

The Standard Bearer

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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THE STANDARD BEARER

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Meditation

"THE PATIENCE OF JOB"

Rev. J. Kortering

"Behold we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy," *James 5:11*.

Job!
The mere mention of his name recalls flashes of

memory before our consciousness. How he suffered.
The Sabeans fell upon his thousand oxen and five

hundred asses and took them away.

The fire from heaven consumed his seven thousand sheep and their shepherds.

The Chaldeans divided themselves into three bands and went off with his three thousand camels.

The wind from the wilderness smote the house of his eldest son, killing his seven sons and three daughters.

Woeful list!

Worst of all a terrible plague of boils afflicted Job from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. Writhing in pain he sought refuge among the ashes, potsherd in hand. His three friends saw his grief was very great, they sat speechless for 7 days.

O, how he suffered.

But, why?

It's all right to ask that question. In fact, God wants us to ask it, because the entire significance of Job's experience lies in the answer to exactly this question. To be sure we must ask it from a proper motive. It will not do for us to ask, why did Job suffer such poor luck. That's blasphemy. Rather, we must formulate the question, why did *God* afflict Job this way.

The evidence submitted to us in the Book of Job indicates clearly that none other than God, the Lord Almighty, brought so great afflictions upon His servant Job. Satan appeared among the sons of God before the throne of His Holiness. During the Old Testament times, Satan still had access to heaven. Jehovah addressed a question to Satan, hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth? Satan retorted that it was little wonder that Job was upright and feared God, God had lavished so much material prosperity upon him that Job would be foolish not to serve God. Satan challenged the Almighty, "put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." The answer from God came forth, "Behold all that he hath is in thy power, only upon himself put not forth thine hand." Notice carefully, Satan could not touch Job without a divine mandate. *God* very really sent the Sabians, the fire, the Chaldeans, and the wind. Still Job persisted in faith. The second time Satan appeared before God he had another challenge; "Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life . . . put forth thine hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." The divine answer? "Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life." The conclusion is the same, God did indeed put forth His hand and touched his flesh through the instrumentality of Satan and the plague itself.

These trying circumstances didn't just happen to Job, they were sent to him from God Almighty. Thus it always is for God's people.

But why? Does Jehovah have a purpose in doing such a thing? Is there a reason, a *good* reason?

The answer is in the affirmative. What a glorious gospel for the suffering people of God. God has a purpose in afflicting His children. Listen to the words of

this text, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." The Holy Spirit writes His own commentary on events recorded in the Scriptures. When James, in the Spirit, tells us, "the end of the Lord" was revealed in Job, he means the purpose of the Lord, the goal of the Lord was to demonstrate in Job that He, the Lord, is very pitiful and of tender mercy. Don't you see then, no child of God ever suffers needlessly. God's purpose with afflicting Job and God's purpose in afflicting His children today is the same: He shows how pitiful and merciful He is.

Paradoxical? Indeed, it seems contradictory: God directed Satan to sorely afflict Job in order that through that affliction He would reveal to Job that He loved him and was merciful to him.

This is the good news for God's suffering people.

It shines so brightly in God's dealings with Job.

To appreciate this we must say a few words about God's pity and mercy. Both of these virtues of God are rooted in His love to His people. They are unique expressions of His love to His people who are in *distress*. Basic then, is God's love to His people. This love is that of a father to his children. As a Father He has begotten us unto Himself. The wonder is that He has adopted us to be His children. By nature we are strangers, conceived and born in sin, and therefore of our father the devil. Our Father loved us with so great love that He signed the adoption papers with the blood of His only begotten Son. His love reached out for His elect children and according to His own divine justice, He laid their iniquity upon His own Son who was qualified to bear it away. When Jesus cried out from the cross, "It is finished" He explained for us the significance of His death, viz. that He had removed the reproach of the sins of His own. In this way Father has the right to take strangers into His house to dwell with them forever. Having sealed this work by the resurrection, Father raised His own Son to His right hand and gave to Him the power of grace to be dispensed by the Holy Spirit so that these sons might be gathered into the family. By the preaching of the gospel each one is brought into a living relationship of faith whereby we cry out, "Abba, that is, Father!"

The love of father is manifest in different ways. One important way is that a true father desires to teach his son patience. We use this word as it is used in our text, literally, endurance! A father wants his son to be strong, to be a good son, to be a hard worker, to be a reliable person, to make a good husband and father, and so to be durable and well established.

If we apply this to our relationship with God this is even more true. The love that our heavenly Father has for us teaches us to be durable. The figure of speech applied here is that of tempered steel. If the blacksmith takes molten metal and submits it to the blows of a hammer or places it under pressure, the result is that

this steel becomes harder and more durable. This is what God does in love to His children. He deals with us in a way that we learn patience, endurance! He sends the hammer blows of distress, not to punish, not to destroy, but to cause us to become strong in our faith, to become fixed in our doctrine and pure in our walk of life.

While He is doing this to us, He is not coldly indifferent to what effect this has upon our life. The Psalmist tells us, "As a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." Surely a father has compassion upon his child when he hands him to the surgeon. He does not say, well, this is for his good and so remains coldly indifferent to his cries; he suffers along with that child. The pity of Jehovah for His children is that in love He sends them affliction to make them strong in faith, and that while this is taking place, He is touched with their infirmities, He suffers along with them. It is this pity that activates the other attitude of God namely, mercy. Mercy is the result of pity. It is that work of God whereby He is not only compassionate to His children in distress, but He is moved to *deliver* them from their suffering. In mercy God sustains His children by giving them the necessary grace to bear their afflictions. He gives them the spiritual understanding to press on in the midst of the trials. In the end He delivers them as soon as His purpose is accomplished. Because God is merciful, He never afflicts His children with a greater measure of affliction than is necessary, nor for a longer period of time than is necessary to make them durable. In mercy God delivers His children as soon as possible.

According to our text, the measure of pity and mercy is comparable to the intensity of the affliction. God afflicted Job terribly hard; it was humanly speaking impossible to bear; consequently God was *very* or abundantly pitiful and *tender* of mercy to Job.

The history recorded in the Book of Job proves this point. Job was spiritually distressed. His burden was more than being stripped of earthly possessions and suffering pain in body. His distress was directed to God. Why did *God* do this to him? This problem was further aggravated by his wife who said, curse God and die. His three friends claimed that he was so sorely tried because he was a greater sinner and when Job denied this they accused him of being a hypocrite. Elihu opined that Job was an evil man and the plague was to correct him of so much evil.

Did Job cast up his hands hopelessly and curse God? Did Job rebel against the Almighty? Did God forsake him and let him sink into the terrible depth of despair?

No, as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitied Job. His pity was very great and mercy was tender. He gave Job the light of hope in the midst of darkness. Even while he groaned in suffering, he saw the light of God. As lightning flashes amidst the dark storm clouds, so Job saw and expressed faith in God. Stripped of all his possessions, he cried out, "Naked came I from my mother's womb, naked shall I return thither, the Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Swooning in agony amidst the ashes he cried out in faith, "Though He shall slay me, yet will I trust in Him." His ears ringing with the accusations of his friends and his soul pleading, "Have pity upon me, o have pity upon me my friends for the hand of God hath touched me" he still cried out, "For I know that my redeemer liveth . . . and though after my flesh worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

What a demonstration of God's pity and mercy upon His afflicted people. In the darkest hour, Job saw the light of God.

In the end this becomes even more evident. Surely Job's defense was not the strongest on every point; we even read that he cursed the day of his birth. Yet God vindicated Job overagainst his friends. After the Almighty spoke to him from the whirlwind and revealed to him that he was righteous and that His hand was not against him because of his sins, Job makes the most beautiful confession, "Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth." God restored to Job his possessions and blessed him with sons and daughters.

The whole experience had been spiritually beneficial for Job. The Lord had surely instructed him in endurance and in the midst of this instruction the Lord did not forsake him, but sustained him. This speaks of pity and mercy in abundance.

We count them happy that endure.

No, we don't do that as natural creatures. We count them happy that have no troubles. But, as spiritual sons of God we count them happy who receive from God troubles and who endure in the midst of them. We count them happy because they know the real meaning of sonship. God draws them very close to Himself through these experiences. They stand upon a high spiritual plane that bears evidence of the durability of faith, a faith tempered by affliction.

Are you one of God's afflicted? Are you in the class of Job?

We count them happy!

This is a profound joy in God our Father who is very pitiful and of tender mercy.

It is, of course, quite impossible to make sure of our election first, and then of our calling. For it is in the calling that we receive the fruit of election. In the calling the God of our salvation that ordained us unto glory reaches down to save us and to give us eternal life in Christ. In the calling we experience our election. And therefore, we must give diligence to make our calling sure, and through that personal assurance of our calling reach out and lay hold by faith upon our own election from before the foundation of the world.

— H. Hoeksema, "The Wonder of Grace," p. 117

Editorial

Editor's Notes

Our readers are reminded of the scheduled change in subscription rates announced in the last issue, and also of the subscription drive announced in that issue. Since we publish only one issue in August, this will be your last reminder before the September 1 deadline to take advantage of the old subscription price of \$5.00. Be sure to take double advantage of the old rate! Get a subscription renewal for yourself; and do your part toward spreading the witness of our *Standard Bearer* by sending in \$5.00 for a gift subscription for a non-reader. Again you will find for your convenience a subscription blank on the inside back page.

* * *

The *Standard Bearer* will be commenting in this and future issues on various burning questions in the Reformed community. In the present issue we begin our treatment of the views of Dr. H.M. Kuitert. But there are various other matters, such as, for example, the sequel to the "Dekker Case," to which we shall also devote our attention.

* * *

Copies of my recent pamphlet entitled "A Testimony and Appeal Concerning The 'Dekker Case' Decisions of the Christian Reformed Synod of 1967" are available free of charge. Write to: Rev. M. Schipper, 1543 Cambridge Ave., S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506.

Editorial

The Erring Views of Dr. H.M. Kuitert

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

The *Standard Bearer* has from time to time reflected on some of the theological trends in the Netherlands in the *Gereformeerde Kerken* because of the influential position which these churches occupy in the Reformed community as a whole and particularly because of the influence which Dutch theologians have exercised upon theological developments in this country, especially in the Christian Reformed Churches. From time to time disturbing reports have come from the Netherlands, reports which have been connected with names of leaders such as Dr. Berkouwer, Dr. Kuitert, Dr. Polman, as well as names like Koole and Baarda. Besides, the last General Synod of the *Gereformeerde Kerken* recanted the decision in the Geelkerken Case (Assen, 1926), in effect opening the door officially to various erring views with respect to the first chapters of Genesis. Moreover, it is a well-known fact that at least some of the so-called liberal wing of the Christian Reformed Church in this country are in sympathy with some of the new trends in

the Netherlands, and particularly in sympathy with the theological method and views of Dr. Berkouwer.

It was of no little interest, therefore, that Dr. H.M. Kuitert came to our shores and was given the opportunity to air some of his views. Moreover, these views of Dr. Kuitert received considerable attention and created no small stir when they were expressed, even to the extent that the *Grand Rapids Press* carried a report of an interview with Dr. Kuitert. I was especially interested in what this Dutch professor had to say about the first chapters of Genesis and about the inspiration and authority of Scripture, some of the most significant subjects under discussion at present in the Reformed community. Dr. Kuitert had been invited to speak three times at the Christian Reformed Ministers Institute, and two of these lectures were originally slated to be on the above subjects. He had been scheduled to deliver a lecture on "The First Chapters of Genesis and the Authority of the Bible," and another lecture on "A New

Approach to Creation and Evolution.” The subject of his third lecture was announced as “Changing Morality in a Changing World.” For some unannounced reason, Dr. Kuitert did not follow this plan, but devoted only one lecture to the subject of the First Chapters of Genesis, Creation and Evolution, and the Authority of Scripture. As far as I have been able to ascertain, this lecture will not appear in print; however, I was allowed to attend this lecture and am able to report from rather extensive notes which I took, so that I do not have to rely on the rather brief account which appeared in the *Grand Rapids Press*.

Who Is Dr. Kuitert?

Dr. Kuitert is one of the younger theologians in the Netherlands, a product of the Free University, and now a member of the theological faculty at the Free University of Amsterdam. He is professor of Ethics and of Systematic Theology. According to a recent news item in *Christianity Today*, Dr. G.C. Berkouwer, professor of dogmatics at the Free University, is going into semi-retirement; and Dr. Kuitert will be his successor in that position.

This means that Dr. Kuitert occupies a very influential position. He has many a Dutch student of theology under his instruction. But more than this, he also is able to influence students from this country, particularly graduates of Calvin Seminary, who go to the Free University for graduate work. And even apart from this, the very prestige of his position enables a man like Kuitert to be a “voice of authority” in matters theological within the *Gereformeerde Kerken*.

Undoubtedly, therefore, Dr. Kuitert is a force to be reckoned with in the Reformed community. And if attention was given to some of his views heretofore, one may certainly expect that more attention will be paid to him in the future. Already one of his books, originally written in Dutch, has made its appearance in an English translation. This is his “The Reality of Faith,” which I hope to review in a later issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

To this information it ought to be added that the name and views of Kuitert are very closely related to the name of Dr. Berkouwer. I believe it is fair to say that Dr. Kuitert ties himself to Berkouwer’s apron strings. During the lecture which I heard he spoke very glowingly of Berkouwer’s theology, and especially of the latter’s most recent work on Holy Scripture. On the other hand, Dr. Berkouwer by his views on Holy Scripture not only does not condemn the views of men like Dr. Kuitert, but he also actually creates room for their views, supposedly under the banner of a Reformed doctrine of Scripture. Perhaps it may even be said that Kuitert is not only a disciple of Dr. Berkouwer, but even a protegee of him. At any rate, this relationship is also important, for the simple reason that Dr. Kuitert, by tying himself in with Dr. Berkouwer, capitalizes on the latter’s fame and standing as a theologian, whether

intentionally or unintentionally. And for the very reason that Dr. Berkouwer is a force to be reckoned with in the area of Reformed theology, Dr. Kuitert is also such a force.

Before I enter upon my personal report of the lecture which I attended, let me conclude this part of my editorial with a few quotations from the newspaper account to which I referred earlier.

He’s considered controversial when he comes to this country, but Dr. Harry M. Kuitert . . . doesn’t believe he is controversial in the hearts of many Christian Reformed ministers who attended that denomination’s annual ministers’ institute last week.

He believes it is his views on what he calls the “Genesis issue” that has created the stir.

“I don’t think that Adam and Eve ever lived,” he said. “It was the way the Bible writers wrote. They used them as teaching models to discuss creation. Why do I start this whole fuss? Because I believe the Bible is not ‘Adam and Eve,’ but ‘Who is Christ’ and what Christianity is.”

On the matter of creation, he said, “We should listen to the scientists. Why is it dishonoring God because we say creation takes the shape of evolution? What about the fossils and earth layers?”

“Some of our orthodox forefathers believed God put fossils and things on earth as a joke.”

In the first (of his three lectures, the one on creation and Genesis, HCH), Dr. Kuitert said the first books of the Bible were written by men who wrote in their surroundings and in words and style of language no longer used.

The above items are sufficient, I am sure, to cause more than a few raised eyebrows. They reveal, too, that Dr. Kuitert does not fall short when it comes to being outspoken in expressing his views; in fact, Kuitert’s frankness was the one thing I could appreciate about his lecture. Yet this brief newspaper account hardly furnishes a realistic picture of the extremely radical position which Dr. Kuitert takes.

An Account of Dr. Kuitert’s Lecture on The Genesis Question

As I mentioned, I took rather extensive notes on Dr. Kuitert’s 45-minute speech on this subject. And while I am not able to make many direct quotations, I nevertheless feel competent to give a rather accurate account of the main points of his address. Dr. Kuitert, understandably, did not speak very good English, and it was sometimes difficult to grasp some of his words; but I feel certain that I am not misrepresenting him in what follows.

In his introductory remarks, first of all, Dr. Kuitert pleaded to be accepted as believing Scripture. He asked his audience not to start by calling him bad names, but to work with him (to work critically, if they would), but to work with him. Right here, in my opinion, is the critical point in the entire lecture. For in his views about Genesis and the so-called creation-evolution issue and

the authority of Scripture, Dr. Kuitert does not present anything basically new. What is new about his and similar views is the fact that they are being presented in the Reformed community and in what is supposed to have been (until now) one of the strongholds of the Reformed faith, and that they are being presented as being quite consistent with a Reformed doctrine of Holy Scripture. Kuitert wants to be accepted as believing Holy Scripture. This, of course, is the crux of the matter. And I must insist not only that Dr. Kuitert's views are in clear conflict with Scripture, but also that Kuitert made absolutely no attempt in the course of his lecture to proceed exegetically and to show that his views are founded upon Scripture itself. In other words, — and I shall return to this point later, — Kuitert's basic approach is wrong. He starts out from a different view of Scripture and its authority; and having a different starting-point, he is bound to reach different conclusions. Worse yet, however, this appeal to be accepted as believing Scripture is insidious. For while it sounds innocent and sincere, it must be remembered that Kuitert means "Scripture as I understand its inspiration and authority." But as I said, I will return to this point later in my account and critique. I mention it now as a fundamental and crucial point, one which must constantly be kept in mind and one by which we must not be deceived. This, by the way, is the only point in the lecture where I considered Dr. Kuitert to be less than frank. Otherwise he was frank to the point of being spine-chilling.

After his introductory remarks, Prof. Kuitert said that in the course of his lecture he would treat three main subjects, namely: 1) The Exegesis of the First Chapters of Genesis; 2) The Implications of His View for the Doctrine of Scripture; and, 3) The Implications for Dogmatics. Admittedly, this was too much territory to cover in the course of a 45-minute lecture. The advantage of this method of treatment was, of course, that Dr. Kuitert furnished his audience with the main thrust of his views, so that those who heard him went away with a rather clear idea of the sweep and the radical character of those views. Nevertheless I cannot refrain from the remark that, in my opinion, the very attempt to cover all this territory in one 45-minute lecture was far from scholarly. I certainly would not even attempt to cover so much territory in a *popular* lecture. Each of Kuitert's sub-topics would by itself furnish more than enough material for one lecture. But certainly for a ministers' institute one would expect a more thorough and theologically scientific treatment of subjects of this kind. Even from this point of view, therefore, I was disappointed and could hardly acclaim this lecture as of university caliber.

As to the exegesis of the Genesis story, Dr. Kuitert began by flatly stating that the Genesis account must not be read as the story of "how it happened." The old, traditional view of Genesis, according to him, must be

discarded. And what reason did he furnish for this statement? One would expect exegetical reasons, Scriptural reasons, or at least the semblance of an *attempt* to furnish exegetical reasons for such a bold statement. Such, at least, — whether one agreed with the attempted exegesis or not, — would have been scholarly. It would have been worthy of a theological professor from the famous Free University. But such attempted exegetical reasons were not forthcoming. What did we get instead? In effect, the argument (a purely rationalistic one, and a poor one at that) that this view is "old hat": it must be discarded simply because it is an idea which came down to us from the 17th and 18th centuries. Besides, the argument was advanced that this traditional view does not take into account the matter of *where the Genesis story came from*. It does not take into account the fact that inspiration involves a using of man in his historical context. Inspiration, according to Kuitert, does not mean that the Genesis story simply "dropped out of the blue," so to speak. It involves using man in his historical context. The Genesis story had its origin in various accounts of the origin of things which were current in Israel's cultural community. There were current among the various nations many such accounts which are parallel to the account of Genesis 1-3; and Israel simply assimilated these stories of other nations and put them into the framework which we find in Genesis, a framework suited to and in harmony with their worship and acknowledgement of Jehovah. Israel annexed these accounts of the other nations for Jaweh. They filtered it and refashioned it. They demythologized the myths. And thus they made these myths suitable for a profession of faith for their God, Jehovah. There are, therefore, no journalistic reports in Genesis, no accounts of *how* things happened, no historical data concerning creation and the fall. And Kuitert maintained that with his view he was not doing violence to Scripture, but the very opposite: he was truly honoring Scripture. On the contrary, he claimed that the old, traditional view of Genesis does violence to Scripture.

Again, however, it must be noted that no exegetical grounds for this view were furnished. There was no attempt at exegetical proof. It became very plain that Dr. Kuitert simply proceeded from the fundamental viewpoint of the higher critic, from a viewpoint which is not at all new in the world of theology, but which is being introduced into the Reformed community in a somewhat new form and under the guise of being a legitimate, Reformed view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

At this point there were also very definite overtones of Dr. Berkouwer in Kuitert's lecture. For the claim was made that we must read the Genesis story as proclamation, rather than as a journalistic account containing historical data. And what is this so-called proclamation? This, in brief: that creation is good; that we are the guilty ones; that man was meant to be God's represent-

ative, God's image-bearer; that God does not give up on man even if he is a sinner. This is the proclamation, the *kerugma*, the gospel. This is all that can be distilled out of this Genesis story which is otherwise nothing but a synthesis of myths of other nations in Israel's cultural community.

I must break off my account at this point, and continue this discussion in the next issue, D.V. Already the reader may obtain somewhat of an idea of the radical departures involved in Dr. Kuitert's views, however. Nor does it require much discernment to detect that there is absolutely nothing Scriptural about this view. Any similarity between Kuitert's view and the Genesis-account lies only in the use of some of the *words* and *terms* of Scripture, into which, however,

Kuitert pours a different content. When he speaks of creation, of guilt and of sin, etc., he does not mean what Scripture and our confessions mean by these terms. They are not, for one thing, historical facts: for Genesis does not give us an account of how things happened. And if this be true, then we do not even have an account *that* things happened. And, finally, it requires little discernment to detect that Kuitert has absolutely no Scriptural and exegetical ground either for rejecting what he called the traditional view, or for maintaining his own view.

Next time, the Lord willing, I will point out, among other things, how Kuitert's view is destructive of all of Reformed doctrine and how Dr. Kuitert claims that all of Reformed dogmatics must be revamped.

Editorial

The Joy of the Ministry

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

The Importance of This Joy

We may readily see that the presence or absence of such a real, spiritual joy on the part of a minister of the gospel affects his entire ministry. On the one hand, it affects the minister's approach to his labors. It affects the willingness and faithfulness and devotion and readiness and zeal and alacrity and energy with which he approaches his labors. On the other hand, the presence or absence of such joy will also necessarily have its affect upon the faithfulness and obedience of the minister as far as his message, the Word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the "faith of the gospel," is concerned.

Perhaps this can best be pointed out negatively and by way of contrast. What is the effect of a lack of true joy and its attendant confidence and contentment? Having no joy in his labors, the minister consequently has no interest in them. They hold no attraction for him. He would rather neglect them or find excuses to avoid them and to busy himself with other things. He becomes dull, lazy, slothful. When it is time for him to be in his study, laboring with the Scriptures, he will find excuses to be elsewhere, or he may indeed be in his study but reading the latest best-seller or the newest issue of some magazine. When it is time to go to the

pulpit, he goes only out of a sense of duty, and before long it will not be difficult to discern both his lack of study and his lack of enthusiasm. Catechism preparation and teaching will be given "a lick and a promise." Pastoral visits will be dull and as brief and as few as possible. There is simply no zest for the labor. The minister has a job, rather than a calling; and he must, of course, do something in order to draw his pay.

But there are further effects which arise very easily from such a lack of joy, especially if it persists. After a while, a pastor may begin to look for reasons for his gloomy and pessimistic situation; and he may begin to look for substitutes for the real joy of the ministry. It is right here, I think, that from a subjective point of view we can pin-point the source and the cause for many a departure from the truth and from the true calling of a minister. When a minister casts about for possible reasons for his dissatisfaction, he may rather readily focus upon the results, the fruits, of his labors, especially of his preaching. But he looks at those results from an outward and rather carnal point of view. There is not much growth. The congregation which he serves remains rather small and struggling and insignificant and of little power. There do not seem to be any "great things" accomplished. Perhaps there is very little ex-

pressed response to his preaching. Society meetings are poorly attended and rather dead. Catechism classes are a drag, and it seems as though there is little interest and cooperation on the part of either pupils or parents. And when the minister looks for a reason, he hits upon the *message*. That message must be changed. It must be made more popular, more appealing! This may begin by merely filing the “sharp edges” from the truth. It may proceed to making the message more “evangelistic.” It may continue by making the message more “adapted” and more “relevant,” more appealing and more “geared to the times.” But somehow, unless the process is interrupted, the end is that the gospel is corrupted into the Arminianism which is so common in our day or into the social gospel which is becoming ever more popular in Reformed churches. Thus, gradually but inevitably, the truth of the gospel is lost and denied; and the final result is that the light is removed from the candlestick.

There are other departures which frequently go hand in hand with that which I just mentioned. “Gimmicks” are introduced. Song services or evangelistic services replace the evening worship. The choir upon special occasions renders an oratorio at the time of the evening worship. So-called “youth services” are introduced. Liturgicalism and formality makes inroads. The preaching of the Word is de-emphasized. Expository preaching is neglected. All these — and anyone who watches the ecclesiastical scene can mention more such elements — find their way into the church as substitutes for the true preaching of the Word.

But what is behind this?

I do not know whether you have faced the question as to what, from a subjective point of view, explains the rise of all the departures and heresies which plague the churches, also the churches of the Reformed family here and in the Netherlands. Objectively, of course, the trouble lies in a departure from the authoritative standard of the Word of God and a departure from the confessions. But what explains this departure subjectively?

You say, perhaps, that it is sin and carnality, both in the pulpit and in the pew. And this is true, in general. But can we be more specific?

And then I answer: the trouble lies in a dissatisfaction with the message, a dissatisfaction with the “foolishness of preaching.” Along with this goes a dissatisfaction with the power and the effects of the preached Word. Behind this lies a lack of the real, spiritual joy of the ministry of the Word. Missing that joy, and failing to see wherein that joy properly consists, a minister (and his church and consistory may very well be party to this and encourage him in it) looks for *substitute joys*. He tries to find delight in mere carnal things, in externals. He seeks pleasure in the things of man, mere natural man: man’s work and man’s accomplishments. He begins to substitute a gospel which is of man and according to man. He aims to establish for himself and

for his church a name and a place in the world and according to the standard of mere men.

To be sure, if this is a permanent thing and if this tendency is not stopped, one can only conclude finally that such a minister is thoroughly carnal. He never was in his heart a true minister of the Word. He never was spiritually motivated. Principally, he always did “make

merchandise” of the church and of the gospel. But it is possible also for the true minister of the Word to become temporarily discouraged and gloomy and pessimistic. And at such a time, if he loses his bearings and loses from sight the real nature of the joy of the ministry and proper object of that joy, he stands in danger of “going off the deep end” and of trying to find the remedy for his lack of joy in the wrong direction and by the wrong means.

Hence, the minister must be mindful of the proper object of the joy of the ministry. And we may confront the question: what may and what ought the minister of the Word rejoice in? What object should he keep in view in his ministry?

The Proper Object of the Minister’s Joy

In the first place, and from a subjective and very personal point of view, the minister of the gospel may and ought to rejoice in the very fact that the Lord has called him and counted him worthy of the ministry.

That is an amazing wonder, you know! You and I will never be able to fathom the wonder of that. How is it possible that the Lord will use and does use a sinful man, a man who is altogether unworthy and unable in himself to speak God’s Word, — how is it possible that He uses such a man to proclaim His holy Word? How is it possible that the Lord puts a mere man, and a sinner besides, in the exalted position of being the ambassador of the King Sovereign? And how is it possible that in spite of all his weaknesses and sins, all his failures to live up to the demands and the holiness of his exalted office, the Lord maintains the minister in his office?

This is pure grace! It is a wonder that has no other “explanation” than pure, sovereign grace!

And what a reason for rejoicing there is in the experience that one is the recipient and heir of such grace!

The apostles themselves rejoiced in this. Think of what Paul writes to his spiritual son Timothy in I Timothy 1:12-14: “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” Or think of what Acts 5:41 says about the apostles when they had to suffer in and because of their labors as Christ’s witnesses: “And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to

suffer shame for his name.”

But also from the objective viewpoint the faithful minister has abundant reason for joy.

First of all, he may and ought to rejoice in the fact that *Christ is preached*.

The apostles found their joy in this. Take the example of the apostle Paul. Even when he was in prison and was hampered in his work, and even when there were those who were his personal enemies and rivals and preached out of strife and envy, it was his joy that Christ was preached. Thus he wrote to the saints in Philippians 1:18: “What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”

Make no mistake. The apostles did not rejoice, and we may not rejoice, simply in the preaching of a vague and general Christ, as though it made no difference what was said about the Christ and how He was presented in the preaching. No, they always militated against this. And now, as then, there are many false Christs preached in the name of the gospel. And there is no real joy in the proclamation of a false Christ. On the contrary, Christ, the Christ of the Scriptures, the Christ of God, the Christ in all His fulness and riches as the revelation of God’s sovereign purpose and power to save His people and to realize His everlasting covenant of grace, — that Christ must be preached. The Christ of the infallible Word, the Christ Whose knowledge has been set forth and systematized in our Reformed confessions — and let me add, because there are many who do no more than lip service to those confessions today: those confessions as they are adhered to and maintained in our Protestant Reformed Churches, — that Christ must be preached.

He must be preached! He must be set forth evidently. He must be expounded according to the Scriptures. He must be proclaimed with authority. He must be proclaimed in all His meaning, both objective and subjective, and in all His significance for the faith and the calling of the people of God in the midst of the world.

In this there is joy: real, spiritual, solid joy. I have said it before from the pulpit, and I will say it again now: if I could not proclaim that Christ, I would rather not preach. There would be no joy in the ministry for me. I would resign.

And there is good reason for this. That Christ is the sole content of the Scriptures. To make known that Christ in all His exalted greatness and power to save, to exalt that Christ in all His fulness of riches as the revelation of the God of our salvation, that is the sole purpose of the gospel and the sole purpose of the preaching of the gospel. The gospel is not humanistically oriented. It is not the proper purpose of the preacher to “save souls” or “to save the world,” as is the presentation of the social gospel. No, when a preacher preaches *Christ*, the Christ of God, and when all his preaching

exalts no one else than the Christ of the Scriptures, then he achieves, then he attains fulfillment as a minister. Anything else is disappointing and futile. It may seem glamorous and attractive to proclaim another gospel. It may seem outwardly as though one accomplishes much more by doing so. He may attract large audiences by means of humanistically oriented ‘crusades.’ He may become a popular figure of world renown. He may gain status in the eyes of the world. But unless a preacher preaches *Christ*, he can attain no fulfillment as a minister. He is engaged in an utterly vain and futile labor which will surely prove to be disappointing and empty in the end. There is no genuine joy for the minister except when he preaches Christ only and always! For the minister is servant. And the glory of a servant lies exactly in the fact that he *serves*!

In the second place, and in close connection with the fact that the proper object of this joy is the preaching of Christ, the preacher may also rejoice in the confidence of the *certain fruit*, the certain success, of his preaching.

That fruit is both negative and positive. The preaching bears fruit in them that perish and in them that are saved, in them that are hardened and in them that are called. We must remember this. The preaching of Christ is always successful. It always bears fruit. It is never a failure. The fruit may not be fruit according to man and according to the standard of man. Judged according to the latter standard, it may seem to be a total failure at times. And we must indeed be careful that we do not yield to the temptation of judging the success or failure of the preaching according to human standards. If we do so, we will soon come to the conclusion that the preaching of the cross is foolishness; and we will forget that the foolishness of God is wiser than men. No, the preaching of the gospel is always successful. Also from this point of view the Word of God speaks very plainly. What is the secret of the apostle Paul’s confidence? What explains his consuming and never failing optimism? What is behind his joy? How is it that in the face of all kinds of trouble and opposition and apparent failure the apostle can continue to rejoice, and in his joy can continue to labor with unflagging zeal? Just listen to him in II Corinthians 2:14-16: “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” There you have it: “... God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ!” The apostle is never a failure, no matter what may be the effect of his preaching! What could be more joyful than to be engaged in a venture, a task, a mission, whose success is absolutely guaranteed in advance? Yes, that is the guarantee which the minister of the Word has!

That fruit is certain, of course, because it is of Christ. The fruit is not of the preacher, nor of the hearer, but of Christ. It pleases Christ to work His work through the "foolishness of preaching." It pleases Christ to gather His church through the means of the preaching. He it is, Who from the beginning to the end of the world gathers and defends and preserves, through His Spirit and Word, a church chosen unto everlasting life and agreeing in true faith.

Again, it is important to remember this, so that the preacher seeks his joy in the proper object. We cannot always see this fruit in the immediate scene. We are inclined to become impatient, to run ahead of the Lord. We are inclined to put stock in outward, natural things, in outward growth and size and status and recognition. And then we can become very disappointed and disillusioned. For we expect great things from the thunder and the fire of the preaching; and when we wake up to stark reality on "blue Monday" and discover that to all appearances the thunder and fire of the pulpit has produced but a scarcely discernible ripple on the surface of the congregational waters, we can become utterly despondent and find ourselves with Elijah under the juniper tree. We have forgotten that the power of the preaching is not the thunder of the human word, but that its real power is the power of the speech, the indispensable and sure speech, of the still, small voice, the effectual and silent and internal and invisible whispering of the Spirit of Christ. Hence, never forget it: Christ works His work through the ministry of the Word, and the fruit of that work is absolutely certain. God always makes the preacher triumph!

The Way To This Joy

About this, after all that has been said, I can be brief. But let me be emphatic.

The way to the joy of the ministry is, first of all, faithfulness. And there is no other way! Never be tempted to try another way!

It is the way of faithfulness as far as the *message* is concerned: faithfulness to the truth of the gospel! This cannot be emphasized too strongly in our day. Ours is a day of apostasy, a day when preachers are no longer satisfied with the message which the Lord Christ has commissioned them to preach. That is too tame. That is too old. That is too unexciting. That is too unpopular. That is too ineffectual. Ours is a day, too, of ecumenism, when the truth of the gospel is being sacrificed more and more in the interests of a man-made unity of the church which has absolutely nothing in common with the true unity of the body of Christ. But be not deceived! The way of corrupting the gospel, the way of heresy, is not the way to real joy! Just witness the fact that those who follow this path must always be trying new methods and new paths to satisfaction and joy. They are grossly dissatisfied, no matter what they try. And do not forget: these false teachers are facing a day

when they shall be still more dissatisfied. They shall never hear the Word of the Lord Christ: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" They shall be cast out into the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Their final lot shall not be joy, but everlasting grief and unhappiness.

But by faithfulness I mean also devotion to the work. I mean a willingness to spend himself and to be spent. A preacher must not look for a life of ease. He must not look for excuses to put the work on others. There is always plenty of work to be done; and this is especially true of the labors of the ministry in our little denomination of churches. One does not have to look for work. And a preacher is not a man who may expect to put in his eight or nine hours a day, punch the clock, and be finished for the day. He must expect to labor day and night. This also is the example of the apostles, remember. It is well to remember this. I have said upon occasion that I have great sympathy for the minister who is busy, but little sympathy for the man who *complains* that he is busy. The danger is not usually that a minister is too reckless about expending his energies. The preacher can well afford to be rather reckless in that regard. He must consider himself expendable. This is the demand of his high calling. It requires his all, his very best efforts, all his energies, and then just a little more! After all, he has only one life to spend in this glorious calling, at best only the short span of thirty or forty years. Not only so, but the situation in our day is critical, and all the signs of the times remind us that the time is short. The Lord is coming! Let us labor while it is day, ere the night cometh in which no man can work!

Finally, the way is dependence upon divine mercy. Notice how the apostle emphasizes this: "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, *as we have received mercy*, we faint not." Without that mercy, we would surely faint. Upon it the minister of the Word is dependent. He has no sufficiency of himself. His sufficiency is of the Lord.

Hence, the way is the way of prayer. The minister of the Word must lead a prayerful life, particularly with respect to the specific needs of his ministry. For in prayer he turns to the fountain and source of all mercy, expresses his dependence upon God's mercy, and opens his soul to the blessings of divine mercy. Therefore, be instant in prayer!

May the Lord our God, in His providence and blessing, soon give to our candidate a place in the ministry of the Word, and then in that ministry give him joy. And may He give that joy to us all as ministers of His Word, and also to His church to whom He has committed the ministry. Then we have joy indeed!

All Around Us

Prof. H. Hanko

PCUS-RCA MERGER.

The long talked of merger between the Presbyterian Church US (Southern) and the Reformed Church of America took another giant stride forward. The General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church and the General Synod of the Reformed Church, meeting concurrently, passed motions of approval on the merger and referred the merger plan drawn up by the joint committee of 24 back to the presbyteries and classes for their vote.

The General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterians, meeting at Montreat, North Carolina, passed the motion after a very short discussion and by a vote of 406 to 36. There was more difficulty in the Synod of the Reformed Church of America. Meeting in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the Synod spent hours debating the question and finally passed the motion in a secret ballot by a 183 to 103 vote.

The plan is now to be brought to the presbyteries of the Southern Presbyterian Church where it needs approval by three-fourths of the presbyteries and to the classes of the Reformed Church where it must be approved by two-thirds of the classes. If the merger plan is successfully guided over this important and difficult hurdle, it will be returned to the top ecclesiastical assemblies for final approval next year.

Several amendments were made to the merger plan at this year's general assemblies which are of some importance. One amendment had to do with the confessional basis of the newly merged church. The Classis of South Grand Rapids had petitioned the General Synod of the Reformed Church to reduce the number of confessions from six to two, but they had wanted the new church also to forget about a proposal which had already been adopted to form a new confession. Classis South Grand Rapids was afraid that the writing of a new "contemporary Confession" would result in a position similar to the United Presbyterian Church with its "Confession of 1967." However, while the part of the proposal to reduce the number of confessions passed, the proposal to eliminate the writing of a new confession failed. The result is that the confessions of the new church will be the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Shorter Catechism, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession. Dropped were the Larger Catechism and the Canons of the Synod of Dort. When

and if the new church is formed, one of the first items of business will be the formation of a new contemporary and relevant confession.

The merger plan also contained no provision for the office of deacon. Several attempts were made to restore this office, but they failed. The new church will have no diaconate.

The merger plan had made some provision for the safeguarding of the property of congregations which do not want to go along with the merger. If congregations left the new church within a stipulated time, they would be permitted to retain their property. This part of the merger plan was broadened by amendment to include not only the present merger but also any future mergers into which the new denomination might enter.

The opposition to the merger came mostly from members of the Reformed Church. Some of their objections include the following. There is the problem of the Southern Presbyterians' commitment to the COCU plan of union. (Cf. below.) Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, chosen as vice-president of the Reformed Church Synod and author of the well-known book, "The Power of Positive Thinking," argued that, after the merger, the new church could vote to discontinue affiliation with COCU. Many in the Reformed Church also objected to the plans to write a new confession, fearing that such a confession would incorporate modern and liberal theology after the pattern of the "Confession of 1967." There were also objections to the dropping of the Canons of Dort, the Presbyterians' position favoring ordination of women, the omission of the office of deacon, and important changes which will be made in church polity.

Observers of the merger predict that, should the plan pass the presbyteries and classes, it will be by a very narrow vote. There is considerable doubt that it will pass at all.

* * *

In separate action, the Reformed Church refused to become a participant in COCU. The standing committee on interchurch relationships had advised joining this proposed twenty-three million denomination. And, while the Southern Presbyterians have partially committed themselves to joining COCU, the Reformed

Church, in what seems to be contradictory action, voted to remain outside.

* * *

Many decisions taken by the General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church were highly distasteful to conservative leaders in that denomination. It was, in the opinion of many, one of the more liberal Assemblies; it committed the Church to a course of social action which will take the denomination farther along the road of the social gospel and modern day liberalism. One member, quoted in the *Presbyterian Journal*, remarked: "Knowing our Church, if the Reformed Church in America is made up of people willing to merge with us, I'm not so sure I want to associate with them!"

THE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE.

With the recent assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy the nation is undergoing one of its periodic times of soul-searching. Prodded on by President Johnson's new commission on violence which was asked to determine "what in the nature of our people and the environment of our society makes possible such murder and such violence," the soul-searching has come up with some interesting answers.

In a lengthy article entitled "Understanding Violence," *Newsweek* gives some of these answers. It is instructive to listen.

The floor is first of all given to the non-experts which *Newsweek* lightly dismisses. California's Governor Ronald Reagan blamed demagogic leaders in and out of office and the "spirit of permissiveness that pervades the courts." Senator Eugene McCarthy found the cause in the violence of the Vietnam war. The young, when quizzed, blamed the "intransigence" of the establishment; the old, the disrespect of the youth. The whites blamed black militants and the blacks blamed white racism. The latter has, apparently, the most effect upon people. Estimates are made of 50 million private weapons in the hands of the citizenry because of the threat of racial conflict.

But quickly the floor is given to the experts. Here is their testimony based on studies in the fields of sociology, ethnology, zoology, neuro-physiology, etc. Many claim that violence has always been an integral part of the history of our Republic. From the violence of the frontier days through the war for independence, on to the civil war and urban riots of the 1800s and the labor disputes of the early 1900s, we have lived with a tradition of violence which makes "violence as American as cherry pie."

In support of this contention it is pointed out that violence is greater in the U.S. than in any other industrialized society.

The U.S. homicide rate is five per 100,000 persons annually, a figure roughly eight times that of England and Wales and four times that of Japan, Australia, New

Zealand and Canada — though less than the rate of some Latin American countries.

Other experts turn to the political assassinations which have characterized our history.

Most ominous of all, the pattern of political assassinations in the U.S. now resembles what one would expect in a banana republic. "The assassination of Lincoln established a scenario for political violence." Starting the count with Lincoln, four of twenty U.S. Presidents have been assassinated, and assassination attempts have been made on three more. Moreover, a Secret Service report released in January shows that the number of persons arrested for threatening the President of the United States has increased alarmingly since John Kennedy's assassination, from 80 arrests in 1963 to 425 arrests in 1967.

Newsweek reported some findings and opinions on this.

The men (who have threatened a Chief Executive) tended to have much in common: several were young and many came from unhappy homes. Typically they were raised by dominant mothers, while their fathers stood ineffectually by or were absent altogether — not unlike the youth accused of murdering Robert Kennedy.

Although their threats were directed at men, (one who studied these matters) found the underlying source of their resentment was directed at their mothers. Rage against mother, he said, "is only later displaced on to male authorities," then to the government and finally to the President, "the embodiment of the U.S. Government."

So a dominant mother is an important cause of political violence.

The experts in other fields were also given their day. One argues thus.

... Aggression is an evolutionary instinct — a drive inherited by man from the lower animals. He also holds that modern man finds himself trapped in his violent patterns because of a trick of evolution. Most carnivores, especially those equipped with lethal teeth and nails like the wolf, have instinctive inhibitions against killing members of their own species. On the other hand... evolutionary man never had to develop inhibitions against killing other men for the simple reason that he was so physically ill-equipped to kill — until, that is, his brain grew, and he invented weapons. Among all the carnivores, man — and the rat — are the only species that kill their fellows.

A physiologist weighs in with his views.

Experiments in both animals and men show that the brain contains a well-defined "aggression center." In humans the area is the amygdala nerve cells, located in the temporal lobe. When the amygdala of a mild-mannered woman patient was stimulated electrically with a thin wire passed through her skull, she turned abusive and threatened to strike the attending surgeon. When the current was turned off, she became her customary gentle self again. This aggression center is part of man's hereditary endowment, but it is affected by changes in body chemistry and mediated by the

higher centers of the brain that have learned the evolutionary lessons of social adaptation, cooperation, empathy, loyalty to others, postponement of gratification, attachment to ideas and symbols — in short, all the forces that can control and contain aggression.

TV also comes to its share of blame.

... For most Americans, the Vietnam war is a television war, live and in color in U.S. living rooms nightly. And as such, it becomes another example of the sado-violence that is the new pornography on television and in movies. One survey — made a few years ago — showed that between the ages of 5 and 14 the average American child will witness 13,000 violent deaths on TV. In one Monday-Friday period on four commercial channels in a major city, Stanford University researchers counted twelve murders, a guillotining, 37 hand-to-hand fights, sixteen major gunfights, two stranglings, an attempted murder with a pitchfork, a psychotic loose in an airliner and two attempts to run cars over persons on sidewalks, among other episodes.

And so it goes. *Newsweek* points out that while politicians are talking about gun control, psychiatrists "in their brisk professional way have now begun to weigh the possibilities and problems of people control." In an ominous way, *Newsweek* describes this.

Such a suggestion grew out of a meeting in Boston last week aimed at getting the U.S. to establish one or more \$25 million research centers for the detection and treatment of potentially dangerous individuals The program would treat violence just like typhoid fever or any other major public-health problem. Large numbers of citizens would be screened, perhaps when they apply for a driver's license. What would be needed is a simple and reliable battery of tests to judge an individual's "impulse control". People with "poor impulse control" it seems, are often involved in traffic accidents, beat their wives and children, and become uncontrollable on small amounts of alcohol.

President Johnson appointed a commission on violence to find answers to two questions. The first is: What in the nature of our people makes possible such murder and violence? The answer to this question is easily found on the pages of Scripture. Man is, in his condition of total depravity, desperately wicked, capable of every crime and filled with violence from birth. Paul quoting the Psalms writes in Romans 3: "There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known." The earth is described

in Genesis 6:11 as filled with violence. In that memorable Psalm of Asaph, Psalm 73, Asaph describes the wicked as being covered with violence as with a garment. The Word of God explains in a few words what all the experts in this country have not been able to understand.

President Johnson's second question is: "What in the nature of the environment of our society makes possible such murder and violence?" The answer here too is not difficult to find — if one is willing to measure society by the standard of God's Word. A complete breakdown of the principles of authority-obedience in every sphere of life, given impetus by an abandonment of the law of God for some nebulous "new morality," has contributed to lawlessness. The higher courts of the land have effectively handcuffed the law enforcement agencies by building legal walls of protection around the criminal. Violence is condoned and preached and taught in civil disobedience, marches, demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, etc. The door is opened to violence knocking always at society's threshold. When it comes rushing to plunge us into anarchy, do we have to ask silly questions? If we can only ask silly questions, we shall get silly answers. And then we are in for some bad days.

RESOLUTION ON COCU

An interesting resolution on COCU was adopted by the American Council of Christian Churches quoted in *Lutheran News*.

The Executive Committee of the American Council of Christian Churches, meeting in Dayton, Ohio, April 1-2, 1968, expresses emphatic opposition to the Consultation on Church Union for these reasons among others:

1. COCU creates a non-creedal church in which any belief or radical unbelief is allowed. We hold the Bible to be our "only infallible rule of faith and practice."
2. COCU creates a "uniting" force which, according to the remarks of President James I. McCord of Princeton Theological Seminary, moves "beyond the unity of the church to the unity of mankind." Not "One Christian Church" is contemplated, but "One Secular World."
3. COCU creates a power force in this country which, fortunately, the USA has never known. As we see clergy-led riots, the thought of these same clergymen claiming to represent, initially 25½ million Americans is frightening. We thank God for the unity in freely expressed diversity which Bible-believing Christians have enjoyed, even while they have sought for Christian understanding and cooperative witness

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Trying The Spirits

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Rev. Robt. C. Harbach

"In whom we have redemption through His blood." (Eph. 1:7) We are here informed that the source and genius of redemption is not in ourselves. We do not redeem ourselves. We have redemption, but only in Him, Christ. Redemption means *deliverance*, a deliverance by the payment of a price which purchases the redeemed and sets them free.

No subject is more misunderstood than that of redemption. The general impression most people have of it is wrong. They think of it as being first a "possible redemption," which can then become an actual redemption. "Possible redemption" requires a surrender to Christ and an accepting of His atonement to make it availing, and so secure it as an actual redemption. A mere "possible redemption" is unavailing! It does not purchase or redeem! It is merely a conditional deposit put to the account of all men. It cannot, for this reason, be said that the price has been paid for certain men and that therefore those men shall never be called upon to pay it! This is the philosophy of "universal redemption," namely, that Christ died for every son of Adam. But the theory of universal redemption although it seems to be one which cannot be more charitable and benevolent, and seems to hold out to all men the most comforting of prospects, is really a very gloomy hypothesis, and one doomed to disappointment. For unless a universal redemption be actually founded on a universal salvation, it cannot have a well-meaning universality. To offer all men a universal redemption unfounded upon the basis of a universal salvation is to offer them an elusive phantom redemption, which can never be materialized. Universal redemption without the support of universal salvation is a vain, visionary, hopeless and impossible ultra-pious wish.

But let us go back to the meaning of the word, which is that of deliverance. Redemption means the procurement of deliverance by the payment of a ransom price. With the payment of the price the ransomed go free. The term does not denote mere part payment, nor an offer of full payment, nor simply the good intention to pay. It denotes such full payment that there is nothing more to pay and consequently those for whom the price was paid are bought with a price, delivered and free! Therefore on the basis of what the Presbyterian and

Reformed churches have always confessed, and on the basis of Scripture, we speak not merely of an intended redemption, but of an effectual redemption. The latter is one which brings about the results intended! It is a prevalent Arminian error that redemption "is inherently universal." This is misleading, because the language does not refer to real, actual redemption; it refers to the dream of "possible redemption." But this dream of a possible redemption has no basis of an inherently universal salvation to fall back on; hence it merely shimmers on the background of a mirage. Nor is the dream of hypothetical redemption according to the Reformed Confessions. "The saving efficacy of the death of God's Son extends to all the *elect*, bestowing upon *them alone* justifying faith, and bringing *them* infallibly to salvation. Christ by the blood of the cross *effectually* redeems out of every people, tribe, nation and language (the only universality of redemption the Reformed confessions allow—RCH), all those and those *only* who were from eternity chosen to salvation. (Note also the particularity of the redeeming cross: not "every people", but "*out of*" every people!—RCH). All the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit He purchased for *them* (chosen from eternity—RCH) by His death, and preserved *them* to the end" (condensed from Canons II, 8). "The idea of redemption in the Reformed Confessions is not that of an inherently universal redemption, but of *effectual* redemption, nothing else, nothing less. This is also borne out in the Belgic Confession. "By offering Himself on the tree of the cross and pouring out His precious blood, Christ made a full satisfaction for the remission of our sins. This only sacrifice, once offered, is that by which believers are perfected forever. This is also the reason why He was called Jesus, that is, Savior, because He should *save His people* from their sins (condensed from Article XXI)." This reveals that Christ's death was not merely *possibly* redemptive. It was *redemptive*, and whatever is redemptive is *saving*. According to the confessions, redemption has an inherently "saving efficacy." The Heidelberg Catechism is in harmony with this. "Jesus Christ, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil, and so preserves me and assures me of eternal life." The result of that full

satisfaction and redemption through His blood is that He “*makes* me sincerely willing and ready henceforth to live unto Him (condensed from HC, 1).” Therefore it is not man’s willingness and readiness that makes redemption effectual; but rather effectual redemption produces the fruit of willingness and living unto Him. Also HC, 54 tells us that Christ does now on the basis of His death as a once-for-all full satisfaction of saving efficacy: “The Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends and preserves to himself by His Spirit and Word, *out of* the whole human race (note the particularity—RCH), a *church* chosen to everlasting life.” (condensed) This means that Christ does not fail to seek, gather, win and save all the ransomed church He redeemed with His own blood. This is the “all mankind” of HC, 37. Mankind is saved, but saved in the elect. That, because redemption and election are co-extensive. None but the elect are redeemed. This is evident from the Ephesian passage before us. “Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world! predestinated to the adoption of sons, *we*, (the chosen ones) have redemption!” (1:4-7).

Universal terms there are which Scripture uses in connection with the redemption of Christ. But it is *non sequitur* reasoning to think that this connection infers universal redemption. For the Bible also uses particular and restrictive terms in connection with redemption. But if the universal terms are to be understood in the unlimited sense, then why did the Spirit inspire the secondary authors of Scripture to use any particular terms at all? The particular texts tell us that Christ died for “the sheep,” “the church,” “His people” and “God’s elect,” etc. There are universal terms used in connection with His death, such as “world,” “all,” and “every.” The universal terms harmonize with the particular, but the particular never will with the unlimited.

Redemption is very specific. Negatively, it is redemption from bondage, from death, from the curse of the law, from all iniquity. Positively, it is redemption unto God. “Universal redemption” does not redeem universally, and so is inherently contradictory. It redeems *from* nothing to nothing. This is true because, although a “universal redemption” is supposed to be *sufficient* for all, it is not able to *effect* the deliverance of any. Only effectual redemption can do that. If, then, there is only one redemption, and it is “universal redemption,” and on the basis of it God offers deliverance to all men, does He not mock while He offers? What comfort would it be to me to know that God offers me a salvation sufficient for all but not efficient for all? Only effectual redemption is truly kind, gracious and of service to me.

Redemption is therefore not to be interpreted as pious men might wish to think of it, as expressing the divine will as wanting everybody saved and nobody lost; but as Scripture has it, that none should be lost of those given to Christ (John 6:39). We have no right to say to all men to whom through us the gospel is sent that

“Christ died for you” or “Christ redeemed you.” We have the right only to say to them what Scripture says, as, e.g., “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed *His people*.” (Luke 1:68) To the question, “Did Christ die for me?” many answer rather glibly, “Of course He died for me. He died for all men. Therefore He died for me.” Here is a use of the universal term “all” in a way contrary to Jesus’ usage of it. He spoke of “all Mine.” That is the meaning of “all” when used in connection with redemption. It is to be understood in the limited sense. When John’s disciples referred to Jesus’ baptizing, they said, “the same baptizeth, and *all* come unto Him.” They did not mean that all men come to Him. The Pharisees said, “If we leave Him thus alone, *all* will believe in Him.” They did not include themselves among those believers. Luke, recording the healing of the lame man, writes, “for *all* glorified God for that which was done.” But he did not include the Sanhedrin in that “all.” Jesus himself said, “If I be lifted up, I will draw *all* unto Me.” Admitting that the word “all” has a limited meaning elsewhere in Scripture, is it a *non sequitur* to maintain that it has the limited meaning in connection with Christ’s death? It is not. Jesus did not mean that He would draw “all men” to himself, but “all Mine,” i.e., “all that the Father giveth Me.” Isaiah wrote that “He shall bear their iniquities,” and explains that this was done thus: “the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” He never said, “the iniquity of all” (which “universal redemption” theorists try to make it). Of what is the “us” embrative? The context answers, “For the transgression of *My people* was He stricken.”

Now that “us” is the restricted and very well known “us” of the particular gospel. “The Spirit himself maketh intercession *for us*,” which means, as the words following prove, that “He maketh intercession for the *saints*.” Referring to them, Paul states, “If God be *for us*, who against *us*?” Then he says that God gave up His Son *for us*, and that the risen Son makes intercession also *for us*. Nor does Paul leave it in doubt as to whom he means by “us:” “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s *elect*?” That the “us” are the “elect” is plain from, “God hath not appointed *us* to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for *us*, that we might live through Him.” (I Thess. 5:9f)

Christ could not have died to render the salvation of all men possible, for when He died there were multitudes already in hell, and so beyond the possibility of salvation. Nor could He have made only a conditional redemption, which He left to the will of man to render, by man’s act of faith, effectual, or by unbelief, leave it as it is, ineffectual. For He made it for such as will *have* it (we *have* redemption), but none will have it, except such as God makes willing, as He certainly does all His elect, and them only. In no sense is Christ Redeemer without redemption.

FROM HOLY WRIT

The Book Of Hebrews

Rev. G. Lubbers

Hebrews 6:9-12 (continued)

FOLLOWERS OF THOSE WHO INHERIT SALVATION (Hebrews 6:12) — Continued

This passage from Genesis 12:2, 3 is worthy of careful reading and interpretation. Here we have, as it were, the grand framework of the promise. Here we have the perspectives of the New Testament dispensation that the gospel is to be preached to the Gentiles also. Here we have that good-tidings which reads "in thee shall all nations be blessed." It was before preached here to Abraham concerning the Gentiles. These too are Abraham's children. (Galatians 3:8) Hence, if we be Christ's then are we Abraham's children and heirs according to the promise. What distant perspectives, both Christological and Eschatological! Abraham will have many heir-children. They will inherit the promise. They will not merit it; it will be all of free grace. God gives it to whom He wills. It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God who giveth mercy! It is of the God of glory! (Acts 7:2) This promise has its perspectives in the glory of the new heaven and of the new earth. The heavenly and the better country is seen from afar. (Hebrews 11:10-13)

However, Abraham can only inherit this promised land, and set-forth salvation, by "faith and long-suffering." Faith is the sure subjective basis of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. By faith Abraham walked as seeing the unseen God. Of this we shall see more when we come to our interpretation of Hebrews 11. "Longsuffering" on the other hand, is that virtue of grace and love which does not grow exasperated and frustrated and weary in the midst of many disappointments and seemingly unnecessary tarrying on the part of God to fulfil the promised salvation. Surely, if anyone had need of faith and longsuffering, it was Abraham.

It should be remembered that the stage in which Abraham was to walk in faith and longsuffering is given in the promise "In thee and in thy seed shall all nations be blessed." Were it not for this Word of God, the gospel, before preached to Abraham, there would be nothing toward which to look in hope and to await in faith and long suffering. Besides, it should be remembered that the particulars of the manner of the realization of the promise are made known to step by step along this road of faith and longsuffering. Abraham

is not a spectator, but he is to run the race, keep the faith and thus inherit and receive the promise. And thus Abraham is not only the father of all believers, but he is also an example of faith in whose footsteps the Hebrew believers are to walk. As Abraham walked in long-suffering, thus also we are to walk. Of course, each must walk thus in his own time and dispensation of grace. Abraham looked for the realization in his day in the birth of the Son, the heir, and we look to Christ, the forerunner of our faith, who has gone before us within the veil.

And this brings us to the second stage of Abraham's faith and patience! We read this in Genesis 12:7 "And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said "Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him." Abram had passed through the land. And now he is assured that his seed shall possess this land. We are told by the writer to the Hebrews that this "land" is really the "better country, the heavenly." (Hebrews 11:10-13) However, it is doubtful whether Abram immediately saw this and was given to understand this far-reaching perspective. God as the great artist puts on touch by touch. He did not reveal all the details of the promise at once, but led Abram on as the great Pedagogue! Now Abram's faith is upon this land. This was the land that God would shew him. This land indeed fits in with the distant perspective of the nations being blessed in him and in the seed, but that Abraham must receive in faith and longsuffering!

The next stage of the faith and longsuffering of Abraham we see in what is recorded in Genesis 15:3. Here we have the deep cry of Abraham's struggle of faith and longsuffering when he says "Behold to me thou has given no seed: and, lo, one born in mine house in mine heir." What a deep cry of faith and longsuffering on the part of this struggling saint! It seemed so contradictory. God would make his seed as the stars of heaven in multitude. "So shall thy seed be." And yet he has no seed. Must he look elsewhere? His wife is childless and barren! And that too is of the Lord. Yes, he will walk in hope against hope. But this is the way then of faith and longsuffering. It is waiting God out! And the cry is not so much "how long"; it is rather, will the promise be realized at all, since there is not one child born to Abraham. And what satisfaction does Abraham receive? He receives the sign of the multitude of the stars, and he also receives a revelation concerning

Israel's becoming a great nation in Egypt for four hundred years. Here the lines are traced out in some detail in promissory form—before Isaac is born. Here the stage is kept intact for Abraham's walk of faith and longsuffering! (Genesis 15:13-13) Yes, and this people shall live in this land. The time of Joshua the son of Nun is foretold, some five hundred years in the future! And in this faith and longsuffering Abraham inherits the promise. It is given to him in grace. His faith is counted for righteousness as it lays hold on the promise in Christ.

Yes, the way darkens and deepens!

It is more and more a way of faith and longsuffering.

For the fact is that Sarah becomes older and all hope of having a child is gone. And the same inevitable lot befalls Abraham. He too dies as far as the natural ability to raise up seed is concerned. The record sounds like the death-knell! "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, . . ." But there is hope! The names of these two saints are changed. Abram is called Abraham, and Sarai is called Sarah. He is the father of multitudes and she is the princess among the women! The day-star, the hope of the eternal morning may rise in their hearts. Listen! "I will make my covenant between me and thee and multiply thee exceedingly." You will have a son, "and thou shalt call his name Isaac!" (Genesis 17:2-8) And in Isaac shall thy seed be called! (Rom. 9:9; Genesis 21:12)

However, the greatest trial of Abraham's faith and longsuffering is when the Lord comes and commands Abraham to offer up his son Isaac. We hear its staccato sounds: take now thy son—thine only son—whom thou lovest—and get thee into the land of Moria—and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains that I will tell thee of!" (Genesis 22:1, 2) Here is the ultimate test of Abraham's faith and longsuffering. It was faith. It took God at His word. It reasoned and computed in the higher dimension of what God is able to do and what he will do according to His sure promise. Thus we read in Hebrews 11:17-19 "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, in Isaac shall the seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." Such was the faith in which Abraham inherited the promise. Yes, and it was a way of *longsuffering* The road was long, the trials were many and they were severe. They were humanly impossible, and they seemed to contradict the very promise of God! But faith "accounted" and it "suffered long."

Isaac is taken to the designated mountain. Hear the faith of Abraham speak, "God is able, God is able . . ." Once Abraham had received his son as born from those who were dead. He had believed in hope against hope upon him who raiseth the dead to life and calleth the things which are not as though they were. (Romans

4:17) The hand of the LORD is truly not shortened. O, the faith of Abraham was great. He waxed strong in faith, and he did not faint. He did not become bitter with God. He loved God, and suffered long in this love. And thus he inherited the promise in this long road of faith and longsuffering, going on from strength to strength! (Psalm 84:5-7) Truly, blessed is the man whose strength is in the LORD . . . who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, everyone of them in Zion appeareth before God!

GOD CONFIRMS THE PROMISE BY OATH TO ABRAHAM (Hebrews 6:13-15)

It was a glorious moment of faith and longsuffering there on mount Moriah, but it was also a moment of great obedience. Abraham did not withhold his son from God. He sacrificed him in obedience of love. He was tried and his faith was perfected. Faith could rise no higher; it had reached the zenith on Moriah's heights. It was the full assurance of faith indeed. See Abraham with hand extended holding the knife to plunge it into the throat of Isaac. Hear from heaven God calling: Abraham, Abraham it is enough! Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou has not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. (Genesis 22:12)

Yes, the Lord did prepare himself a sacrifice. It was not Isaac, but a vicar. The Lord prepared in such a way that it was Jehovah-jireh, in the mount of the Lord it shall be manifested. It was a picture of Calvary and of the resurrection from the dead. Here the perspectives open beyond the present life. It is through death and resurrection that we become the multitude of the seed in Abraham, and that the word is fulfilled: in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And here Abraham did not merely see the promised land of earthly Canaan. Here he saw Christ's day from afar and rejoiced. (John 8:56) The Mystery of godliness was unfolded here. And thus Abraham *obtained* the promise. He actually obtained the promise by faith, and this was the end of the long road of faith and longsuffering!

That such was the case with Abraham is evident from the oath which God swore to Abraham. God swears this oath as a reward for Abraham's faith. Thus we read in Genesis 22:15-19 as follows. "And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gates of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

EXAMINING ECUMENICALISM

"The Dutch meet Dixie"

Rev. G. Van Baren

Our readers are aware of the fact that merger proposals are being discussed by the Reformed Church in America and the Southern Presbyterian Church. This past month (June) the Synod of the Reformed Church and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. approved the merger proposal of their committee of 24. *Time* presented a brief report in its June 21, 1968 issue. It stated: (under the above title)

Meeting in separate assemblies, representatives of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (1,000,000 members) and the Reformed Church in America (400,000) last week approved a tentative plan of union. If the proposal is ratified by the local governing districts of the two churches, they will merge in 1970 to form a new denomination called the Presbyterian Reformed Church.

Through the kindness of Rev. James A. Millard, Jr., stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, I received a copy of the merger plan and the report of the Committee of 24 presented to the Synod and the General Assembly of the two churches. I quote, without comment, the report presented to these bodies for your information.

REPORT OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF TWENTY-FOUR TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND GENERAL SYNOD

Fathers and Brethren:

In 1962, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America directed the Joint Committee of Twenty-Four to seek together "a fuller expression of unity in faith and action" in order "to give a more effective witness to the Gospel, and especially to the Reformation emphasis on the authority of Scripture and the Sovereignty of God as expressed in the Lordship of Jesus Christ." Both Assembly and Synod reaffirmed their "readiness to be led into whatever forms of church life and work are revealed as God's will for us."

In 1965, after three years of study of our ways of witness and their theological basis, and consideration of a number of possibilities, other than union, of express-

ing our unity in Christ and witnessing more effectively to the Gospel each of which seemed to be impractical, the General Assembly and the General Synod instructed the Joint Committee "to begin drafting a Plan of Union for possible presentation not later than 1968."

In 1967, after hearing a preliminary report as to the contents of the draft documents, the General Assembly and General Synod affirmed "their confidence in the Providence of God and their serious and enthusiastic purpose to proceed as rapidly as possible looking toward the union of our two churches."

The Joint Committee has enlisted the help of a number of members of both communions in the preparation of the first drafts and sought comments and suggestions from Presbyteries and Classes, sessions and consistories. Well over 2,000 suggestions have been received and studied. Many of these have been incorporated in the final Plan.

We submit this Plan of Union to the General Assembly and General Synod because, in the words of the Preamble, "we are convinced that by coming together in one new church the members of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and of the Reformed Church in America, both branches of the church universal, will

- (1) bear a more effective witness to the Gospel,
- (2) seek a genuine renewal of the Church in commitment to our Lord,
- (3) increase obedience to the Will of God revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ and made known to man by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures,
- (4) to emphasize our obligation in the light of the Great Commission to meet the true needs of all people.
- (5) expand the horizons of our concern for the responsibilities we bear for all of life and for all of mankind.

Having sincerely endeavored to hold ourselves ready to be led into whatever forms of Church life and work are revealed as God's Will for us, we propose the establishment of "a united Church to be known as The Presbyterian Reformed Church in America."

1. In 1967, the General Assembly and the General Synod voted to hold their 1968 sessions "simul-

taneously but not together . . . in view of the fact that the Plan may be amended, changed, altered or otherwise revised" by the two highest courts.

We therefore recommend that the following procedure for dealing with the Plan of Union at our simultaneous sessions be adopted by the General Assembly and the General Synod:

- (1) That the Joint Committee of Twenty-Four act as a committee of reference in regard to the Plan of Union during the simultaneous sessions.
- (2) That there be a first 'reading' (by title only) as early as possible at each session and that all proposed changes in the Plan of Union be received and referred to the Joint Committee for immediate consideration.
- (3) That the Joint Committee report to General Assembly and General Synod its recommendations to which suggestions should be adopted.
- (4) That a second 'reading' then take place whereby the two courts will by vote indicate their approval or disapproval of the proposed amendments.
- (5) That the remaining differences between the two courts be resolved by the Joint Committee and the final Plan be presented for a third 'reading' and final vote.
- (6) That at the third 'reading' the rules of order of both General Assembly and General Synod be set aside in order that the final Plan of Union may be voted upon without consideration of further amendments or changes . . . (schedule of readings omitted—G.V.B.)

2. We recommend to the General Assembly and the General Synod the following resolution: "Resolved: that the General Assembly approve and recommend to the Presbyteries (that the General Synod adopt and recommend to the Classes) full organic union with the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States) under the proposed plan of union consisting of the Covenants of Agreement, the Form of Government of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in America, the Rules of Discipline of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in America, the Directory for the Worship of God and for the Work of the Church of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in America, together with all other documents and procedures incident thereto, all of which are attached to this resolution or by necessary implication are incident thereto, and by this reference are incorporated as a part thereof."

3. If both General Assembly and General Synod adopt the Plan of Union, it will be voted upon by the Presbyteries and Classes in the following manner:

- (1) The resolution to be acted upon will be as follows:
For the Presbyteries and Classes: "Resolved:
That the Presbytery (Classis) of . . . give its

advice and consent (give its approval) to full organic union with the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States) under the proposed Plan of Union consisting of the Covenants of Agreement, the Form of Government of the Government of the Presbyterian Reformed Church (etc. as above) . . .

- (2) The approval of three-fourths (60) of the Presbyteries and two-thirds (30) of the Classes will be needed.
- (3) A certificate reporting the decision of the Presbytery or Classis will be sent to the Stated Clerk immediately after the vote is taken.

We recommend that, in order to afford a reasonable time for study of the Plan of Union and to insure some degree of simultaneity in registering the votes of the Presbyteries and Classes, the General Assembly and General Synod recommend that no votes be taken by the Presbyteries and Classes until January, 1969.

4. If the required number of Presbyteries and Classes approve the Plan of Union, the 1969 General Assembly and General Synod will make the final decision. If the Plan of Union is adopted, the following procedures will assist the transition of the two denominations into one united Church:

- (1) In accord with Article 5 of the Covenants of Agreement the offices of the General Assembly and the General Synod will be continued until 1971 under the supervision of the special Committee on General Assembly Operation, one-half to be named by the General Synod Executive Committee and one-half to be named by the General Assembly Committee on Assembly Operation.
- (2) In accord with Article 14 of the Covenants of Agreement the General Assembly and General Synod will each appoint twelve members to the Transitional Commission on Organization.
- (3) In accord with Article 12 of the Covenants of Agreement the General Assembly and General Synod will each appoint six members to the Committee to Undertake the Formation of a New Confession.

We recommend that if the Plan of Union is approved by both General Assembly and General Synod in 1969 that the Consummation of the Union take place at a meeting of the New General Assembly of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in America in 1970.

5. We further recommend that the Joint Committee of Twenty-Four be continued until the next meeting of the General Assembly and the General Synod to be available to the churches for guidance, counsel, and interpretation of the Plan of Union, and to offer whatever materials may be helpful to the Presbyteries and Classes as they prepare to make their decisions.

Contending for the Faith

THE DOCTRINE OF SIN

The Second Period— 250-730 A.D.

The Pelagian Controversy

The Augustinian System

H. Veldman

Toward the conclusion of our preceding article, we had begun to call attention to Augustine's conception or doctrine of God's redeeming grace. We noted that this church father's conception of grace was so completely different from that of Pelagius. He had experienced personally this power of the living God. That Augustine, as guided by the Holy Scriptures, makes the proper distinction between deism and pantheism is expressed very clearly in the following quotation from his Confessions, as quoted by Schaff:

How shall I call on my God, on my God and Lord? Into myself must I call Him, if I call on Him; and what place is there in me, where my God may enter into me, the God, who created heaven and earth? O Lord my God, is there anything in me, that contains Thee? Do heaven and earth contain Thee, which Thou hast created, in which Thou didst create me? Or does all that is, contain Thee, because without Thee there had existed nothing that is? Because then I also am, do I supplicate Thee, that Thou wouldst come into me, I, who had not in any wise been, if Thou wert not in me? I yet live, I do not yet sink into the lower world, and yet Thou art there. If I made my bed in hell, behold, Thou are there. I were not, then, O my God, I utterly were not, if Thou wert not in me. Yea, still more, I were not, O my God, if I were not in Thee, from whom all, in whom all, through whom all is. Even so, Lord, even so.

The above quotation shows conclusively that, in the soul of Augustine, man is nothing without God, and everything in and through God. The consciousness that he lived, moved and had his being in God thrilled this

church father. Augustine was so theocentric in his views and conceptions! To know the Lord was surely everlasting life to him. And it is certainly true that the undercurrent of this sentiment could not carry this father onward to all the views he developed in opposition to the Pelagian heresy. He himself had learned to know by experience the power of the grace of God and what it means to have the love of that alone blessed God poured out into his heart. And he had also learned to know, personally, the folly of the Pelagian heresy.

Schaff compares Pelagianism with the Augustinian conception of grace as follows, in Vol. III, 844:

While Pelagius widened the idea of grace to indefiniteness, and reduced it to a medley of natural gifts, law, gospel, forgiveness of sin, enlightenment, and example, Augustine restricted grace to the specifically Christian sphere (and, therefore, called it *gratia Christi*), though admitting its operation previous to Christ among the saints of the Jewish dispensation; but within this sphere he gave it incomparably greater depth. (what Schaff says here of Pelagianism is so true also of Arminianism—H.V.) With him grace is, first of all, a creative power of God in Christ transforming men *from within*. It produces first the negative effect of forgiveness of sins, removing the hindrance to communion with God; then the positive communication of a new principle of life.

Following upon this, Schaff sets forth Augustine's view of justification and grace as follows, calling attention to the fact that Augustine stands on essentially Evangelical ground:

The two are combined in the idea of justification, which, as we have already remarked, Augustine holds, not in the Protestant sense of *declaring righteous* once for all, but in the Catholic sense of gradually *making* righteous; thus substantially identifying it with sanctification. Yet, as he refers this whole process to divine grace, to the exclusion of all human merit, he stands on essentially Evangelical ground. As we inherit from the first Adam our sinful and mortal life, so the second Adam implants in us, from God, and in God, the germ of a sinless and immortal life. Positive grace operates, therefore, not merely from without upon our intelligence by instruction and admonition, as Pelagius taught, but also in the centre of our personality, imparting to the will the power to do the good which the instruction teaches, and to imitate the example of Christ. Hence he frequently calls it the inspiration of a good will, or of love, which is the fulfilling of the law. "Him that wills not, grace comes to meet, that he may will; him that wills, she follows up, that he may not will in vain." Faith itself is an effect of grace; indeed, its first and fundamental effect, which provides for all others, and manifests itself in love. He had formerly held faith to be a work of man (as, in fact, though not exclusively, the *capacity* of faith, or *receptivity* for the divine, may be said to be); but he was afterwards led, particularly by the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 4:7: "What hast thou, that thou hast not received?" to change his view. In a word, grace is the breath and blood of the new man; from it proceeds all that is truly good and divine, and without it we can do nothing acceptable to God.

From this fundamental conception of grace, according to Schaff, arise the several properties which Augustine ascribes to it in opposition to Pelagius:

First, it is *absolutely necessary* to Christian virtue; not merely auxiliary, but indispensable, to its existence. It is necessary "for every good act, for every good thought, for every good word of man at every moment." Without it the Christian life can neither begin, proceed, nor be consummated. It was necessary even under the old dispensation, which continued the gospel in the form of promise. The saints before Christ lived of His grace by anticipation. "They stood," says Augustine, "not under the terrifying, convicting, punishing law, but under that grace which fills the heart with joy in what is good, which heals it, and makes it free."

It is, moreover, *unmerited*. *Gratia* would be no *gratia* if it were not *gratuita*, *gratis data*. As man without grace can do nothing good, he is, of course, incapable of *deserving* grace; for, to deserve grace, he must do something good. "What merits could we have, while as yet we did not love God? That the love with which we should love might be created, we have been loved, while as yet we had not that love. Never should we have found strength to love, except as we received such a love from Him who had loved us before, and because He had loved us before. And, without such a love, what good could we do? Or, how could we not do good, with such a love?" "The Holy Spirit breathes where He will, and does not follow merits, but Himself

produces the merits! Grace, therefore, is not bestowed on man *because* he already believes, but *that* he *may* believe; not *because* he has deserved it by good works, but *that* he may deserve good works." (how sound are these quotations from Augustine!—H.V.) Pelagius reverses the natural relation by making the cause the effect, and the effect the cause. The ground of our salvation can only be found in God Himself, if He is to remain immutable. Augustine appeals to examples of pardoned sinners, "where not only no good deserts, but even evil deserts, had preceded." Thus the apostle Paul, "averse to the faith, which he wasted, and vehemently inflamed against it, was suddenly converted to that faith by the prevailing power of grace, and that in such wise that he was changed not only from enemy to a friend, but from a persecutor to a sufferer of persecution for the sake of the faith he had once destroyed. For to him it was given by Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." He also points to children, who without will, and therefore without voluntary merit preceding, are through holy baptism incorporated in the kingdom of grace. His own experience, finally, afforded him an argument, to him irrefutable, for the free, undeserved compassion of God (indeed, how weighty is this argument, namely, the work of God's grace in the hearts of infants, in support of the doctrine of God's almighty and sovereign grace—H.V.). And if in other passages he speaks of merits, he means good works which the Holy Ghost effects in man, and which God graciously rewards, so that eternal life is grace for grace. "If all thy merits are gifts of God, God crowns thy merits not as thy merits, but as the gifts of His grace."

Grace is *irresistible* in its effect; not, indeed, in the way of physical constraint imposed on the will, but as a moral power, which makes man willing, and which infallibly attains its end, the conversion and final perfection of its subjects. This point is closely connected with Augustine's whole doctrine of predestination, and consistently leads to it or follows from it. Hence the Pelagians repeatedly raised the charge that Augustine, under the name of grace, introduced a certain fatalism. But the irresistibility must manifestly not be extended to *all* the influences of grace; for the Bible often speaks of grieving, quenching, lying to, and blaspheming the Holy Ghost, and so implies that grace may be resisted; and it presents many living examples of such resistance. It cannot be denied, that Saul, Ananias, Solomon, and Sapphira, and even the traitor Judas, were under the influence of divine grace, and repelled it. Augustine, therefore, must make irresistibly grace identical with the specific grace of regeneration to the *elect*, which at the same time imparts the *donum perseverantiae*, the gift of perseverance.

A few remarks in connection with the above paragraph are certainly in order. In the first place, when Schaff declares in the above quotation that the grace of God may be resisted, I am sure that he is expressing in these words his own personal opinion. To say that the irresistibility of God's grace is not to be extended to

all the influences of God's grace, that even the traitor was under the influence of divine grace, as evidently meant by Schaff, is surely in conflict with the very plain and lucid language of the Word of God. Does the fact that Ananias and Sapphira lied against the Holy Spirit imply that the Holy Spirit was in them and attempted to lead them in the way of truth and life? Of course not! The Holy Spirit was in Peter, and, lying before the apostle, they therefore lied against the Holy Spirit. Was Judas under the influence of Divine grace? But do not the Scriptures teach that Christ selected him to be one of the twelve exactly in order that he might fulfill that which had been prophesied of him, as in Ps. 41, and stated in John 13:18-19? Secondly, it is certainly true that Augustine championed the truth of God's sovereign

predestination. This doctrine must follow from the doctrine of the irresistible character of God's grace. If we maintain the one, we must maintain the other. If we are dead in sins and in trespasses, then it is certainly true that we can do nothing toward our own salvation. And if the Lord must begin the work of salvation in us, then it must follow that He begins that work of salvation where He wills. Then it must follow that He is never determined by the will of the sinner. Then He is determined exclusively by His own will, and this must imply that truth of God's sovereign predestination, that He does not save who will to be saved but whom He wills to save. Augustine's doctrine of man's utter corruption and God's sovereign predestination are inseparably connected.

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ANNIVERSARY

On August 9, 1968 our beloved parents,

MR. AND MRS. RICHARD DEPPE

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

Their children:

Mr. and Mrs. Gerard Deppe
Mr. and Mrs. Frank Deppe
Mr. and Mrs. John Wigger
Dr. and Mrs. Glenn Van Dommelen
Mr. and Mrs. Walter Sellers
Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Rotman
Mr. and Mrs. Jack Deppe
Mr. and Mrs. Gary Vander Schaer
Mr. and Mrs. John Deppe
Mr. and Mrs. Dick Deppe
33 grandchildren

50th ANNIVERSARY

With heart-filled gratitude to our faithful covenant God, we plan, D.V., to commemorate the fiftieth wedding anniversary of our beloved parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Dykstra, Sr., on August 15, 1968. Many days have they walked the path of their pilgrimage here below as strangers journeying to a far country. We received their instruction and confess with them: "hitherto hath the Lord helped us." I. Samuel 7:12.

Their grateful Children,
Grandchildren and Great
Grandchildren.

News From Our Churches

July 16, 1968

Loveland's pastor, Rev. D. Engelsma, has declined the call which he had received from South Holland, Illinois.

Our church in Hull, Iowa has extended a call to Rev. G. Lubbers, of our Southwest Church in Grand Rapids.

Candidate R. Moore is at this writing considering two calls, one from Isabel and the other from Forbes, in the Dakotas.

* * *

Rev. G. Vos, emeritus minister of Hudsonville, suffered injuries in a car-truck collision in that village June 21, and was taken to Zeeland Hospital, where it was learned that he suffered some fractured ribs and a punctured lung, besides other injuries of a more superficial nature. Rev. Vos was later transferred to Blodgett Hospital in Grand Rapids, where his lung injury might receive proper attention. The brother was released from the hospital July 13 to recuperate in the atmosphere of home and family. Mrs. Vos continues to suffer much pain in her extreme arthritic condition. We commend this aged couple to the love and care of our sympathetic High Priest for succor in time of need.

* * *

The Jamaican Clothing drive provided Southeast's Diaconate with enough material to make up twenty-nine good-sized bales. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Matt. 25:40.

* * *

The summer bulletins are meager news reporters. The extra activities of the congregations have come to an abrupt halt as they reached their seasonal close. It is possible that we could profitably take a leaf out of the activity book of our Baptist friends and hold a mid-week Bible Study meeting for the benefit of those who can hardly wait a whole week for spiritual "re-fueling."

* * *

Hudsonville's consistory has considered the plight of the deacons' families and has decided to allow the fathers to take their places in the auditorium with their families of small children. Another innovation introduced this summer is the practice of partaking of the elements of Holy Communion in unison.

* * *

The Hope School Board thankfully announced that their financial drive netted almost \$7,000.00 in cash and pledges.

* * *

Rev. Woudenberg's "Studies in Biblical Doctrines" are finding their way to the river boats that engage in warfare in Viet Nam. A certain John Bouma, whose home is in Bellaire, Texas, wrote from Viet Nam telling of his appreciation of those sheets while serving in river

warfare as a Naval Reservist. And, a man wrote from Paw Paw, W. Va. to express his joy that his family is being helped to a better understanding of the Scriptures through the copies he receives. The U.S. Mails will deliver those valuable sheets to anyone whose name you would like to add to Rev. Woudenberg's mailing list. Just ask him.

* * *

Some young couples of First Church in Grand Rapids are sponsoring a once-a-month discussion group which meets after the evening service in the church. The first meeting was held in June, and it was a real success, with about eighty people of all ages participating. The group was split into four smaller units, each with a chairman to guide the discussion. June's topic was the church's relation to the race question and the civil rights movements in the neighborhoods. The topic under discussion in the July meeting was "Local Mission Work," another timely subject well worth an evening's time. The subject chosen for August is "Prayer."

* * *

Our Seminary will be a much busier place this Fall. At least six young men will join seminarian Rodney Miersma in many of his classes as they receive pre-seminary training for the next three years. A five-year plan has been tentatively set up which is intended to provide us with ministers who have had all their training from High School forward under Protestant Reformed instructors. A more complete report of our Seminary has been scheduled to appear in one of the Fall issues of the *Standard Bearer*.

* * *

As a result of a synodical decision, Rev. and Mrs. Heys, of Holland, Mich., and Mr. and Mrs. T. Feenstra, of Redlands, Calif., have been sent to Jamaica for a two-month tour of labor. Rev. Heys is expected to instruct the ministers and elders, and Mr. Feenstra's contribution to the work will be that of giving advice and assistance to our Jamaican friends' project of providing church buildings which will meet with government approval. And if the calling church is unsuccessful in obtaining a missionary for the Island, the consistories will be asked to release their ministers for periods of six months in order to give continuity to the work we have begun there.

* * *

A filler in Southeast's summertime bulletin printed the following "Quiet Thought": "Would you approve of discontinuing our Sunday evening service? You say, 'Of course not!' But have you ever realized that your willful absence is a vote to discontinue it?" That was a "quiet thought" which spoke quite loudly!

* * *

... see you in church,

J.M.F.