist in supplying these churches.

A large number of protests, involving two of the churches and their school organizations, was placed in the hands of a committee to report at a special session of Classis which will meet January 12 at South Holland.

Our Forbes, North Dakota church requested collections in the churches to assist in paying for the parsonage and church they recently acquired. Classis granted the request.

One consistory requested approval for the second step of censure, which was also granted.

The next session (the regular March meeting) will be held in Edgerton, Minnesota. To replace Rev. G. Van Baren as stated clerk, Classis elected Rev. D. Engelsma. In the future, all classical materials must be sent to his address: 750 Jefferson, Loveland, Colorado.

Classis adjourned at 9 P.M., and Rev. J.A. Heys closed with prayer.

G. Van Baren, stated clerk.

* * *

Randolph, Wisc., has called Rev. J. Kortering, of Hull, Iowa, to be their minister. The trio also included the Revs. R.C. Harbach and G. Lanting.

* * *

The Reformed Witness Hour has scheduled Rev. J. Kortering, of Hull, Iowa, for the last two Sundays in October and the first two in November. On Oct. 24 Rev. Kortering's sermon will be on, "The Gift of Faith" (Eph. 2:8); and on Oct. 31 the text of Phil. 4:8 will be exegeted under the theme, "The Communion of Saints". Remember that copies of all the radio sermons may be had by writing to The Reformed Witness Hour, P.O. Box 1230, Grand Rapids, 1 Mich.

* * *

Randolph's consistory has placed a subscription to our *Standard Bearer* in the public library of Beaver Dam, Wisc. Our paper is now on the magazine table with the many others it displays. God grant that it may be a power for good in that community.

* * *

The Reformation Day Rally to be held in the Grand Rapids Civic Auditorium Oct. 27 is being widely advertised in the area. Nine big bill-boards in Grand Rapids, two in Kalamazoo, and one each in Holland and Muskegon, and radio and press announcements will call this meeting to the attention of the Reformed people in the community. Have *you* invited *your* friends and neighbors?

* * *

The Reformed Action Society of our Western churches has sponsored a public lecture in Edgerton, Minn., Friday evening, Sept. 25, with the Rev. B. Woudenberg as speaker. After the lecture the annual business was conducted, including election of office bearers.

* * *

Did you know that our people in South Holland are building a new church? The walls are in, six arches are in place and the seventh awaits the brick; and then the church will have taken shape. It is rumored that this building will incorporate some unique characteristics, but this will be reported when it is finished.

* * *

The Ladies' Circle of the Society for P.R. Secondary Education sponsored a lecture featuring Prof. H. Hanko as speaker. His topic, "Prot. Ref. Education—Unique Enterprise" was treated under three points: its Basis, its Character and its Advantage. The basis was that knowledge should be treated, not as a collection of bare facts, but as a revelation of the God of Creation. The character of our teaching would be shown by the goals for which we strive—that knowledge is for knowledge's sake, to learn to know God. The advantage we may expect is to produce "wise children" as they are described in the Book of Proverbs. Special numbers on the program were singing by Mr. and Mrs. C. Jonker, by the Hope Heralds, and an organ-piano duet by the Misses Mary and Ellen Kregel.

* * *

Did you know that Mrs. C. Hanko, Redland's pastor's wife, has improved to the extent that she might accompany her husband on a classical appointment to Lynden, Wash.? and, that Mrs. Heys, wife of South Holland's pastor, has submitted to back surgery and has returned home, and is "as well as can be expected"?

..... see you in church

J.M.F.