

The Standard Bearer

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THE STANDARD BEARER

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MEDITATION—

Wrestling With God

by Rev. J. Kortering

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him...And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me...And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.
Gen. 32:24-30

And Jacob was left alone.
There wrestled a man with him.
And he blessed him there.

This is God's system of pedagogy: alone, wrestling, blessed!

Have you been to this school lately? If you have, you understand what it means to see God face to face and have your life preserved. From an outward, natural point of view these are frightening moments. It is the most terrifying experience for the child of God

to be left alone and to wrestle with God.

A dark corridor leads to the arena of this wrestling match:

Sleepless nights when the conscience is seared with pangs of guilt over sins committed.

Long, lonely hours when the stillness of the night is broken by the groans and sighs of the suffering.

Hot tears of anguish that flow from a soul that throbs with the sorrows of death.

Ears bruised with the deafening roar of battle followed by a stillness that is smeared with blood.

Anxious souls cut deeply by the barbs of strife, disappointments, unfulfilled ambitions, lost friends, and seemingly total failure.

Indeed, it is a dark corridor that leads to the wrestling match.

It was that way for Jacob too.

Listen to him as he enters this corridor, "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac....I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant.... Deliver me, I pray thee!"

We would almost pity poor Jacob, he appears broken, torn by inner strife, all things seem to be against him. He has just become two bands. He had feared the worse, it seemed as if defeat was imminent, Esau was coming and that with 400 men!

It was only 20 years before that Jacob had contrived with his mother Rebekah to obtain the birthright blessing from his blind father Isaac. Having the goats hair tied to his arms and neck, while he carried in his hands the savory meat of the freshly prepared morsel of meat, he had bowed before his father and exultingly said, "I am Esau, thy first born, bless me!" The consequences of this brought Jacob to the lonely crags of Bethel, where God came to the sole wayfarer and assured him that He would be with him and bring him back to the land of Canaan. Encouraged by the sight of the angels and promise of Jehovah, Jacob pressed on to Padanaram. There he stayed for twenty years, fourteen of which were spent as payment for Leah and Rachel and the remaining six for wages. Called by God to return, Jacob loaded his possessions on the beasts of burden and took with him his two wives and two concubines who together bore him twelve sons and one daughter. With his servants, they managed to guide the caravan southward to Canaan.

But Jacob became concerned. One question leaped irrepressibly before his consciousness, Esau, what about him? Had the passing of time dulled the keen edge of bitter revenge? Would he yet carry out his threat to kill Jacob? There was one way to be sure. Jacob sent a delegation of servants to inform Esau that he need not be afraid, for Jacob's return to Canaan would pose no threat to Esau's security. Even though Jacob had secured the birthright blessing, he was not coming now to take from Esau his possessions or claim them as his own. He wanted Esau to know that he had plenty of his own.

The report came back, "Esau is coming, and that with 400 men!"

Jacob fell on his knees. To God he directed his prayer. He poured out the anguish of his soul, for he was "greatly afraid and distressed." The corridor that led to the arena was indeed dark.

We ask, why was the chromatic hue so black?

In the deepest sense his problem was spiritual. God had promised him a safe return. The covenant God, the God of his father and grandfather had said, I will deal well with thee, I will surely do thee good and make thy seed as the sand of the sea.

Here comes Esau with a band of soldiers! What more can he expect but to be exterminated by the flash of the sword? He could already hear the insane shriek of soldiers satiating their thirst for blood by plunging their swords into his wives and children. How would God reckon this with His promise? What of the covenant? What of the cause of the church?

"O God of my father Abraham...I am not worthy... deliver me!"

You have had the same kind of problem very often, haven't you? The night seems so black, the cause of Christ seems so helpless that it appears hopeless. Sometimes the corridor is very long and it is always black. From our human point of view it seems as if our personal faith is about to be jeopardized, or the covenant of God seems to be brought to nought in our families, or the forces of evil seem to swoop down upon the church and are about to destroy it. Our struggle is like Jacob's, how will God allow this, the God of our fathers, the covenant God who has promised that there shall be found faith upon the earth when our Lord Jesus Christ returns.

The dark corridor leads to the arena. God answers our plaintive cry.

A man began to wrestle with Jacob.

It is not important whether Jacob thought this man was Esau or not. The fact remains that out of the dark a man came forward and began to fight with Jacob. Jacob had separated his present for Esau and instructed his servants to tell Esau they were for him. These in turn were followed by the droves of animals and at the end of the procession was his beloved Rachel. He alone remained on the northern shore of the Jabbok. Suddenly out of the darkness this man grabbed him. We must not blame Jacob for having hallucinations brought on by an anxiety syndrome. Neither is the presence of this man simply a visionary encounter. A real man with flesh and blood grabbed Jacob and engaged in an actual physical encounter.

They fought until daybreak and neither prevailed. It is not so, that one was a great deal stronger than the other and thus arose unscathed above his prostrate victim. Both had sweated and strained, but none had won.

At daybreak a change came.

The man touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh.

It left him a cripple.

It brought a change. Jacob forsook fighting with his fists, he fell to his knees and clinging to the man cried out, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me!"

Christ drew Jacob into the arena. The answer to

his urgent prayer came in the form of this wrestling match. God was teaching Jacob deep spiritual lessons which we also must learn through wrestling with God.

When the man touched his thigh, Jacob's heart was touched. It was then that he saw that he fought not against flesh and blood, but "God face to face" and that in human flesh which is Jesus Christ. Christ of the Old Testament came to Jacob. He has the answer to spiritual problems.

And what was that answer?

Jacob had relied upon his own fallible human strength. Like an adder striking its victim he had turned upon his fainting brother, "Sell me thy birthright and I will give thee of the pottage." Plotting through mean deception he had wrested the birthright from the lips of his blind father. Provoked by the capricious ways of his Uncle Laban, he refused to be content with Leah whom God had thrust into his bosom, but he bargained for Rachel besides. Wantingly he stooped to the gutter with his reeds in order that his livestock might abound. Ah, indeed, this is Jacob with all his clever schemes.

What did it accomplish? Esau is coming and that with 400 men. He had fought, but did not prevail.

The arm of flesh can never accomplish victory in the battle of faith. Jacob had to become a cripple before he could properly face Esau. We have to see this for ourselves as well.

The long dark corridor brings one to the encounter with God. Stripped of all human vanity, we are brought by Christ to see the true perspective of the battle of faith. How shall we be preserved? How shall the only covenant God of heaven and earth realize His covenant?

Not by human strength, not by God being dependent upon man, not through clever stratagems or compromise.

The touch of Christ brought Jacob to his knees and instead of fighting Him, he threw his arms around Him and would not let Him go. In that humble posture he cried out, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me."

Let's learn this lesson with Jacob. Drawn into this arena with him we wrestle with God. By the touch of His grace in our hearts we come to see ourselves as nothing. By nature we fight against Christ. Our great ideas and aspirations are so wrong. What we think is the only way by which our lives can be useful in God's

sight, is frequently wrong. Our ideas of how the church should operate and what God should do in and thru His church, are so often foolish. Whatever is of man, of the flesh, is against Christ. We must be stripped in the arena, we must see ourselves as nothing and unworthy before God. The arm of flesh cannot gain the victory.

There is only one way, we must cling to Christ! We must learn to take our problems to God in prayer through Jesus Christ. We must open the Scriptures and find the answer to our problems there. Even as Jacob, we cry to God in the name of Christ, "Bless me." Forgiveness, strength, courage, and wisdom flow from the throne of grace through our Lord Jesus Christ.

"And he blessed him there."

What is thy name? Jacob. Thy name shall be called no more Jacob but Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with God and man and hast prevailed.

Jacob — supplanter.

Now, Israel — conqueror.

The encounter with Christ produces a marvelous change. Indeed, "He halted upon his thigh." He wasn't in much shape to face Esau and his 400 men from a physical point of view, yet by faith he faced him and God brought him safely to Bethel where he fulfilled his vow.

Pupils that are drawn into God's school learn this precious lesson. The cry, "Deliver me" is answered, "Israel — Power with God!"

Let's turn away from the frail arm of flesh.

Let's cling by faith to Jesus Christ and cry out, "Bless me."

By this strength we too are able to face life and prevail. No matter how great the trial, no matter how dark the corridor, no matter how strong the enemies appear, this we know, God has promised to be our God and the God of our children. He hears our every cry and will surely give us the final victory in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nothing shall separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord. This is blessed indeed.

May God touch our hearts so that we cling to Christ.

Then the peace of victory is ours. God is faithful.

EDITORIALS—

Editor's Notes

by Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

From several correspondents I have received reminders that in the new law concerning Social Security coverage of clergymen there is also an exemption provision. I was aware of this at the time I wrote my editorial on the subject, but the available information

on this was so scanty that I elected to wait until I could gain more complete information. As yet I do not have much more information, but I will continue trying to obtain it. At the moment, the following will have to suffice: 1) "For taxable years ending after December

1967, income from the ministry will be covered unless the clergyman files an application for exemption and a statement that he is opposed to receiving social security benefits (or other public insurance), based on services as a clergyman, by reason of religious principle or conscience." (Quoted from a bulletin received from Congressman Gerald R. Ford)

2) It is not yet clear what would constitute a legitimate ground for exemption. There is some question, for example, whether Article 13 of the Church Order, which makes it the duty of the churches to "provide honorably for them (retired ministers) in their need," would be legitimate ground. Investigation is being made on this score.

3) In case exemption is not possible, the following information is also pertinent: a) For purposes of Social Security, rental allowances or the rental value of a parsonage must also be included under earnings. b) The rate for self-employed people (under which clergymen are included) is 6.4 per cent for 1967-68, and 6.9 per cent for 1969-70; and this rate is supposed to increase gradually until 1987 to 7.9 per cent.

4) I have also been told that there is still ample time to file an application for exemption should such be legitimate.

* * *

For the time being, at least, the department "The Church At Worship" will not be appearing in our magazine, due to a resignation-with-immediate-effect by contributing editor Rev. G. Vanden Berg. Disappointment over this resignation does not preclude our expression of thanks for the many faithful labors of the brother in behalf of our *Standard Bearer*.

* * *

We welcome as a special feature in this issue the

text of a recent address by Rev. J. A. Heys at a Young People's Mass Meeting. Perhaps it is superfluous to add that we did not intentionally "scoop" *Beacon Lights* on this. The author graciously offered this article for publication in the *Standard Bearer*, and we publish it on the assumption that both young and old may indeed benefit from it.

* * *

Beginning in this issue under the department "Pages From The Past" there will appear my translation of a very valuable Dutch brochure by the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema entitled, "De Geloovigen en Hun Zaad," ("Believers And Their Seed"). This brochure, though somewhat "dated" and though, as might be expected, also polemical, offers a clear exposition of the entire concept of the covenant and of the place of the children of believers in the covenant. We hope that many readers who can no longer read Dutch will benefit from this translation of a booklet which has already gone through two editions in the Dutch language. With the exception of the addition of chapter headings, and certain changes necessary to the production of smooth but accurate translation, the material is presented unchanged. I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness in this translation to an earlier manuscript-translation of the Rev. G. Lubbers, from which I gained much valuable assistance.

* * *

Though a bit later than originally planned, my pamphlet entitled "A Testimony and Appeal concerning the 'Dekker Case' Decisions of the Christian Reformed Synod of 1967" has now come from the press. Copies may be obtained by writing to Rev. M. Schipper, 1543 Cambridge Ave., S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506.

Our Most Basic Immediate Need

by Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

If anyone were to ask me what is the biggest need and the biggest problem which our churches face and which our coming synod will face, I would reply without a second's hesitation: *our severe man-power shortage*.

Understand, I do not speak of this man-power shortage in the carnal sense. I cannot join in the raucous cry for men that has frequently been raised in the church, as though the cause of God's church is dependent upon men and upon mere numbers of men, and as though possibly men may go lost through the church's failure to send forth sufficient laborers into the fields. Nor, in fact, do I wish this editorial to be understood as a mere plea for *men*. Perhaps it might be better to speak in this connection of the shortage of *servant-power*. For, certainly, what we need is not mere men, but *men of God*, dedicated, faithful, hard-working, well-trained, well-equipped *servants of the*

Lord. Nor am I unmindful of the fact that there is but One Who can (and Who will, I am confident) supply our need: on the contrary, this is the basic premise of my essay, and let it not be forgotten that this need will be supplied only in the way of unceasing prayer. At the same time, let it not be forgotten that the Lord our God never treats His people and His church as stocks and blocks. He uses means. The Lord is not going to drop ministers into our midst suspended from parachutes. He will raise them up from among us, call them out of the bosom of the churches, cause our churches and our homes to beget them and bring them up and train them.

For this reason I write these lines, not only to lay these matters before the brethren who will be delegates to our coming synod, but to lay them before the churches and our people.

For I am of the conviction that this is indeed our largest problem, that, in fact, it will loom up to trouble our synod at more than one point in its deliberations. I hesitate to use the word "emergency," for I am inclined to shy away from emergency-psychology. But let me then use the word "urgent." For I am convinced that we must take this problem very seriously, probably more seriously than we have taken it heretofore. And we must, by the grace of God and in the confidence of our calling as churches, attempt more concretely to solve it.

For the labors of our churches must go on. They must not only go on, but they must increase. I am as convinced of this as I am convinced that our Protestant Reformed Churches hold the truth of God's Word, the heritage once delivered unto the saints, purely. I am as certain of this as I am certain that our churches by the grace of God represent the purest manifestation of Christ's church in the midst of the world. I am as concerned about this as I am aware that on every hand today the church is departing rapidly, almost pell-mell, from the paths of God's Word, and that therefore we as churches have the calling to "blow the trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm." And I am in as dead earnest about this as I am impressed by the testimony of the signs of the times that the time is short, and that we must labor while it is day, before the night comes in which no man can work. There is much to be done. There may well be less time to labor than many of us imagine. And the laborers are but few.

THE PROBLEM

Permit me to point up the problem.

First of all, there is Jamaica.

The situation, I think, is obvious. Anyone in our Mission Board and anyone who has followed the periodic reports of our Jamaica work must be painfully aware of it. Several years ago already the Lord began to open a door for us on that island of the sea. Our churches responded, not only officially but organically. I think it cannot be gainsaid that our people have "had a heart" for the work in Jamaica, and rightly so. To the best of our limited ability our churches have labored there. From time to time men have been sent there for brief periods and have labored intensively while there. Moreover, even when it was impossible to have laborers on the island, the work has been continued through correspondence and through literature and through tapes, and especially during the last two years through the correspondence courses prepared by Revs. Heys and C. Hanko. And also with respect to the work of benevolence and the problem of the Jamaicans' places of worship, our churches have made valiant attempts to be of assistance. But what is sorely needed is men who can labor at length and on the spot, men who for an extended period can devote all their time and labors to the work there. There is great need of preaching and instruction among the people at large. There is an extremely pressing need for instruction of the Jamaican ministers, something which cannot prop-

erly be accomplished only by correspondence courses. There is obvious need of consolidation and organization. There is need for guidance and assistance, not only money-wise but in the actual work of planning and construction, with respect to their building needs. There is need for systematization and guidance with respect to the work of benevolence among our Jamaican brethren and sisters.

All of this points to one thing: we need men on the island of Jamaica, men from our churches, and soon.

Certainly, our aim is that the churches in Jamaica shall be independent. They shall lead their own ecclesiastical life and govern their own ecclesiastical affairs. They shall be the Protestant Reformed Churches of Jamaica. And this means ultimately, of course, that they shall, so to speak, be self-sustaining as far as their ministry is concerned. Their ministers must come from their own midst. But this is *ultimate*. I am speaking of the immediate need. Then I say that we have the aim that these churches shall be *Protestant Reformed*. This we must take seriously, and certainly not in the sense that we have this Jamaica-project and support it out of a certain vain-glory, so that we can boast perhaps that we have an exotic mission program. And from all that I have heard and read of the Jamaica-work there is from that point of view a sore need, a crying need, for good, sound, thorough, patient instruction in the truth, the same truth that is so dear to us, before the Jamaican churches will be ready to exist indigenously. This is the most important and immediate need. And this says nothing yet about the guidance that is necessary with respect to the material needs of the people there, a guidance which can hardly be efficiently accomplished from Grand Rapids.

This phase of the problem I would sum up by suggesting that we need a minimum of two, perhaps three, men who can take up residence in Jamaica for a long time. We need at least one missionary-minister who will preach to and instruct the people, but who will concentrate especially on instructing the Jamaican ministers. We need either another missionary-minister who will co-labor with him; or as a temporary measure we need an elder who will assist the missionary. Possibly the latter could also labor with respect to the material needs and problems of the churches there. But perhaps it would be better if we could send a lay-volunteer for a comparatively long period, — a man knowledgeable in building and construction and a man capable in business affairs.

Secondly, there is our mission program, — no, let me say: our mission calling, — here at home. It is well-known that for some years now we have been without a home missionary. But for one thing, the statement still stands in the Preamble of the Constitution of The Mission Committee, "However, we are convinced that our present duty lies primarily in the field of church extension and church reformation." This is the position of our churches. And I believe that this position is correct. Sometimes it is suggested that the prospects for this home mission work are poor, that the fruits are meager, that the labor is

well-nigh hopeless, and that therefore it is both impossible and rather useless to call a home missionary. I disagree. First of all, I would emphasize that we must not take a utilitarian approach to the work. Our calling is like that of the prophets of old: to proclaim God's Word "whether they hear or whether they forbear." In the second place, I point to the fact that in recent years we have not put forth a consistent and prolonged effort in this direction, for the simple reason that we have had no home missionary. Our labors have been rather sporadic. This lack of a missionary has also been a deterrent in carrying out to any large degree the plans which were prepared and adopted by our synod a few years ago. In the third place, I may point to the fact that there have been in recent years in connection with the labors that have been put forth, both officially and unofficially, increasing signs of interest in some areas and increasing signs that there are those who look toward our churches to carry the banner of the Reformed faith in this day of apostasy. Frankly, I do not look for any large and far-reaching reformation in our times; I am inclined to think that the times are too late for that. Nor do I labor under the illusion that we can go out and perform home mission work as in former years and perhaps organize churches rapidly. The situation is different; the labor must needs be different. It will probably have to be slow, very patient, plodding labor; and frequently it will be discouraging because of apparent meager fruits. In the fourth place, as to a field, I would remark that possibly the field is there but we do not have our eyes open to it, at least not sufficiently. No, I may not be able to point to specific fields of labor, although the call from specific areas may yet come before we even have a missionary in the field. But is it not possible that the Lord is pointing us to an open door exactly in the reality of the widespread and appalling apostasy of our day, an apostasy that is more and more leaving our little denomination as lonely witnesses of the truth of God's Word? When you take stock of that apostasy, and when you take stock of the fact that such apostasy is increasingly smiting as a dread blight churches close to our own as well as those more distant, and when you consider the fact that there must be in many places a remnant, be it a small remnant, who love the Reformed faith and who are grieved and pine away in their souls because of the rapid and wanton departure from the faith, do you not earnestly long that our churches would have the men and the means to go with a zeal to let our witness to the Reformed faith of our fathers, the precious God-given heritage that is ours, be spread far and wide, yea, be shouted from the housetops? Do you not feel Zion's urgent calling to "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins?" Will you not say with the prophet of old, "For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest?" The time is fast coming when the remnant of the faithful people of God must huddle together, not in any spirit of broad ecumenism, but as those of like precious faith, as those who

love and hold fast to the faith of the gospel, in the face of a common and powerful enemy, the antichristian church! And I am of the conviction that we as churches must sound the alarm and call them out and help them to find safe ecclesiastical shelter. It may be discouraging and difficult labor indeed. But since when has the Lord promised His faithful church an easy way in the world? Rise up, and let us labor!

And what shall we say as to the need in this regard? Officially and by ecclesiastical decision, we need *one*, just one, home missionary. Time was when our churches felt that we should send missionaries two and two. This is surely the Scriptural ideal. Personally, I have no doubt that right now two men could be kept more than busy in the home mission labors of our churches. But let us leave it at the minimum for the present: just one!

In the third place, there is the situation in the home churches. There are, first of all, our several vacant churches. Not only are those churches aware of the need most directly; but also both classes can only be painfully aware of this problem, for time and again they must wrestle with the problems of a classical appointment schedule for vacant flocks that are in some cases far distant from neighboring churches. Then there is the very real fact — and the brethren know that I do not write this to shelve them before their time — the very real fact that we have at present five ministers who are in or near their sixties, men, too, who have been through the *sturm und drang* of our previous ecclesiastical history. They have only a few more years to labor, at best; and that is saying nothing about that always real possibility that one of them or one of any of our ministers may suddenly be removed from his labors through sickness or accident. Besides this, there is the fact that our present available man-power must needs be spread very thinly in the manifold labors, both official and unofficial, of our churches. Committee members for standing committees, writers for our *Beacon Lights* and *Standard Bearer*, speakers for our Reformed Witness Hour, speakers for myriad other occasions, writers of Reformed literature, — all these must be always be recruited from thin ranks, which means that their available energies must in turn be distributed among many necessary labors.

All this I write not to complain; for there is no reason to complain. Nor do I write it in a spirit of pessimism. For such pessimism, I believe, is wrong. I write it so that we may all consider the problem, and so that our churches may see the very urgent need that will face our synod at many a turn in its deliberations. They will think and probably say more than once: "If only we had more men..."

For the situation is this, that right now, only in order to meet our immediate needs, we could use a half dozen faithful laborers. And in the very near future, even before a new recruit could complete 4 years of college and 3 years of seminary, we could well need a dozen men only to meet current needs, let alone new ones.

(to be continued)

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES—

Abner's Death

by Rev. B. Woudenberg

*And the king lamented over Abner, and said, Died Abner as a fool dieth?
Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked
men, so fallest thou. And all the people wept again over him. II Samuel 3:33, 34*

For David the making of peace with Abner was a matter of unmitigated joy. Not only had he always had the highest regard for Abner as his own former captain under Saul, but Abner had brought to him again his first wife Michal, and there was now the promise of bringing all of Israel together under his rule without any further bloodshed or war. With all sincerity David had greeted Abner in Hebron, had feasted him and his companions with a royal feast, and had sent them again upon their way in peace. The only thing that David had failed to consider was Joab, the captain of his own army in the field.

At the time that all of these negotiations had been going on between Abner and David, Joab had indeed been out in the fields pursuing the troops of Israel's enemies. It had been a highly successful foray, and Joab had returned with high spirits and a great amount of spoil. But then he was told about Abner. With shocked incredulity, he could hardly believe it when it was said to him, "Abner the son of Ner came to the king and he hath sent him away, and he is gone in peace."

Joab was a man of quite different cut than was David. Although both of them were great soldiers and men of war, that was the extent of their similarities. Beyond that there was only difference.

Joab was by every measure the professional soldier, and cold, calculated logic was the strength upon which he thrived. To him everything stood out in clear contrast, white against black, good against bad, friend against enemy: there was no in between. To him life was a very simple matter of determining who the enemy was and moving against him with all of the strength that one could muster. It was the singular code of his existence, and it made him extremely effective as a warrior and a general. Once he had marked a man or a force as his enemy, he set out to destroy him or them with cool precision, unhampered by any personal feelings or reservations. Emotional hesitancy or indecision had no place in his way of thinking.

In a person of this kind, there was something that moved David to a feeling of awe and admiration, and this was true especially in Joab. It was, perhaps,

because in the final analysis he could not himself always be so coolly calculated and logical, with the result that he often felt himself to be less decisive and effective. It was not, of course, that on the battlefield he could not be fully as courageous as a man like Joab and as effective a tactician. There the enemy was clearly drawn and David could not be excelled. Neither was it that, when David stood before an instance of moral wrong and wickedness, he could not be completely final and unwavering in his judgment. It was just that besides this all and through this all, he, David, always remained so completely a man, warm in all of his feelings and kind in all of his sympathies. This was true so especially when it came to his brethren after the flesh, his fellow members in their chosen nation. In their sorrows, he grieved with them; in their burdens, he longed to help them; in their weaknesses and temptations and guilts, he could not forget that he was a sinner like them. One thing in life was finally always much more compelling to David than personal conquest and victory, that was the deep spiritual desire to show in his life the spiritual virtues of kindness, love and forgiveness. To him always more important than any other consideration was the glory of his God and the welfare of God's people. It was because of this that David was finally a much greater person and much more really a leader than a man like Joab ever could be. And yet, in the tenderness of his sympathy and understanding, David oft times found himself hesitant and indecisive. Those were the days when he found himself looking upon the cool, decisive logic of Joab with a feeling of almost jealous admiration.

This all formed the reason, therefore, that when Abner came to David offering to forget the past and work together with David in the future, David was more than willing to receive him. For him the practice of forgiveness was a very real possibility, especially when it could serve to heal that deep wound that cut through the nation of Israel without further bloodshed or battle. But when Joab heard of it, it was something quite different. To him, Abner was simply and finally the enemy, and that was all there was to it. He was the man who had fought against David and also led others to do it; for this there could be no forgive-

ness, only judgment. Moreover, Joab was able to see something in Abner that David was quite incapable of understanding — he saw in Abner a man cool and calculating, just like he was himself, who never did anything out of mere goodness but only because he was sure that in the end it would work out to his own advantage. And besides, Joab could not forget that Abner was the one who had killed his younger brother, Asahel. But more than anything else, Joab realized that there simply was not room for both himself and Abner in the presence of David. They were too much the same cut and fiber, men who each in his own way had to dominate. And the likelihood was that, if Abner was ever allowed to take a place in the court of David, he would press his advantage of age and of having once been David's own commander until gradually Joab would be supplanted by him as the head of the real power of Israel, the army. It all made the whole situation intolerable. The moment Joab heard what had happened, he was aroused to a pitch of furious indignation. Plunging into the presence of the king, and without gesture of respect or introduction, he demanded, "What hast thou done? behold, Abner came unto thee; why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone? Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest."

The approach of Joab was surely crude and rude and an inexcusable affront to the dignity of a king; but David knew his captain, he had fought often with him by his side and they had slept together in the caves of the earth. He really had not hope, nor even any real desire that Joab would ever greet him with anything but the intimacy of old friends. It only made him feel badly that Joab could never conceive of the possibility that a former enemy might repent and be received again as a friend, particularly when that person was one like Abner who had fought so long and so valiantly for the cause of Israel. Moreover, neither could he, David, consider himself entirely without guilt in the whole matter, for had not he taken his men out of the land of Israel and made friends with Israel's most bitter enemies, the Philistines? Might it not be that this long hesitancy of Abner to recognize David as Israel's true king was merely a reflection on the depth of this, his own offense? But this kind of thinking he knew was foreign to Joab; he would never understand. The best that David could try to do was to assure Joab things would all work out for the best in the end.

Joab, however, was not a man to be put off with such vague hopes and promises. He was a man of action; and, leaving the presence of David, he knew there was no time to be lost. Quickly he called his swiftest and most trusted messenger to hurry after Abner and call him back to Hebron.

No doubt it was an inconvenience, if not an irritation for Abner to be called such a long way back to Hebron. Nevertheless, he knew that for the success of his plans it would be necessary for him to humor, at least for the time being, this young captain of David's army, Joab. Coming back to the city, he found not only Joab

but also his brother Abishai waiting for him at the gate. If the appearance of the two young men standing together reminded him at all of that still younger brother, Asahel, whom he had been forced to dispense with at Gibeon, it was only for a passing moment. Abner was a man of greatest self-confidence, used to being in charge of every situation, and little did he realize how completely this young man Joab was of the same determination. When, therefore, Joab motioned him aside into the privacy of the shadows beside the gate, he had no hesitancy in going. Thus it was that there in the shadows, Joab drew his sword, thrust out, and Abner lay dead beside him.

The shock with which the news of what had happened came to David was almost unbelievable. Here when at long last it seemed that the whole of Israel was going to be brought smoothly and without trouble under his dominion, the whole thing came crashing down about him. Abner, after all, was known to be the leading power in all of the tribes outside of Judah, and here he was dead, slain by the captain of David's own army. How could anyone help blaming David himself for having done it. But, even more than that, there was the utter repugnance of the manner in which this had been brought about by Joab, his captain. Here was falsehood, here was the lie, here was betrayed confidence, here was nothing less than murder and assassination. David's whole nature reacted against it with moral indignation. But what was he to do about it? Justice, of course, demanded that life should be paid for with life and Joab's life should have been required of him. But this was Joab, David's right-hand man, the one who had fought by his side through so many battles, the man who had risked his life in David's behalf repeatedly, David's companion and friend. He simply couldn't do it.

For David there was only one alternative, that was to renounce all personal responsibility for what had happened completely; and so he did. There, publicly in the court, he spoke for all to hear and said, "I and my kingdom are guiltless before the LORD for ever for the blood of Abner the son of Ner: let it rest on the head of Joab, and on all his father's house; and let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper, or that leaneth on a staff, or that falleth on the sword, or that lacketh bread."

Even this was not enough, however; it was necessary that Joab should not go without punishment; and there was one thing that would be almost as severe to him as death itself — that was, the demand of public humiliation and repentance. And so it was this that David required. Calling Joab to him in the presence of all the people, he commanded him together with the people, "Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner." And this time Joab knew there could be no argument. Faithful soldier that he was, he obeyed the king's commandment as contrary as it was to his whole nature.

But even that was not enough. David would also show the personal regard which he had for Abner. Personally he followed the bier of Abner to its grave,

and as he went he wept saying, "Died Abner as a fool dieth? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man, so fellest thou." Neither would he all of that day be comforted, but when they urged food upon him answered, "So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down."

The sincerity of David was beyond question; and the message it brought to the people was as effective as anything Abner could have done for him in life. All of the people united behind him as one person; for it was in his tears more than in his strength that they saw the proof of a true king.

But David himself had begun to feel his great weakness, his helplessness before Joab the son of Zeruiah. It was when he returned to the privacy of his own home to his personal servants that night that he admitted it. To them he said, "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" but then he went on to say in addition, "And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: the LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness."

TRYING THE SPIRITS—

The Obedience of Christ

by Rev. R. C. Harbach

It would not be possible to think of Christ in His death on the cross as having done but one thing for us, namely, to have paid the just penalty of our sin. He did much more than that. If all He had done by His death was nothing more than to pay the penalty due against man's sin, where would man be? He would certainly not be back where Adam was when he was in the state of rectitude where he daily paid God the debt of obedience he owed Him. For Adam had fallen and had brought moral and spiritual ruin upon himself and on all mankind. So that since the fall of man, he has been incapable of any good and prone in all wickedness. Since then he has been unable to render obedience to the law of God. If then he were absolved from the penalty of the law and nothing more, he would still be a sinner before the law, helpless to keep it, never keeping it, but always breaking and dishonoring it. At the same time he would never be called to account for any falling short of God's glory or His law, since he is delivered from its penalty. If that were all Christ did for us in His death, then we would not be saved from our sins, but in our sins. Nor would God be in an honorable position. For His law would not be magnified. Man would be delivered from wrath, but not gifted with eternal life, and in no position to obtain eternal life. For sin must be removed before eternal life can be bestowed. There man would be in no danger of punishment, but would be besmirched with the defiling effects of sin. He would never be cleansed from an "evil conscience." (Heb. 10:22) He would be worse off than Adam ever was. For after the fall, Adam had the sacrifice, the altar, the coats of skins and, so, restored fellowship with God. Adam had lived under the divine demand of perfect obedience, which he personally rendered. But even this perfect obedience of his had no reward such as eternal life pronounced upon it. Adam was a friend and servant of God. A servant only

does what is his duty to do. Fulfilling his duties does not earn him the right to, or qualify him for the reception of, eternal life. That would have to be purely the reward of grace. After the fall, he still lived under the demand of perpetual obedience, only that obedience conceived of now not personally rendered (that no longer being possible), but as representatively fulfilled in and by Christ. Christ was his only hope.

Christ not only had to pay the penalty of Adam's sin and the penalty of all our sins, but He had to bear those sins and take them away—if man was to be left any hope at all. The Lord had not only to pay the penalty of the law, but also to keep the demand of the law. He came into the world to save us from our sins as well as from wrath. That He did by His death, but also by it He purchased for its beneficiaries a perfect righteousness, so that gifted and clothed with His righteousness they are in the sight of God as righteous as He, and cannot, as Adam could have before the fall, become unrighteous. His death then raises us out of our spiritual death to a position higher than Adam ever had. Eternal life never could have been possessed for the rendering of perfect obedience. Obedience is that which a servant owes his sovereign. Giving faithfully what is owed cannot in any way entail eternal life. But if a representative could not only pay what was owed, but in doing so pay a price of infinite value and worth so that there would be purchasing power sufficient to procure eternal life, then his clients would become heirs of eternal life. This Christ did. He by His perfect obedience merited, won and bestowed eternal life on them.

Reformed theology has distinguished this saving work of Christ's obedience as His passive obedience and His active obedience. According to the former, He suffered in our place as our Representative, and so paid the penalty for us. According to the latter, He

perfectly kept the requirement of the law, so that His death would be a sacrifice acceptable and sufficient to purchase eternal life. But though we may make this distinction, we cannot think of Christ's active obedience as separate from His passive obedience. We cannot limit His active obedience to His life and His passive obedience to His death. For His whole life was also one of passive obedience, all through it all enduring suffering and humiliation. Furthermore His death was not entirely a passive obedience, but also an active obedience, the apex of His active obedience offered to divine justice. Since then His perfect, perpetual and representative obedience is indivisible, every event of His life was both active and passive obedience, and every aspect of His death was both passive and active obedience. All of His life was a keeping of the law of God, a vicarious law-keeping. Some have strongly objected to the idea of a "vicarious law-keeping." Modernists do, because they see how it is so inseparably related to vicarious atonement, which they cannot stand. But the Antinomian also objects to the term as a piece of legalism. Yet it cannot be denied that Christ's life and death were a law-keeping; not a law-keeping for himself, but for those He came to save. If there is no vicarious law-keeping, then there is only one other form of law-keeping left, and that is personal law-keeping, which, for fallen man, is a hopeless case as to its ever, by him, being accomplished. He must then have a representative law-keeping, for the law cannot be set aside; it must be satisfied, established and honored. Because of our sins we could never make that satisfaction. Because of our sins we deserve eternal death, but do not die that death, since Jesus died that death in our place.

But the popular religion of the day in the world is that of Pelagianism, the philosophy of humanism, the religion of the "man on the street." According to it, Christ's death has a moral influence on mankind. Every man has a spark of divinity in him, is by creation and nature a child of God, but that spark needs to be fanned into flame, and the wandering child needs to return to his heavenly Father. By an act of his own will he had strayed from his Father, and by an act of his own will he must return. But what shall induce him to take steps to return? Everything from God's side is open for him to make such a return. Only his own follies have clogged the way. He could hurdle these barriers if he could be made to see again that God is still his Father, still loves him, and is always more ready to forgive than man is to be forgiven. Then man would be restored to the favor of his Father and the joys of his Father's house.

What is it which really gets to man so that he will return to the Father, His house and the benefits of sonship? He must look at the cross of Christ, exposing himself to its influences. Jesus was a son of God; indeed, because he was such a unique exemplar, he could even be called the son of God. When he went so far as to die on the cross there was revealed the highest manifestation of God's love for a wayward humanity. Feel the impact of that love and all opposition to the

Father should be overcome. The cross, if man will only contemplate it, will have such a persuasive influence on him. In keeping with this thinking of the world, the one who died on the cross was not true God, and did not need to be, in fact, that would only be a hindrance, putting him that much farther from us. He was a third party (cp. Russellism, where Christ is neither God nor man, but a third something to reconcile both!) who by his supreme example of self-sacrifice would show the way (cp. Christian Science's view that Christ is not *the Way*, but merely the way-shower!) for man to get back to God. If man will only get inspired by that example he will discover that he has attained to the higher life of the sons of God. The cross becomes to him the pathway leading from moral decrepitude to moral integrity.

Many of the religious books on the market and many of the modern religionists speak very freely about the cross of Christ. But is not the view of the cross they present that just set forth above? They will readily say that His death was redemptive, just as they will say that Jesus was divine. They say that Jesus was divine because man is divine. So they say that Christ's cross is our cross, and so his sufferings were redemptive. For after all, our sufferings are also redemptive. Christ shows the way of redemptive suffering. Many follow in his train to purchase to themselves the good degree of a life elevated above poverty, sordidness and strife. This is also the religion of our politicians from the president on down.

This is the modern and prevailing view of the cross — merely an example of a general principle of self sacrifice meant to be patterned after in individual instances of practice. Salvation then is walking in the way of the cross, so conceived. This means, of course, that it is not Christ's cross that saves us, but our cross. Christ's cross has power to influence to walk in the way of it, but it is our cross that has power to save once we walk in that way. Then it is not Christ's walking in the way of the cross, but ours which ultimately saves us. The blood of Christ does not save a man. It simply arouses him so that he may get busy and save himself. Disguised with familiar Christian terminology, and decked out in modern attire, it is nevertheless the old Pelagianism and the old moral influence theory of the atonement.

The governmental theory is no better. It is hardly more than another form of the moral influence theory. It holds that the cross of Christ was not necessary to satisfy the offended, eternal justice of God. It was necessary that good order in the world be preserved. Sinners must not get the idea that they can sin and riot with impunity. If men go on in violence and corruption unrestrained, the world will go to pieces morally and physically. That would not be for the greatest good of the greatest number. So God set up the cross to teach that sin is with Him a serious matter, to show what sin deserves, and what He could justly do to the sinner. Thus the cross is meant to act as a restraint on sin so that the world may be preserved. This enables God to offer salvation on much easier terms than on that of

perfect obedience. He offers it on the terms of "faith." Then "faith" will look at the cross, see what man deserves, what God could have done to him, and so be moved to quit the life that disturbs the proper government of God's world. Such philosophizings deny

the justice of God, deny that justice demands punishment of sin (a very prevalent dream today!), deny the holiness of God, and deny the love of God which went to such cost as to make the body and soul of His Son a sacrifice for the sin of His people.

ALL AROUND US—

A Word Concerning the Assassination of Dr. King Ecumenicity

The Pill

by Prof. H. Hanko

A WORD CONCERNING THE ASSASSINATION OF DR. KING

I write this on the day of the funeral of Martin Luther King Jr.

The eulogies have now all been spoken. Many statements of public confession of sin—the sin which supposedly brought on this act of violence—have been written and will continue to be written. Pledges are still being made in the halls of government and in the pulpits of the land that the ideals for which he fought and died will live on. The flags still fly at half-mast. The word "martyr" hangs heavy in the air. But violence swirls through the cities of the land and the death-toll mounts. Arson, murder, pillage and rapine burst out to engulf the country.

Not many apparently will go along with it, but the words most fitting to the occasion are the words of the Lord Jesus: "All that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

Martin Luther King claimed to be an apostle of non-violence. And most apparently agree. He is being hailed as such today. But the fact remains that he had taken the sword in his hands. He claimed to be a preacher, but he refused to preach the gospel. He preferred the sword. He had taken the sword of civil disobedience and used it himself to defy, and teach others to defy, laws with which he did not agree. He had taken the sword of demonstrations and marches and sit-ins — the sword of coercion and forceful persuasion to gain the goals which he sought. And the result was that wherever he went, violence followed in his wake. He was pastor to no flock. He brought not the gospel of Jesus Christ. He spoke of power as the legitimate and necessary weapon to gain his ends. He fought with the sword. Now he has died with the sword. And a nation, used to the power of the sword, hypocritically mourns his passing.

The murder of Dr. King was brutal and wanton. It was a terrible violation of the law of God. It can be called by no other name than murder — cold-blooded

murder. There ought never to be a single voice raised in defense of this monstrous crime. But the violence he himself stirred up engulfed him at last. And it threatens to engulf the land.

It is, I suppose, called non-violence which Martin Luther King preached because this kind of violence had the protection of the laws of the land. Even as these same laws have, in times past, protected the striker in the union; even as lately they have begun to protect the criminal; so also they protected demonstrations and various forms of civil disobedience. But this only spells out to what extent the state no longer fulfills her God-given responsibility to "punish evil doers and praise them that do well." It is exactly the opposite which we find in this perverse generation. The evil doer is protected, and the innocent are left without rights. The government has abdicated in no small way her responsible position under Christ. When violence breaks out no one ought to be surprised. It is a predictable consequence.

There is a Psalm we sing which speaks of this:

When rulers walk in darkness
When judges truth forsake,
The cornerstones are crumbled,
The firm foundations shake.

And the churches of the land follow. Not the liberal and modern churches only — the ones which have adopted a social gospel. But the more conservative churches, those which stand in the Reformed tradition. They have been speaking strangely of a comparison between Martin Luther King and Moses; both led a people out of bondage; both saw the vision of a promised land; both died without having entered. Is this kind of perversion of Scripture to be the last word of the church?

The Word of God must speak to us. And above all it says to them who have ears to hear: "submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake...." We cannot allow the lawlessness of the age bring us into contempt of those in authority. In bowing before

the law of the land we bow before our sovereign King Jesus Christ Whose footsteps we hear now in the events of history, whose sovereign rule shall bring His eternal kingdom which presently we shall inherit.

ECUMENICTY

We have before us several news items of an ecumenical character which give some indication of the progress being made in various ecumenical endeavors.

From the *RES Newsletter* we learn that plans for the merger of the Presbyterian Church US (Southern) and the Reformed Church of America are proceeding. From the February 14-16 meeting of the "Joint Committee of Twenty-Four" has come provisions of a church political nature which will be presented to the next General Assembly Meeting of the Southern Presbyterians and the next General Synod of the Reformed Church for approval. These two broadest assemblies will both meet June 6-12, the former at Montreat, North Carolina; the latter at Ann Arbor, Michigan. Some of the changes proposed include:

- A provision giving each presbytery in the newly united Church one voting unit for every one thousand members or less. Now each presbytery or classis has one vote regardless of its size in affairs of the whole Church. If, under the new plan, a presbytery or classis has fifty thousand members it would receive fifty votes.

- One of the first tasks of the new General Assembly will be to redraw the boundaries of all presbyteries and regional synods so that they will be "equitable in size, based on regional interests and needs as well as geographic considerations."

- To be retained in the new Church would be the practice of having one governing body in each congregation. This governing body would be called a consistory and would be composed of pastors, associate pastors and elders.

- Elders would be elected from the membership of the local congregations which would open the door to the election of women into this office. This is now practiced in the Southern Presbyterian Church but not yet in the Reformed.

If these plans are approved next June by the two broadest assemblies of the two denominations, the matter will be returned for voting to the seventy-nine presbyteries of the Southern Presbyterian Church and to the forty-five classes of the Reformed Church. If three-fourths of the former and two-thirds of the latter approve the plan, it will return to the two broadest assemblies in 1969. If final approval is gained in 1969, the union will be effected in 1970 by a joint meeting of the two broadest assemblies.

There are a couple of problems which remain unsolved. One is the participation of the Southern Presbyterians in the COCU talks. (cf. below) For one thing, these COCU talks have gone on record as favoring some kind of organization which includes bishops. The Reformed Church has not yet expressed itself on this matter.

For another thing there is the unresolved problem

of the "Liberal-Conservative" split in the membership of both denominations. That these two groups are at odds cannot be denied. What effect this will have on the merger remains to be seen.

* * *

Only a few weeks ago delegates to the seventh annual COCU (Consultations on Church Union) meeting finished their work. COCU now includes ten different denominations and will form, if a united church is finally the result, one denomination of 25.5 million protestants. The ten denominations include the following churches: African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical United Brethren, Methodist, Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (Southern), Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., Protestant Episcopal Church and United Church of Christ. The talks were begun with the proposal for such a union made by Eugene Carson Blake in the church of Bishop James Pike.

Last year there was some discouragement among the delegates because it seemed that union was far off and perhaps even unobtainable. The movement seemed to be floundering. The talk was to consummate union without a formal plan; but many were opposed. But the spirit has changed. Many are growing impatient at delay and will not wait very much longer for the slow processes of ecclesiastical machinery and for all the picayune bickering of leaders over fine points. So now optimism has replaced pessimism and there is a renewed determination to press on. The Committee set a deadline of two years to come up with a specific plan for union. There are hopes even that it can all be done in one year.

But whether a specific plan is made or not, union is proceeding. While the leaders dally the local churches of the denominations involved have begun to attain unity among themselves. They are no longer living separately; they are achieving their own form of cooperation.

These local churches are already sharing each other's ministries. They are exchanging pulpits and working amongst themselves to combine services and worship. They are joining in various endeavors. They are forming united programs of social action. They are cooperating where once they were competing in church extension. They are working together in missions. They are developing joint programs of theological training, development of educational materials and relationships with non-ecclesiastical organizations.

Besides, actual merger is in some instances taking place on the congregational level while the leaders ponder their problems higher up in the church's structure.

In other words, union is proceeding whether there is actually a plan or not, whether the leaders are agreeing or not.

That therefore this will someday become a reality seems to be a certainty. And yet even such a broad ecumenical step as this is but a relatively small step

in the grander vision of the ecumenical leaders. Already some are speaking of COCU as being a first step towards an international denomination embracing Protestantism over the whole world. And this, in turn, will be in preparation for the day when final union with Roman Catholicism is attained.

The ecumenical leaders will not rest until a one-world church is attained.

* * *

Dr. H. M. Kuitert, from the *Gereformeerde Kerken* in the Netherlands, has once again spoken out on his views of merger with Roman Catholicism. These views of his are discussed in a recent issue of *Tot Vrijheid Geroepen*. He is quoted as saying that he firmly believes that if the true unity of the Christian Church is to be attained, Roman Catholicism will have to be brought into union with Protestantism. To these he has no objection. The thought does not disturb him. He sees Rome as the church with the oldest rights; he believes that the institution of the papacy is not by any means an insurmountable obstacle to union; it is his personal conviction that if Pope John XXIII was still pope he would have no objection to acknowledging him as God's representative upon earth.

When a man in Dr. Kuitert's influential position and with his Calvinistic and Reformed background can go as far as this in denying all the Protestant and Calvin Reformation stood for, one wonders what has become of the Church in these troubled times.

THE PILL

An interesting news item appeared in *Christianity Today*. We quote it in part.

After surveying the evidence, *Child and Family* magazine, edited by physicians, concludes in its current issue that the birth-control pill is "the most dangerous drug ever introduced for use by the healthy in respect to lethality and major complications."

Many of the six million American women on the Pill, the report says, suffer such side effects as strokes, liver disease, migraine, depression, embolisms, and failing eyesight. It has been implicated in cases of sterility. Deaths attributed to its use exceed the death rate for polio during the years when it was considered a major health hazard.

Dr. Herbert Ratner, public-health director in Oak Park, Illinois, who recently became the magazine's editor, is no champion of the Roman Catholic view of contraception. In fact, he charges that the net effect of the Pill has been that "the middle and upper classes of the United States were seduced away from well-established and safe means of birth control...."

We are aware that the problem of birth-control is very much more complex than the question of the health of those who use it. There are very real spiritual questions which arise here. It is not our intention to go into this question now. We only want to call attention to the fact that when man attempts to interfere with basic life processes he is bound to suffer the consequences. This sort of thing must be shunned by the people of God.

SPECIAL FEATURE—

That Awful If

by Rev. J. A. Heys

Speech delivered at the Young People's Society Mass meeting Easter Sunday afternoon, April 14, 1968 at Hope Church

One of the worldly wise men of this earth once said that a rose by any other name is just as fragrant and beautiful. Probably I am not quoting him literally, but that was the idea of his words. And this is true. The names which we give to objects do not determine their essence and nature, their characteristics and appearances. And when we change the name of a creature, we do not change the essence and characteristics of that creature. A rose when called a dandelion is still the same flower with the same shape and beauty.

And today, whether we use that name of heathenish

origin, *Easter*, or the more spiritual name *Resurrection Day* — which, of course, I prefer — we in no way change the wonder and beauty and glory of the event that we celebrate on this day. By our name we may ignore and deny that truth of the day, but we cannot take it away and destroy it. For that reason also I can never get excited about the complaint that Xmas is such a wicked name for Christmas. I know that X is the symbol of the unknown quantity in algebra; and we surely do not want to express that we do not know whose birthday Christmas is. If that is the derivation of the word, I abhor it. But I also know that X is the first letter of the Greek name for Christ, namely, *Xristos*. And to me *Xmas* then is a contraction of *Christmas*. But I do not like that name either. Christmas is no better than Xmas. For Christmas means Christ's Mass and

is of Roman Catholic origin. In neither case, however, do we destroy the truth of Christmas by the name we use.

But all this is to prepare you and to beg of you not to judge my speech by the title that I have chosen, nor by the three sub-points under which I plan to treat it. Often a speech — and that holds true also for a sermon — is better than its title or theme. Sometimes it works the other way so that the only good part of the sermon or speech is the theme. But my title this time is rather odd sounding; and the three points may sound rather odd to you as well. My title is, "That Awful If"; and under it I want to ask three questions: "If What?", "Then What?", and "Now What?"

IF WHAT?

I have in mind the words of Paul in I Corinthians 15:17, "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." And I would remind you that from the day that He arose from the dead, men have denied His resurrection. The Roman soldiers, as hired by the chief priests, spread that lie from that day onward. They knew better. The grave was open for them to see that He was not there. They had seen the angel who rolled away the stone; at least the soldiers did, and they told the chief priests. It was not a case of not knowing the truth. It seldom is that. But it definitely was a case of not loving the truth that they knew. And the silliness, the utter folly, of their lie is so plain that a child can see it. If they were asleep, how could they be sure that the disciples did this? And what is more — there is that angle that they had in their sinful unbelief overlooked — what if He would suddenly appear, as actually He did five times that very day?

From that day on men have denied the resurrection in one way or in another. On Mars Hill the Athenians laughed at Paul for preaching this resurrection. King Festus told Paul that his much learning had made him mad, when Paul preached that resurrection before him. And today in our sophisticated and "cultured" age men do not come out so bluntly but instead concede that He lives in our lives and as His teachings are followed by His Church today. It is, for them, a spiritual resurrection but not a resurrection of His body. And many in the church world hold to this same lie. We may also expect this to grow very rapidly in the years ahead, and there are clear signs that we will see this in circles very close to us, in future generations at least. For when worshippers of science so-called submit all of Scripture to the scientist, so-called, in order to determine whether the Genesis story is true, whether we have to have a Theistic evolution and the like, they will have to come to the scientist, so-called, also as far as the virgin birth of Christ is concerned, and His resurrection from the dead. And the scientist, so-called, will assure them that both of these are absolutely impossible and have never happened. Surely a man with such a spear wound in His side and with all that loss of blood cannot after three days come back to life!

But what if they are correct?

What if Christ was not raised from the dead by God? That is the question here. In verse 14 Paul asks from the viewpoint of Christ Himself. If He did not rise by His own power, then our preaching is vain and man's faith in Christ is vain. But here he looks at it from the viewpoint of God's dealings with Christ. Remember two things here: God sent Him to the cross as our covenant Head. Pilate put a sign up over the cross in ridicule and to get even with the Jews who pulled one over on him. But God used Pilate to point out that The King of the spiritual Jews, the King of the Church, was hanging here for the sins of His people to remove them forever. Just read II Corinthians 5:21. God made Him to be sin for us. And then also Colossians 2:14 where Paul says that the handwriting of ordinances which was against us was nailed to that cross, when Christ bearing our guilt was nailed to the tree. Remember then, also, that there God poured out all of the vials of His wrath against our sin. God poured out all the fire of hell upon His head for our sins! God forsook Him, and God punished Him there for our sins.

What if Christ failed in His attempt to remove these sins by suffering that punishment? What if His promise to the penitent thief is not true? What if God did not receive His spirit which He commended to Him in His last words upon that cross?

Consider seriously the fact that if He is not raised by God, then He is still under punishment for our sins. It is not a case of Christ failing to remove our sins after a heroic attempt, and then going Himself with His spirit to heaven without us. Having come as our Head and taken our guilt upon Himself, having been made sin for us, and then failing to remove these sins, He is STILL under the punishment of them. If He is not alive with body and soul today in glory, then God was not satisfied with what He did. Then the death of His body is punishment upon Him *which God has not removed*. If Christ be not raised, He FAILED! Stand then before this awful if! Ask yourselves the question: *What if Christ be not raised? What an awful if!*

THEN WHAT?

Then our faith is vain.

And Paul is speaking here of faith in Christ as the Saviour. That faith is vain. It is empty. It is unprofitable. It does you no good. There is absolutely no value in that faith at all. For faith is trust in Christ. It is holding on to Him with heart and mind and expecting full salvation from Him. I ask you what good a flat spare tire is in the trunk of your car, when you go out on a trip. I had an experience like that some years ago. Our trust in a worthless object revealed a faith that is vain, empty, worthless. Two of us came from the Chicago area to Grand Rapids early in the morning for a meeting, and the gas tank was rather low but seemed full enough to promise an arrival there by the time that the gasoline stations were open in the morning. Our faith, however, was in a one gallon can of gas in the back of the station wagon. Sure enough,

between Zeeland and Hudsonville the car began to chug and to sputter and then came to a halt. But that gallon of gas was back there! O, no! The boys of the driver had used its contents for the lawnmower and had said nothing about it! Our faith was vain. We were yet stalled and helpless to go on with the car. If Christ be not raised from the dead, our faith will not do that which we expect it to do. Our faith is in Christ; and if He be not raised, He is not able to do what we expect Him to do. And so our faith in Him is worthless. We have faith in a hopeless cause. We are holding on by faith to the wrong thing and to the wrong person.

This is true because we are yet in our sins. Our faith may assure us that they are all gone. But the hard, cold fact is that we are yet in our sins. This means that we are still in their guilt. We are still in their state of condemnation. It means that they have not been lifted from off us in the slightest sense. It means that all that which Christ did on the cross has absolutely no value for us at all.

Therefore, if Christ be not raised, we are all going to go to hell! Let me make it more emphatic, because that is the awfulness of this if. If Christ be not raised, then we are going to meet Christ there in hell and see Him in the awful torment of God's wrath as our would-be Saviour Who failed! If he be not raised, then He has sinned Himself. If Christ be not raised, then He spread some awful untruths and preached a series of false doctrines. He made some vain and sinful boasts and deceived a host of people with His false doctrines. He gave many vain hopes. If God did not raise Him from the dead, then we will suffer everlasting shame *with Him*, and He with us.

He and His people are inseparable. What happens to Him happens to them. If He is raised, we are raised with Him. See Colossians 3:1. If He does not take away our sins, He still has them on His own shoulders; and there is nothing that a righteous God can do to the Head of an unrighteous people, whose sins have not been paid for in full, than to continue to afflict and punish this Head of that wicked people. If He be not raised, then we are losers, awful losers; but Christ Himself is also a loser and a most disappointed would-be Saviour. And all the souls of the saints from Abel onward must be cast out of heaven!

NOW WHAT?

But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that sleep. Now we are perfectly righteous in Christ. Before God we do not have a single sin. God beholds no iniquity in us and sees absolutely no perverseness in us. His judgment from the throne is constantly, "Not Guilty!" And God, looking down from heaven upon us with that risen and glorified Son at His right hand, says of us that we are beautiful, as beautiful as His own Son. For God always sees us in Him and judges us as members of His body. He says Himself in Romans 11:16, "For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches." Christ is not in hell. As our Head He made atonement and took away all of our sins. He

put out the fire of hell for our sins that God poured out on Him. He drank the cup so that there is not the slightest trace of its content left. "It is finished!" And we are no longer in our sins but in Christ and in His righteousness.

Therefore we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ of all the glories of a kingdom of heaven. Higher we are now than Adam and Eve in their righteousness and glory. More glorious we are now than the righteous and holy angels, for they now are our servants, sent to minister to those who are heirs of salvation. Hebrews 1:14. Closer to God we will be than they ever could be. We shall taste and see that God is good more richly than they.

And our faith is now a very wonderful possession. It holds on to something very precious and is a very precious gift from God. There will be a period of time when we will be ridiculed for believing in Christ and His resurrection. We will be laughed at for our hope. And the days before us may be dreadful days of persecution for this faith. But the unbeliever will be put to shame, not the believer. The unbelievers are in for an awful shock when they close their eyes in the sleep of death and suddenly stand before this Christ Whom they now believe is dead. The same is true of those who boldly say that God is dead. What an awfully rude awaking when suddenly they stand before the LIVING GOD!

But we can close our eyes in death and find more joy than we now see by that very profitable and worthwhile faith in Christ. We will not stand before God as with a flat, spare tire or an empty gas tank and gas can. We will be holding on to an almighty and everlasting Saviour Who will carry us to an endless life of bliss and glory. Since Christ is raised by God from the dead, our faith is a wonderful power; and a life of joy and gladness is ours without end.

Let us say it positively, then: SINCE Christ IS raised from the dead, our faith is a precious gift from God; and by it we have that sweet peace of mind that our sins are all blotted out; and we shall be with Christ in heavenly glory.

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FROM HOLY WRIT—

The Book Of Hebrews

by Rev. G. Lubbers

ENLIGHTENED — YET FALL ASIDE (Hebrews 6:4-6)

Here we come to the difficult part of the text. The difficulty is not that the terms are not clear in the text. Rather the difficulty is that the text seems to teach truths which are contradictory to other clear teachings and doctrines of the Holy Scriptures. The text seems to teach a falling away of saints, that is, of those who once were true children of God. If this should be the teaching here it would imply that it is possible to have been a true child of God, to have been a possessor of true faith in Christ, and still to perish everlastingly in outer darkness of hell!

Since we adhere to the principle that dogmatics may not rule over exegesis; that our dogmatic and confessional bias may not influence our interpretation, we cannot simply appeal to the confessions to interpret this text. We will need to interpret Scripture in the light of Scripture.

Our first observation is concerning the term “those who were once *enlightened*.” What is the meaning of the term “enlightened?” The verb in the Greek text is “phootizoo.” The aorist passive participle is used: “tous apax phootisthentas” — the once enlightened ones. They are looked at as a class of people in distinction from those who were not enlightened. They were once and for all enlightened. This enlightenment will never be taken from them, and it cannot be repeated. The aorist tense points up the point action. It states the once and for all fact as a fact. It is not the tense which indicates completed enlightenment up to the present as one might expect in the case of those who have a saving knowledge of God in Christ. The term “enlightened” is used by the writer also in Hebrews 10:32, where we read, “But call to mind the former days in which ye were illuminated (enlightened), ye endured a great fight of afflictions.” Here the translation in the KJV of the text suggests that this is an enlightenment in a saving sense of inward, spiritual illumination in the sense of which Paul speaks of it in Ephesians 1:18. “...the eyes of your understanding (heart) being *enlightened*: that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what is the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints....” In this latter passage the apostle is clearly speaking of the saving illumination, the inward calling as this accompanies the preaching of the gospel. It is evidently true that the Bible uses the term to “enlighten” in more than one sense and application of the term.

This is evident from various passages of Holy

Writ which we ought to consider briefly. In Luke 11:34-36 we read from the lips of Jesus “The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body shall be full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body shall be full of darkness. *Take heed therefore that the light that is in thee be not darkness.* If thy whole body be therefore full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of the candle doth give thee light.” We have singled out a key sentence in the above quotation by italicizing it. There is such a thing as the “light in us” to be “darkness.” Evidently there is a distinction between *natural* light and enlightenment which is psychological, and the enlightenment which is spiritual-ethical enlightenment whereby we have a *saving* knowledge of God. Christ speaks of the fact that there is an inner duplicity in those who have the mere psychical enlightenment. They are children of darkness which they are naturally enlightened. With this accords the teaching of our Lord in Matthew 6:23b “If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” Hence, we must have the single eye. We need the spiritual simplicity, truthfulness and uprightness of heart which loves the truth and hates the lie. And, again, we should notice what we read in John 1:9 “That was the true (real) light which *enlighteneth* every man coming into the world.” It is this light which comes from the Logos in the things made which enlightens “men.” Apart from this enlightenment they could not be sinners, who hate the light and do not come to the light because that their works are evil. These are they who keep the truth down in unrighteousness in unrepentance, and treasure to themselves wrath in the day of wrath and of the just judgment of God. (Romans 1:18-21; 2:1-2)

There is a sense, therefore, in which the Bible speaks of enlightenment which is tantamount to the external calling of the Gospel. We hasten to add that this “external” calling must not be misunderstood as it often evidently is. Too often the eternal calling is viewed as simply referring to the preaching of the gospel as it merely enters into the ear, so to speak. What is forgotten is, that, according to the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, the seed which is sown by the wayside really fell into the “heart” of the hearers under the preaching; it is true not in a saving sense, but in such a sense that these hearers had to react in a spiritual-ethical response. Their response was that, they, under the impulses of Satan’s work, reject the

gospel. However, let it not be overlooked that this is a rejection from the heart. It is a willful rejection because those rejecting know what they are rejecting; they reject from the "heart" which had been naturally enlightened. There must have been an operation of the Spirit even here giving them to understand in a natural way the meaning of the Gospel. Do we not read here in Matthew 13:19 "...then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away *that which was sown in his heart.*" Surely they did understand this with their natural understanding. However, spiritually they did not understand. That is what Jesus means when he says "When one heareth the word of the kingdom and *understandeth* it not..." In a word, the light that was in them is darkness. The external calling, too, enlightened them "so that by hearing ye shall hear, and shall *not understand*; and seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive." It is that which Isaiah speaks of in the sixth Chapter, where he asks: "Lord, how long? And he answered, until their cities be wasted...." It is the Word of God to Isaiah which said "Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed but understand not; and see ye indeed but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed."

Such is the external calling which is accompanied by the Spirit in a non-saving sense of the term!

The light that is in them is darkness!

How great is that darkness!

In the light of the foregoing we are able to understand that implications of the term "Those who have once been enlightened." These are not sinners who perish without law, but they are those who are judged by the law and the prophets: they are those who have known the way and do not walk in the same. They are reprobate, hardened sinners, who hate the light. The god of this age hath blinded their hearts.

For the writer to the Hebrews makes a few more instructive remarks concerning these who were once "enlightened."

In the first place: they have tasted of the heavenly gift. They are in this respect different from those who never heard the gospel, and never lived amongst the people of God. The heavenly gift is emphatically *the* heavenly gift. The Greek construction is "of *the* gift, of *the* heavenly!" It is the salvation in Christ to which the writer here refers. The term is here "doorea"; it is pure gift. It is without merit. Besides, it is a gift which is *heavenly*. It is that which is the very essence of the Mystery of the kingdom of heaven. This gift is evidently the fulness of grace in Christ. The gift of God is eternal life. This is what God hath revealed unto us in His Son. Of this they "tasted." The idea of tasted is not so much that of nourishment as to power to discern and become aware of its inner nature. The term taste is derived from: *tasten*, of *taxare* — to touch. These ascertained the heavenly flavor of this

gift. They are keenly aware that to enter the kingdom means that they must repent from their sins, and serve God with undivided heart. They take a little of it in their mouth; they taste that it is good, but their hearts are evil and they reject it.

In the second place is mentioned, that they are enlightened, and, therefore, are such as who have become partakers of the Holy Ghost. Now, what does this mean? Does this mean that they "received" the Holy Ghost, whom the "world" is not able to receive? Does it mean that they *received* Christ and all his benefits of the Spirit by a true faith? Evidently not! Sometimes the Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit in the tense as he testifies in connection with the preached Word. We referred to this earlier in this essay. Particularly, because, in the next phrase mention is made of "having tasted the *good word* of God," we hold that here the becoming partaker of the Holy Spirit must refer to the enlightenment of the Spirit by which they understood with their natural understanding the heavenly gift of salvation. They knew *that* they must be sorry for their sins, but they knew not subjectively *how* to be sorry for their sins. They did not enter into the rest! The text puts this in the fact tense. They *were made* such partakers. It is a fact of experience and history with such. They did not make themselves such partakers. That too was outside of their ability. They were *made* partakers. That was part of the "having been enlightened." That they are *partakers* is not the same as that they had "fellowship" with the Holy Spirit. It was not with the person of the Spirit that they had fellowship, but they shared with others in the benefits of the preaching, its instruction, etc. In the days of the apostles this could refer to the charismatic gifts in the church: healing, prophesying, tongues, exhortation, teaching and admonition. In these they shared. It is a disconcerting thought, but it is true. One can even have been a preacher of these heavenly realities, felt their power and beauty, be a castaway!! Many first shall be the last, and last shall be first. Paul does not boast that he preached this gospel. He is less than the least of all saints! He rejoices not in that he speaks more tongues than any man, and prophesies more than all. He rejoiced in the words: I have kept the faith, I have run the race, and for me is laid away a crown of life! No mere partaker of gifts, but fellowship in Christ is blessed!

That being made a partaker of the Holy Ghost cannot refer to actual receiving of the benefits of the Spirit in a saving sense in the text is also evident from the meaning of the term "metochous." This term is distinguished from "koinonos" in that the latter suggests personal fellowship, while the former describes participation in some common blessing or privilege, or the like. (See Westcott in loco) Wherefore the being made a partaker of the Holy Ghost simply refers to the natural participation in the benefits of Christ, the gifts in the church without spiritual participation unto salvation.

PAGES FROM THE PAST—

Believers and Their Seed

by Rev. Herman Hoeksema

FOREWORD

In that part of the Form for the Administration of Baptism to Infants of Believers in which a word of admonition is directed to the parents who present their children for baptism in the midst of the congregation it is said that "baptism is an ordinance of God, to seal unto us and to our seed His covenant." Moreover, it is emphasized that baptism "must be used for that end, and not out of custom or superstition."

It lies in the nature of the case, therefore, that if the congregation of Jesus Christ is to live out of that faith when she receives Holy Baptism for herself and her seed, then it is and remains a prime requisite that she should understand the truth concerning that covenant of the Lord her God. The doctrine of the covenant is a basic truth of our Reformed faith. According as God's people better understand His covenant, in its essence and its historical development in the generations of believers, so they will stand more firmly in the truth, and so the danger will be lessened that they will be carried about by every wind of doctrine. Especially in our country and in our day there are many currents which would carry us away from the truth of God if we are not founded in the truth of God's covenant. Many errors, among which not the least dangerous is that of Premillennialism, are exactly characterized by the fact that they either do not understand or do not take into account or reject God's covenant, and thereby arrive at a conception of Israel and the Church as separate entities, at a separation of the old and the new dispensations, a view which blinds the eyes of God's people for the riches of Scripture in connection with the organic development of things. Hence, it is important that our people indeed do not use baptism out of custom or superstition, but out of a clear and firm faith in the eternal covenant of God.

The following pages intend to serve the purpose of instruction in the doctrine of the covenant. The contents of this little book were offered earlier to our people in the form of a series of articles in the *Standard Bearer*. No changes have been made in the original articles. May the Lord bless this publication unto the establishment of the readers in the truth of His faithful covenant.

The Author

CHAPTER I

THE COVENANT PROBLEM

Questions arise repeatedly in connection with the place which our children, the children of believers,

occupy in God's covenant. It is true indeed that various questioners view the matter about which they desire more light from various viewpoints. One inquires about infant baptism and desires a clear demonstration of its Biblical ground. Another is concerned about the question of the salvation of children who die in infancy. Still another seeks an explanation of the well-known word of David spoken at the occasion of the death of his little child. And a fourth questioner earnestly desires more light on the meaning of God's covenant in general. However, it is easy to see that basically all these questions may be reduced to this: what is the place of the seed of believers in God's covenant?

Now for a Reformed man the question concerning God's covenant with us and our children is very important. If from this viewpoint we would speak of a Jachin and Boaz in the temple of the truth of God, then we certainly should not speak, as did Prof. Van Andel somewhere, of the doctrine of Common Grace and the doctrine of Particular Grace; but we should indeed speak of the truth of God's Sovereign Grace, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of the truth of God's Covenant. This is not to say that among our people the question concerning believers and their seed in the covenant of God is always raised because of its doctrinal importance. This is precisely not the case. Much rather is this question for them a decidedly practical one. An answer is sought especially to the question of the salvation of children of the covenant who die in infancy. Are the children of believing parents who die in their infancy, whom the Lord takes away before they arrive at the years of discretion, to be accounted as saved, yes or no? Much of what has been written and spoken about this question in the past arose out of this practical question concerning the salvation of the children of believers. There are even those who insist very strongly on having a positive answer to this question. For them the doctrine of God's covenant depends on the answer to this question. They go along with you when you develop the doctrine of the covenant, even as to the details. But when you reach the question concerning the salvation of the children of believers, — and you come to that question inevitably, — and should you be inclined to give a hesitant or even a negative answer, should you want to say that from the truth of God's covenant in the line of generations it does not necessarily follow that all the fleshly children of believing parents are saved, — then they do as the Friesian king of whom the story is told that he was standing with one foot in the water of baptism when he suddenly asked the missionary whether his parents

were saved and had entered heaven: upon receiving a negative answer to his question, he withdrew his foot from the water and refused to be baptized. Now all this is quite understandable. The question concerning the salvation of children who die in infancy is naturally a deeply moving question. It is a matter of common knowledge and of every-day experience that there is a very large number of children who are taken away by the Lord in their childhood, especially in their early childhood. And the salvation of those children is a matter close to the heart of their parents. This undoubtedly explains why the question of God's covenant always and again arises from the viewpoint of this question. Nevertheless this is regrettable. Oftentimes in this manner the discussion concerning the seed of the covenant and then has turned especially upon that question of their salvation. A question of relatively little dogmatical worth was thus changed into the chief question. The result has been that the truth of God's covenant has also been impoverished and adulterated through this exclusive focussing upon that one point.

This does not change the fact that the covenant idea is indeed very really one of the most important doctrines in the confession of the Reformed churches, and rightly so. This doctrine is really more characteristically Reformed than the doctrine of election. Departure from the Reformed truth usually also takes place with respect to either or both of these doctrines. One begins to do violence to the doctrine of God's Sovereign Grace and departs in the direction of Arminianism; or one no longer understands God's covenant with His people, and he begins to depart toward a Baptist position. The latter is, of course, easier according as the church is less thoroughly undergirded in the truth of God. People decline in the knowledge of God's Word. They do not really understand their own confession any longer. For a time they live from habit and custom. They still present their children for

baptism, and they listen mechanically to the Baptism Form. But with earnest-minded souls things cannot long continue thus. They must give account of the truth. Suddenly, in one way or another, they come to face the serious question of infant baptism. And to their own dismay they come to the realization that they have really never given account to themselves of the meaning and the ground for the baptism of infants in the church of God. And if then there comes no light, the so sorely desired light, — light that can truly be called light, light from the Scriptures, — then the only result is that such earnest-minded souls, rather than do violence to their own consciences, affiliate with one or another Baptist denomination. They are lost for the Reformed truth, and they have forfeited one of the most precious truths of the confession. That this is indeed no abstract portrayal but concrete reality is the lesson of history and of every-day experience. There are many in the Reformed churches who still walk about with the question in their souls: how are we to conceive of God's covenant with respect to our children? There are many who remain in the Reformed churches but who by conviction are wholly baptist. And there are not a few also who openly join with the baptists and break with the Reformed churches. It is therefore of the greatest importance that also in regard to this point we again understand our confession, and that we comprehend and develop the Scriptural idea with respect to believers and their seed in God's covenant. Why are the children of believers in God's covenant? In what sense are they in that covenant? Must we also in the sphere of God's covenant still distinguish between a two-fold seed? Or are all the children, head for head, to be mentioned in one breath as covenant children? What is really God's covenant, and what is the significance of it for our seed? To these and other, related questions we must be prepared to give an answer which rests upon God's Word and which is therefore able to satisfy. And therefore we wish to devote a few chapters to this subject.

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CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH—

The Doctrine of Sin

The Second Period — 250-730 AD

The Pelagian Controversy

The Augustinian System

by Rev. H. Veldman

In our preceding article, we called attention, in connection with Augustine's conception of sin, that this renowned church father, among other things, maintained that man's freedom of choice applies only to Adam as before the fall; since his fall, man no longer has this freedom of choice, to be able to choose the good. Before we call attention to Augustine's conception of the fall of man and its consequences, as set forth by Philip Schaff in his History of the Christian Church, we must note that whereof Augustine speaks most frequently and most fondly. Vol. III, 823:

Finally Augustine speaks most frequently and most fondly of the highest freedom, the free *self-decision* or *self-determination* of the will towards the *good* and *holy*, the blessed freedom of the children of God; which still includes, it is true, in this earthly life, the possibility of sinning, but becomes in heaven the image of the divine freedom, a *felix necessitas boni*, and *cannot*, because it *will not*, sin. It is the exact opposite of the *dura necessitas mali* in the state of sin. It is not a faculty possessed in common by all rational minds, but the highest stage of moral development, confined to true Christians. This freedom Augustine finds expressed in that word of our Lord: "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." It does not dispense with grace, but is generated by it; the more grace, the more freedom. The will is free in proportion as it is healthy, and healthy in proportion as it moves in the element of its true life, in God, and obeys Him of its own spontaneous impulse. To serve God is the true freedom.

In these words Augustine champions the Scriptural truth of the true freedom, true only of the people of God. Freedom of the will, the freedom to be able to do both, to choose the good and the evil, was applicable only to Adam while in the state of rectitude. Since the entrance of sin into the world, man lost this freedom of the will. The natural man is free only to do the evil, and the child of God is free only to do the good. This ability to choose the good is true here only in principle,

but afterwards in heavenly perfection.

ADAM'S FALL AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Augustine's conception of the fall of Adam differs radically from that of Pelagius. Pelagius, as we noted when we called attention to his conception of sin, destitute of all idea of the organic wholeness of the race or of human nature, viewed Adam merely as an isolated individual; he gave him no representative place, and therefore his acts no bearing beyond himself. The Scriptures are surely plain on this point. We read in Romans 5:12: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Augustine's conception of the fall of man is, we understand, so much deeper and more profound. Concerning this, Philip Schaff writes:

To understand Augustine's doctrine of the fall of man, we must remember, first of all, that he starts with the idea of the organic unity of the human race, and with the profound parallel of Paul between the first and the second Adam; that he views the first man not merely as an individual, but at the same time as the progenitor and representative of the whole race, standing to natural mankind in the same relation as that of Christ to redeemed and regenerate mankind. The history of the fall, recorded in a manner at once profound and childlike in the third chapter of Genesis, has, therefore, universal significance. In Adam human nature fell, and therefore all, who have inherited that nature from him, who were in him as the fruit in the germ, and who have grown up, as it were, one person with him.

But Augustine did not stop with the very just idea of an organic connection of the human race, and of the sin of Adam with original sin; he also supposed a sort of pre-existence of all the posterity of Adam in himself, so that they actually and personally sinned in him, though not, indeed, with individual consciousness. Since we were, at the time of the fall, "in lumbis Adami," the sin of Adam is "jure seminationis et germen-

tionis," our sin and guilt, and physical death is a penalty even upon infant children, as it was a penalty upon Adam. The posterity of Adam therefore suffer punishment not for the sin of another, but for the sin which they themselves committed in Adam. This view, as we shall see farther on, Augustine founds upon a false interpretation of Romans 5:12.

When dealing with the problem of sin and the depravity of the human race, we are always confronted by the question as to the conception and birth of each individual child, particularly of the soul. We cannot at this time enter into a detailed discussion of this problem. But concerning this question, Rev. H. Hoeksema in his explanation of Lord's Day III, Vol. I, 154, writes as follows:

In the past there were three explanations of this problem. The first is known as the theory of pre-existence, and held that all the souls were actually created in Adam, and that therefore, all human individuals really sinned in our first father and in him became corrupt. This appears to have been the view of Augustine, a view that was really based on a mistaken explanation of Rom. 5:12: "for that all have sinned." He interpreted that clause in the sense that is given to it in the Dutch translation; "in welken allen gezondigd hebben." But this cannot possibly be the correct rendering of the original. It does not justify the translation "in whom all have sinned," but very definitely must be rendered: "for that" or "because all have sinned." But this theory never found much support among theologians, as might be expected. Apart from the fact that it finds no support in Scripture, it meets with too many difficulties and is really an impossible philosophical conception.

Two other explanations have been given of this problem. They are known as traducianism and creationism. Rev. Hoeksema also calls attention to these "explanations" in his work on the Heidelberg Catechism. And Schaff states, in the quotation we quoted from his history of the Christian Church, that Augustine also supposed a sort of pre-existence of all the posterity of Adam in himself, basing it upon a faulty interpretation of Rom. 5:12.

Following upon this, Schaff calls attention to Augustine's view of the fall of Adam, and he writes:

The original state of man included the possibility of sinning, and this was the imperfection of that state. This possibility became reality. Why it should have been realized, is incomprehensible; since evil never has, like good, a sufficient reason. It is irrationality itself. Augustine fixes an immense gulf between the primitive state and the state of sin. But when thought has accomplished this adventurous leap, it finds his system coherent throughout.

Augustine then sets forth that Adam did not fall with temptation from another. The essence of the sin of Adam consisted not in the eating of the fruit; for this was in itself neither wrong nor harmful; but in *disobedience* to the command of God. And he declares that the root of sin was pride, self-seeking, the craving of the will to forsake God. Hereupon Schaff writes the following:

The fall of Adam appears the greater, and the more worthy of punishment, if we consider, first, the height he occupied, the divine image in which he was created; then, the simplicity of the commandment, and ease of obeying it, in the abundance of all manner of fruits in paradise; and finally, the sanction of the most terrible punishment from his Creator and greatest Benefactor.

Thus Augustine goes behind the appearance to the substance; below the surface to the deeper truth. He does not stop with the outward act, but looks chiefly at the disposition which lies at its root.

Schaff's presentation of Augustine's conception of the consequences of sin is, we believe, very informative and instructive:

The CONSEQUENCES of the primal sin, both for Adam and for his posterity, are, in Augustine's view, comprehensive and terrible in proportion to the heinousness of the sin itself. And all these consequences are at the same time punishments from the righteous God, who has, by one and the same law, joined reward with obedience and penalty with sin. They are all comprehended under *death*, in its widest sense; as Paul says: "The wages of sin is death"; and in Gen. 2:17 we are to understand the threatened death, all evil both to body and to soul.

Augustine particularizes the consequences of sin under seven heads; the first four being negative, the others positive:

1. *Loss of the freedom of choice*, which consisted in a positive inclination and love to the good, with the implied possibility of sin. In place of this freedom has come the hard necessity of sinning, bondage to evil. "The will, which, aided by grace, would have become a source of good, became to Adam, in his apostasy from God, a source of evil."

2. *Obstruction of knowledge*. Man was originally able to learn everything easily, without labor, and to understand everything aright. But now the mind is beclouded, and knowledge can be acquired and imparted only in the sweat of the face.

3. *Loss of the grace of God*, which enabled man to perform the good which his freedom willed, and to persevere therein. By not willing, man forfeited his ability, and now, though he would do good, he cannot. (this probably does not mean that Augustine actually taught that man, in his sin, would do good. — H.V.)

4. *Loss of paradise*. The earth now lies under the curse of God: it brings forth thorns and thistles, and in the sweat of his face man must eat his bread.

Concerning this "loss of Paradise," Rev. Hoeksema writes in his Dogmatics that there is certainly an act of salvation in man's expulsion from paradise. After noting that the words, "man is become like one of us," must not be understood as irony, he writes:

And the rest of the text in verse 22 certainly implies that by continued contact with and eating of the tree of life the earthly life of Adam and Eve would have been perpetuated even in their fallen state. There is, therefore, certainly an act of salvation in man's expulsion from paradise. Eating of the tree would have resulted in a perpetuation of the state of death. In Christ, however, Who is the resurrection and the life, temporal death is become the servant of the elect, to open a passage into eternal life and glory.

BOOK REVIEWS—

Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology

Homiletics

by Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

CREATIVE MINDS IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY, Philip E. Hughes, Editor; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. 488 pages; price, \$6.95

The claim of the dust-jacket on this book is that "This symposium is designed to provide an introduction to the thought of some of the religious thinkers who have made an impact on Christian theology in the twentieth century." To this end fourteen so-called "creative minds" are treated in this book. Among them are Karl Barth, G. C. Berkouwer, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann, Herman Dooyeweerd, and Paul Tillich, to mention a few more familiar names. Each essay is written by a different author, one who is supposed to be thoroughly familiar with the works of the man about whom he writes. Each essay contains a biographical sketch, first of all. This is an informative and valuable part of each essay. Secondly, each essay contains an exposition of the main concepts and contributions of the theologian discussed. This is necessarily abbreviated, of course. And, thirdly, each essay presents an evaluation.

A book of this kind is interesting, and, to an extent, helpful. Nevertheless, its value is very limited. First of all, the exposition offered is necessarily brief, too brief. Secondly, the reader necessarily sees through the eyes of the particular scholar who writes about each theologian. One sees Barth through the eyes of Bromiley, Berkouwer through the eyes of Lewis Smedes, and Brunner through the eyes of Paul Schrottenboer. The same is true of the evaluation of each of these fourteen theologians. If the exposition is accurate and the evaluation is correct, fine. But who is to know? Is the essayist objective? Is he a disciple of the man about whom he writes, and therefore sympathetic to him, or is he an opponent and a severe critic? This, you will understand, makes a world of difference. It would make a world of difference, for example, whether James Daane or I would expound and evaluate the theology of Herman Hoeksema. Hence, more than a mere introduction, and a very limited one, this book cannot be. I immediately sense that Bromiley is too sympathetic toward Barth, and that Smedes is too enamored of Berkouwer.

After all, if one would study the-

ologians and their theology, tedious as the task may be, he must go to the sources and read, study, and evaluate for himself.

This book is recommended; but the reader must not swallow all that is offered.

HOMILETICS (A MANUAL OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF PREACHING), by M. Reu; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan; 639 pages, \$5.95.

This is a volume in Baker's Limited Editions Library, a publishing project which features some other worthwhile reprints. The volume under review is a reprint of a work first published in 1922. The author was professor of practical theology at Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa.

This book is not written for popular consumption; it is a text-book which features a thorough treatment of the subject of homiletics, and as such it is aimed especially at seminary students and preachers.

The author is a Lutheran, and his Lutheranism not unexpectedly shines through at various points in the book. Besides, I would not agree with him in regard to many technical or scientific points of homiletics; for example, the section on various kinds of sermon propositions is not to my liking.

But in a day when very few good books on homiletics are published, it is refreshing to find a book as thorough and as sound as this one. Agreement is not a prerequisite to reaping benefits from a book of this kind. In the future I expect to assign this book to our seminary students as collateral reading in our homiletics course; and I think our mature ministers might have their homiletical thinking and practice refreshed by reading this book critically also.

Here is a sample of the author's thinking on the relation of the text to the sermon, and I like this kind of thinking: "Whatever the text that has been chosen it must come to its full rights in the sermon. The sermon dare not deal with matters that have nothing to do with the text; that would be to turn a word of God into a lying signboard, to use it as a mere stopgap or superficial adornment. Nor dare the text become merely a motto or title of the sermon, or serve as a point of departure from which the preacher advances to the elaboration of his own ideas, the springboard for a plunge

into the depths or shallows of his own thought. This might lead, under the most favorable conditions, to a scriptural but not to a textual sermon, and is out of keeping with the purpose the text is intended to serve. Instead of this, the text must rather be the source of the contents of the sermon, from which all its thoughts flow, so that the preacher draws from nothing else, is guided by nothing else, imparts to his congregation nothing else. His text must be for him beginning, middle and end, and whatever does not grow out of his text, be it ever so fine and true, biblical and edifying, must be ruthlessly excluded. This does not mean that the text may not be related to, or illustrated by, other parts of the Bible. This, on the contrary, is highly necessary; for the individual text is an integral part of the whole of Scripture. But it must be insisted that whatever is gathered from the rest of Scripture, to explain and illustrate the individual text, can only serve as aid to the exposition and application of the latter, and can have no other purpose than to magnify and impress upon the congregation the text itself. Nor does this mean that the life of the congregation may not be referred to in the sermon. On the contrary, it is an important and eminently proper requirement, that the preacher take into consideration the circle of ideas, the judgments, emotions, experiences, and all the various needs of his people, in order that his sermon may come home to their business and bosoms and influence them for good. But the individual text must decide as to the manner in which this is to be done." pp. 317, 318.

This is sound language, and would there were more preachers today who followed this counsel.

And so is this language concerning the application of the sermon sound: "The application dare not, however, be anything alien imported into the text, as though the preacher needed to add to the contents of the text something of his own. He must, on the contrary, take the Word of God, whose meaning in the past he has ascertained, set it unaltered and unabridged, with all its winsomeness and all its severity, in the midst of the present, and let it say to the men of today what it said to the men of the past." pp. 361, 362.

Baker Book House is to be congratulated on this reprint. It is a valuable addition to the library of any seminarian or minister.

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES—

April 10, 1968

The last lecture of this winter's series was held in First Church March 28. Rev. J. A. Heys of Holland was the speaker and the topic was, "The Last Hour." In contemplating this Hour the speaker explained the meaning of the term, showed the part we are to play in it, and found no little comfort in the fact that this Hour is in the hands of the Timeless Timekeeper, and the end of the Hour will be for us the time to enter the timeless Day in the beauty and bliss of God's Presence.

The weather was perfect to draw a good crowd filling the main floor quite solidly. Rev. H. Veldman led in opening devotions, and Rev. J. Kortering closed with prayer. The organist was the same as for all the lectures, Mrs. C. Lubbers, but the organ was not the same. To make way for their newly purchased organ, this one is in the final stages of dis-mantling and only about one third of the pipes were usable, but the audience were lusty singers and were carried along quite well with the crippled instrument under the skillful fingers of a good organist.

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The Eastern Mens' League met in Southeast Church April 1 with Rev. H. Veldman as speaker. He answered the question, "How will the unity of the saints be realized in the Latter Days?" Mr. Ted Engelsma, president of the League, led in devotions and introduced the speaker. Two young ladies, Ellen Kregel and Brenda Rietema, favored the men with an organ-piano duet, a variation built on the hymn, "Christ is Risen." After recess business was conducted, questions were answered, and Mr. D. Meulenberg led in a prayer of thanksgiving.

* * *

The Junior Young People of First Church met with Hope's Young People in joint session recently. The after recess discussion was on, "The Signs of the Last Times." Have you noticed the ever recurrent interest in the Second Coming of our Lord shown in the above meetings centered around the precursory signs of that last event on God's time-clock?

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A male quartet of Redland's church was featured at a hymnsing, sponsored by the Salem Circle, in the local C.R. Church. Their own auditorium was the setting for the Easter Cantata rendered by the Choral Society.

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Southwest congregation was treated to a letter from Dick and Doris Kreuzer found in the bulletin racks. Mr. Kreuzer, we understand, is a medical student interning in Africa, working in the Sudan Interior Mission. His tour of duty will soon be over; he wrote, "We hope to share with you in detail some of the experiences and impressions upon our return. The Lord willing, we will see you all in church June 2 at the latest. Until then, we have several Reformed Witness Hour sermons to nourish us and remind us what a privilege and a precious heritage is ours as Protestant Reformed Christians."

Oh, what could our Mission Committee do with a medical missionary in Jamaica!

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A debating team from Michigan met with the young people of Oak Lawn March 24 and discussed the challenge, "Reformation in the Protestant Reformed Churches - Why!"

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Holland's congregation recently welcomed into their fellowship a family - father, mother, and five daughters - from a Christian Reformed Church in Zeeland.

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Our High School Board, in a Newsletter of April 7, rejoiced in the fact that teacher personnel has been recruited with our existing Christian school losing but one to this staff. Less than a week after the Society meeting the contractors were pouring cement for footings and wall of the building. The Newsletter said in part, "It seems they didn't have patience to wait for groundbreaking ceremonies. Rightly so! Now if we can talk them into a 20 minute coffee-break on the 20th of April, we plan on having a Corner-Stone Laying ceremony! The contractors are the Newhof Associates; the Newhof brothers have always been members of our First Church in Grand Rapids. The staff will include, Mr. Roland Petersen, Administrator and part-time teacher, Miss A. Lubbers, Mrs. I. Quenga, Mr. D. Korhorn, Mr. C. Reitsma and Mr. V. Huber. Our new high school is indeed taking shape!

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The Scholarship Fund of the Federation of Young People's Societies is one project that always needs remembering by our people. All contributions to this worthy cause are to be sent to Donald J. Faber, 1123 Cooper Ave. S.E. Grand Rapids, Michigan 49507; applications for scholarships must be sent to Prof. H. Hanko, 4665 Ju-Lee-On S.W. Grand Rapids, Michigan 49504. This Fund supports any young people who intend to enter the teaching profession with a scholarship stipend. Surely this is a worthy cause, you will agree.

* * *

Mr. Tom Elzinga, from our Holland Church, has a very interesting hobby: that of furnishing past *Standard Bearers* to people asking for them. Recently a contact of his from New Jersey wrote that they were presenting their 21 year old son a graduation gift of fourteen bound volumes of the *Standard Bearer*. The current issues are being sent to him at college. They add that their younger son will inherit their bound volumes in course of time. Mr. Elzinga has built shelves in his basement so that he can from them loan out any back number of our magazine for a specified time. He also has made a complete index of Scripture texts treated on those pages in the past. The owner of bound volumes can enhance their value by a great deal with a copy of that index for a ready reference to their contents.

Rev. R. Decker has received the call from our South Holland congregation.

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...see you in church

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