

# The Standard Bearer

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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**Meditation: Jesus, Silent and Speaking**

**Sanctified Freedom of Speech**

**"Biblical Ecumenicity" (The Text of an Address)**

**Abner and Ishbosheth**

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## THE STANDARD BEARER

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## MEDITATION—

## Jesus, Silent and Speaking

by Rev. J. Kortering

*But he held his peace and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven*  
Mark 14:61, 62

The Preacher said it, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.... a time to keep silence and a time to speak." Ecc. 3:1, 7.

Notice, silence and then speech!

Who could better practice this counsel than our Lord Jesus Christ, even as He stood in the midst of his taunting adversaries. We read, "But he held his peace and answered nothing." Not until the High Priest placed Jesus under oath and demanded of Him His



identity, does He speak in answer to the question, "Art thou the Christ the Son of the Blessed?" by saying, "I am."

He was obedient even in His silence and in His speech.

And that was the wisdom of God.

Only the perfect Son of God could ever have held his peace and said nothing at such an hour. Sinful nature would have had plenty to say, but the Son of God was silent.

A brief review of the scene will make this evident.

The Jewish dignitaries had converged under the cloak of darkness upon the house of Caiaphas. The Scribes were present, they were the intelligentsia of the day, the doctors of law, the instructors in their schools. Most of them were of the sect of the Pharisees. The Levites were represented, to them had been entrusted the consecrated work of the temple. Since they were closely allied with Annas and Caiaphas most of them were Sadducees. We must not forget the Elders: they were represented in the Sanhedrin because they could be trusted for their wisdom; they were old and experienced; what may have inflamed brash youth could well be dampened by the Elders. Look closely and you will notice that in their composite they constitute the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews, the church and state united in one "theocracy."

Alas, they have shed their dignity; by confederating together at such an unearthly hour of the night they only reveal that their work cannot stand the light of day; it must needs be shrouded by the darkness of the night. We have a very apt description recorded in James 3:14-16, "But if ye have bitter envyings and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is there is confusion and every evil work." Envy brooded in the soul of Judas and it led him to lie against the truth. Contracting an illicit agreement for 30 pieces of silver, Judas waited for the opportunity to complete his part. God however, makes the wisdom of the world become foolishness. Contrary to the stipulations of the agreement, Judas presented Christ to the Sanhedrin in the early hours of Friday morning. Now what were they going to do? They had decided to wait until after the Passover; it was going to be a quiet affair without any stir. Judas must have convinced the Jews that it was now or never, for he secured the temple guard and with their unnecessary assist of swords and staves they had brought Jesus to the house of the High Priest. This devilish wisdom produced unbelievable confusion. Doctors of the law, Levites, Elders, are seen babbling together trying to assess the situation and agree on one particular charge with which they may present Jesus to Pilate as grounds for execution.

It is in the midst of this confusion that finally Caiaphas has taken notice that Jesus is extraordinary in His silence. Usually at such a pre-trial the suspect takes up the brunt of the argument. After all when one's life is at stake he is at least expected to show

some interest. If one is innocent he will surely produce all the proof and argumentation to substantiate such a fact and plead for his release. Having observed this repeatedly in other prisoners, Caiaphas turns to Christ and says, "Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But He held his peace and answered nothing."

There can be no question about a possible defense for Christ. Let no one imagine that Christ had no defense, that He considered Himself guilty and worthy of death. One can fill pages of evidence to show that all during His life and ministry He never did one thing that made Him worthy of death. There could be no lawful charge placed against Him. On the contrary one could also fill pages with evidence that the Jews, and more particularly the Sanhedrin, had violated law after law in their mock "trial." They had arrested Him without warrant, Annas had engaged in unlawful private inquiry, the time and place of their meeting was contrary to law. They had taken a citizen and subjected Him to inquiry without first establishing the charge, there were present no unbiased witnesses, they decided to establish guilt and execute the sentence on the same day, all violations of the Jewish law. They even sentenced Him to death, an act outside their own jurisdiction, for they were subject to Rome. The Jews had a law that if one was unanimously declared guilty, he should be freed for such overwhelming evidence could only have come about by mistrial.

Jesus was not silent because He had no argument. He could have blistered their ears with railing accusations.

It was time to be silent. According to wisdom that is not earthly, sensual, devilish, but heavenly and divine, Jesus answered nothing.

Nothing determined more effectively the guilt of His accusers than Christ's own silence. Nothing made it more clear that He was innocent than His own silence. All the while, during which He said nothing, they were forced to produce their own "evidence." This they could not do. Attempts were made, but this produced more confusion, for no agreement could be reached. There was only one conclusion that could rightfully follow, the "witnesses" were false, and Jesus was innocent.

Caiaphas began to realize this. He sensed that the way things were going they would never conclude this trial, and presently dawn would break and expose this fracas of justice. His soul was seething with contempt and bitterness welled up within. Finally it spilled over when he snarled, "Answerest thou nothing?"

More silence!

Finally Caiaphas wielded the only weapon which he had by virtue of his office — the oath. According to Matthew's account we read, "And the high priest said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus recognized that Caiaphas, though he prostituted justice, yet possessed the authority to exact from Him an answer. Jesus obeyed those in authority whether it was godless Caesar, or apostate Caiaphas. Under



oath He bore testimony as to His identity, "I am."

It was time to speak. Heavenly wisdom demanded this of the obedient servant.

Why? Indeed because it was demanded of Him, but there is much more. Not only must it be established that He is innocent and His accusers are guilty, they must execute their evil intent, they must act according to their evil design, they must in their guilt kill the innocent, for the Just must die for the unjust.

This is divine wisdom. In the midst of confusion and wrangling, Jesus sounded forth in words that harbor no doubt, nor becloud any issue; He told them, "I am the Christ the Son of the Living God, and ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

Behold Him as He stood in the midst of His accusers. He who is the natural Son of God, Who dwelt in the bosom of the Father before the worlds were framed. He came in the fullness of time to assume the task of the obedient servant having upon His shoulders our guilt in order that He might carry it all away. He never faltered a moment. He knew no sin, but He became sin for us that we might obtain the righteousness of God in Him.

And what does natural man say to such wisdom? Listen to the words of Caiaphas, "Ye have heard the blasphemy, what think ye?" The universal answer is, "worthy of death." It will not do for us to self-righteously condemn the Sanhedrin as if we would exalt ourselves above them. That they were unworthy cannot be questioned. So too we would conclude the same for apostate church of our day. Many are the present day Sanhedrins who coldly calculate the "death of the Son of God" by deriding the true gospel and try to make of none effect the blood of the atonement. This is evident in the same calculated hatred that broods in the human soul scheming ways to get rid of the Christ who came to satisfy the righteous wrath of the Holy God. Men prate so freely of the love of God that God's justice is maligned and the cross put to open shame.

True as this may be, we must look first at ourselves. Deeply within our own hearts we see the same wrath seething and brooding and all too often erupting in rebellion against the holy God. If the Son of God doesn't do what we like, if He doesn't pamper us in our sins, we become so vehement against Him. The message of our text is this, "we are miserably depraved."

The enmity displayed by the rulers of the Jews is an eruptive display of what we are inside. Depravity is so dark, the guilt is all on one side, our side.

In the midst of so great wickedness, God speaks the gospel of mercy — sovereign mercy, for even the wicked performed His will. In silence the world becomes guilty before God, in speech they become so incensed that they nail Him to the cross. The wisdom of God overrules it all, for He loved His enemies, He prayed for those who spitefully used Him, He died with the prayer on His lips, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Through this work of the obedient servant we behold the depth of God's mercy. He reached down into the pit of hell and drew us out.

Need we proof of this?

A centurion was joined in the execution party. He amused himself at the foot of the cross by joining in the gambling. His mouth was stained with derision as he joined in saying, "He saved others, himself he cannot save." Yet his lips were silenced when God spoke at the cross. The darkness, the words of the Saviour, the earthquake, all brought this centurion to smite his breast and cry out by grace divine, "Indeed, this was the Son of God."

This is the power of God unto salvation. Having paid for the sins of those whom the Father had given unto Him, He shouted forth triumphantly "It is finished" and gave up the ghost. Even death could have no power over Him, for on the third day the righteous Father raised Him from the dead and He ascended into heaven and now reigns over all things, having received power to gather His church unto Himself. He shall come as Judge to destroy His enemies and establish His Kingdom forever.

Are you part of that church? By nature we are all alike — we despise the Son of God, His silence before the Sanhedrin made this evident. By nature we nail Him to the cross — His speech before the Sanhedrin evoked this.

By the power of saving grace we are changed. When He says, "I am the Christ," we shout forth, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." We acknowledge Him for what He is, that God may be glorified.

Silence — speech, the wisdom of God unto salvation.

Hallelujah, what a Saviour! Great is Jehovah.

#### ATTENTION:

A Lecture, sponsored by the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Michigan area, is scheduled for Thursday, March 28, at 8:00 p.m., D.V. Rev. J. A. Heys will speak on the topic, "The Last Hour", to be given in First Church of Grand Rapids.

The Lecture Committee

#### LEAGUE

Attention all members of Men's Societies.

Our Spring Mass meeting will be held D.V., April 1st, at Southeast Protestant Reformed Church. The speaker is Rev. Herman Veldman, The Topic: "How Will the Unity of the Saints be Realized in the Latter Days?" Bring yourself and friends.

Alvin Rau, Sec'y.



# Editor's Notes

by Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

At your editor's request, Prof. Hanko submitted the manuscript of his recent lecture on "Biblical Ecumenicity" for publication in our *Standard Bearer*. Due to the fortunate circumstance that we had some surplus space in this issue, we are able to present the entire lecture in one issue, rather than in installments. This is recommended reading both for those who heard the lecture and for those who were not present.

\* \* \*

We take this opportunity to express our Christian sympathy to Mr. Peter Wobbema, Jr., in the recent death of his father, Peter Wobbema, Sr. May the Lord comfort him in this bereavement. (For the information of our readers, the Wobbemas, both father and son, have for many years been the printers of our magazine.)

\* \* \*

A recent issue of *Christian News* gave editorial notice to Prof. Hanko's comments in *All Around Us* about the futility of science's efforts to overcome death. *Christian News* (formerly *Lutheran News*) is an independent Lutheran publication. Another evidence

that the witness of our *Standard Bearer* extends even beyond the Reformed community.

\* \* \*

In a recent editorial on what here in Michigan has been dubbed "Parochiaid" (government aid for private schools), I suggested that the so-called reimbursible subjects would include almost any subject except direct religion or Bible courses. This was confirmed by a later news dispatch, which mentioned a list of subjects which included English, mathematics, science, American history, government, commercial skills, vocational training, foreign language, reading, and physical education.

\* \* \*

I repeat my recent appeal for biographical information, anecdotes, and pictures which any of our members can furnish about the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema. Preparations for such a biography are in an active stage; any helpful materials, especially pre-1930, will be appreciated.

## EDITORIALS—

# A New "Anti-Abstract" Theological Method

by Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

Last time we discussed this subject, attention was called to the fact that the "method of doing theology" proposed by Dr. Henry Stob in the course of his criticism of the Doctrinal Committee especially, but also of Prof. Dekker, is *rationalistic*. This, we found, was the more striking in the light of the fact that Dr. Stob complains that the old method of doing theology is abstract and rationalistic.

Sound theology, I emphasized, is always rational, that is, reasonable. But to be rationalistic is something different. Rationalism makes human reason, the human mind, — and that is always the *sinful* human mind, — the court of appeal, the authority, in forming a theology and in determining whether that theology is good or bad, sound or unsound, true or false. To be

rationalistic, therefore, is bad; and to call a method rationalistic is to call it by a bad name. I am sure that Dr. Stob will agree with me on that point. He certainly did not mean to say something favorable about the old method of theology when he wrote "all of us have in the past been victimized by what increasingly appears to be an abstract and *rationalistic* method of doing theology" (*italics added*). And I certainly do not intend to say something favorable about the allegedly new method of theology when I call it rationalistic. Theology must not be rationalistic, but Biblical, that is, exegetically arrived at. I would expect that Dr. Stob would agree with me on this also.

I have already pointed out that Dr. Stob's entire method of getting rid of the question, "Did Christ die



for everybody?" is rationalistic, as also that his method of simply introducing a new question, which he calls biblical, but which he does not prove to be a biblical question, is rationalistic.

Let me emphasize, however, that the question posed by Dr. Stob is *in itself* a perfectly good and legitimate question. *In itself*, it is certainly legitimate and Biblical to ask the question: what is every man who hears the preached Gospel — every such man without exception — called upon to *believe*? Moreover, this question can certainly be given a Biblical answer also; and it *must* be given a Biblical answer by responsible theology. This is not the point in dispute. What is wrong about Dr. Stob's method is the *way* in which he raises this question and the *context* in which he raises it and the *purpose* for which he raises it. On these counts Dr. Stob, I contend, is guilty of rationalism.

When it comes to the answer to this question, however, Dr. Stob leaves absolutely no doubt as to the rationalism of his method.

Let me quote that answer in full, so that all may be able to follow the discussion:

What he is called upon to believe is obvious. He is called upon to believe that God loves him with a redemptive love (the same love by which the elect are effectively redeemed — the divine agape), and he is called upon to believe that Christ died for him. By what kind of faith, other than this kind of faith, can anybody be saved? And is not this faith demanded of all? Even he who does not believe, even he who because of his non-repentance and unbelief never shares in the salvation wrought by Christ, even he is called upon in the moment of *Gospel proclamation* to believe that he is beloved of God and that Christ paid for all his sins. What else is the *good news* that comes to him but this? And what besides the divinely founded and authorized "good news" is man—every man—required to *believe*, accept, endorse, commit himself to? And what, when one is a biblically defined Unbeliever, does one disbelieve except "good news"? And whom does a man *reject* when he rejects the Christ except the mediating, the atoning, the reconciling Christ? Whom does he reject other than precisely the *Redeemer*?

We are interested in the above answer, remember, from the point of view of *method*.

And as far as method is concerned, this answer of Dr. Stob to his own question is an example of thoroughgoing rationalism.

Notice, in the first place, that there is not the slightest attempt in the above paragraph to offer proof from the confessions. I believe that one has a right to expect such confessional proof from a Reformed man, from a man who is committed to the Reformed creeds. To a Reformed man those confessions are the systematic expression and formulation of the truths of Scripture. A Reformed man goes on the assumption that the doctrine of our confessions is the truth of Scripture until it has been demonstrated that there is conflict between Scripture and the confessions. To follow the teaching of the confessions, therefore, is a

good safeguard against rationalism. And one may at least expect that a Reformed man will make an appeal to the very creeds which he believes to be the expression of the truth of the Word of God when he wants to make a pronouncement upon an important question like, "What is the gospel? What must a man who hears the preached gospel believe?" One may expect of a Reformed man that he will prove his doctrinal pronouncements by saying, "This is what our creeds teach. This is the teaching of article so-and-so." Does Dr. Stob do this? Not with so much as a word. And the reason, I assure you, is that he *cannot* do this because his doctrine in this paragraph is contrary to the confessions.

Notice, in the second place, that there is in Dr. Stob's answer not the slightest attempt to show that what he writes is the direct teaching of Scripture. An appeal to the creeds is becoming odious in our day, and by many it is considered outdated. Let that be. May not one expect that an appeal will be made to Scripture itself when answering such an important question as, "What must a man *believe*?" Even if I grant that Dr. Stob considers his answer to be Biblical, may I not expect that he will articulate, that he will make explicit, the Biblicalness of his answer? When a theologian says of other theologians (in this case, both the Doctrinal Committee and Prof. Dekker) that they ask the wrong questions and therefore cannot arrive at the correct answers, when he charges that they are talking in terms of non-biblical categories, when he makes the claim of reaching out for "a new and *more biblically oriented* method of theological understanding and construction," (italics mine), and when then he is going to answer an important theological question, — then, I say, one may expect at least an *attempt* to show that the answer is indeed Biblical and that it has been reached by a more biblically oriented method of theological understanding. Yet in this entire paragraph there is not a single reference to Scripture, nor a single quotation from Holy Writ, let alone a solitary bit of exegesis! I find it impossible to believe that this method of theology lives up to its own claim of being "more biblically oriented." On the contrary, if this bit of Stob's theology is an example of the new theology, I find here every evidence of rationalism. Moreover, I make bold to say that what Dr. Stob here writes *cannot* be shown to be Scripture's teaching.

In the third place, and positively, notice that the method followed here is not only non-confessional and non-Biblical, but that it is entirely an *appeal to reason*. Dr. Stob appeals to the *obviousness* of what a man must believe. He claims that it is "obvious" that a man is called upon to believe "that God loves him with a redemptive love" and "that Christ died for him." Mark you well, he does not say, — and as I read him, he does not *intend* to say, — that this is obvious, i.e., plain, from *Scripture*. Nor does he even attempt to show this. It almost sounds as though he means to say: "This is self-evident. Anyone can see this." But then, in an attempt to bolster this claim, he *reasons*. He asks several rhetorical questions, questions to



which the answers are supposed to be plain. Then he again makes a claim that even the man who goes lost must believe that he is beloved of God and that Christ paid for all his sins. And he follows this again by several rhetorical questions which are supposed to support his claim. This, to me, is precisely the rationalism which Dr. Stob condemns in the old theology. It is a reasoning apart from Scripture. It is not Biblically *oriented*. It claims to view Biblical truth from the viewpoint of the kerygmatic situation (the preaching situation). But instead of disengaging Biblical truth from the kerygmatic situation (as Stob charges that both the committee and Prof. Dekker do), it appears to me that he disengages the kerygmatic situation from Biblical truth.

But even as rationalism, this answer of Dr. Stob is a very poor brand of rationalism. For it is guilty of a logical fallacy which no true rationalist ought to make, the fallacy of begging the question, that is, of assuming what ought to be proved.

Notice, in the first place, that when Dr. Stob criticizes both Prof. Dekker and the Doctrinal Committee, he rules out as insoluble the question, "Did Christ die for everybody?" In other words, we cannot answer this question, according to Stob. We can say neither that Christ died only for the elect nor that Christ died for all men. Hence, we must not ask such questions as, Whom does God love? and, For whom did Christ die?

Yet, in the second place, when Dr. Stob goes about answering his own question, "What is every man who hears the preached Gospel called upon to believe?" he exactly gives to that Gospel the very objective content which he says we may not give to it. And he does it by way of an assumption, by begging the question. For what, according to Dr. Stob, is *every man* who comes under the preaching called upon to believe? He must believe two objective facts: 1) that God loves him with a redemptive love; and, 2) that Christ died for him. These two items, then, according to Stob, constitute the *preached Gospel* which every man must believe. In other words, the preacher may and must say to *every man*: "God loves you with a redemptive love. Believe that. And Christ died for you. Believe that." Now, certainly, Dr. Stob will agree with me that a preacher of the Gospel must not lie. He must speak the truth when he preaches the Gospel. Hence, if the preacher must say the above to every man, and if he must speak the truth and demand of every man to believe, of course, what is true, — then it follows with undeniable logic that (on Stob's basis, not mine) it must be an objective fact, an objective state of affairs, that God loves every man and Christ died for every man.

And thus Dr. Stob is right back at the position which he originally ruled out; but he has reached that position merely through an assumption, through a begging of the question with respect to the most fundamental proposition in his entire position as stated in the paragraph quoted.

That this is Dr. Stob's position is abundantly plain

from what he writes about the man who goes lost: "even he is called upon in the moment of *Gospel proclamation* to believe that he is beloved of God and that Christ paid for all his sins." And then Stob adds: "What else is the *good news* that comes to him but this?" It is plain from these two statements that the good news (gospel) is good news also to the reprobate, to him who "never shares in the salvation wrought by Christ," that this good news is "this," that he is beloved of God and that Christ paid for all his sins.

And it is no great wonder that Dr. Stob then goes on to say in his next paragraph: "It is this, I am sure, that Professor Dekker wished to say, and did in fact say, in the article he published in December of 1962." I am constrained to say: "Yes, of course, Dr. Stob. But why go the long way around in order to express your agreement with Prof. Dekker? It would have been much simpler to express that agreement directly. And it would have been far easier to understand if you had simply stated from the outset: Prof. Dekker is right, and the Doctrinal Committee is wrong."

Nor is either Dr. Stob's method or the product of that method anything new. It is the same old Arminian argumentation that the foes of the Reformed Faith followed at the time of the Synod of Dordrecht. And it is the same basic Arminianism that underlies the First Point of 1924. It is this: 1. You cannot have general, or promiscuous, preaching without a gospel that is grace for all who hear it. 2. The reason for statement No. 1 is that you cannot demand (or rather: God cannot demand) faith and repentance of anyone for whom He does not provide salvation. If a man does not even have a chance to be saved, he cannot be condemned for his unbelief and impenitence. 3. And you cannot preach a gospel for all unless God actually loves all and Christ actually died for all.

The third of the above propositions was not stated in 1924. But it was implicit in 1924. And it only remained for Prof. Dekker to express it and for Dr. Stob to agree with it.

But there is nothing basically new about this theology.

Nor is there basically anything new about Dr. Stob's method of agreeing with this theology. Perhaps the most that can be said is that his is the old rationalism dressed in a new and more deceptive garb.

### CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of this series about the new theological method, permit me to tie this discussion in with our discussion of the synodical decision in the Dekker Case. It was the latter which led to our investigation of this method: for the Synod called Prof. Dekker's statements *abstract*. From our lengthy study of the origin and meaning of this term, it ought to be evident:

1) That while Synod did not define its own term *abstract*, nor state that they meant by it what Dr. Stob means by it, nevertheless the Synod adopted terminology employed by the liberal wing in the Christian Reformed Church, that wing which advocates a new



theology and a new theological method. Again, although the term *abstract* was left undefined, and although very likely many delegates did not realize what they were doing when they accepted this term, nevertheless in this very term the advocates of the new theology at least succeeded in getting their foot in the ecclesiastical door.

2) That while the synodical decision sounds rather mildly condemnatory of Professor Dekker's language or manner of expression, an analysis of both the theology and the method of the "anti-abstract" theologians shows that they are quite in agreement with Prof. Dekker's position. Be it in a left-handed way, essentially Synod upheld Prof. Dekker. They did not condemn his doctrine. They did not even condemn his method. They expressed some mild disapproval of the way in which Dekker expressed himself. And in doing so, the Synod adopted the very terminology of those theologians who are in essential agreement with Prof. Dekker. Incidentally, perhaps this explains in part Prof. Dekker's willingness to accept this mild condemnation. It certainly explains Dr. Stob's satisfaction with the synodical decision. Remember his miracle? Actually, of course, Synod should have followed this "miracle"

with another one: they should, according to Dr. Stob, have condemned the Doctrinal Committee for being even more abstract than Prof. Dekker. But perhaps this was too great a miracle even for Dr. Stob to expect.

3) That the deeper implications of the synodical decision are of even more importance. In this term *abstract* the entire, far-reaching issue of the so-called new theology is at stake. This concerns not only the specific issues of the Dekker Case, but all of Reformed theology. There seem to be some in the Christian Reformed Church who see some of the dangers of this new theology and who are very critical of what is taking place in the Netherlands, critical especially of Dr. Berkouwer, who probably may be called the father of this new theology. Perhaps these critics intend indirectly to criticize the followers of Berkouwer in their own denomination. If so, they should cease their indirectness, and should train their sights on targets nearer home. Besides, journalistic criticism is not sufficient; there must be ecclesiastical action.

On my part, however, I believe that the battle was lost in August of 1967; and I see no indication that the clock can be or will be turned back.

## THE CHURCH AT WORSHIP—

# Worship Order

by Rev. G. Vanden Berg

The whole Word of God is, of course, applicable to every facet of the function of the church but, if we may single out the particular Word of God in I Corinthians 14 and apply it specifically to a singular ecclesiastical function, we would say that it especially applies to the worship of the church. We refer particularly to the exhortation in verse 26, "Let all things be done unto edifying," and again to that of verse 40, "let all things be done decently and in good order."

We make this claim not only because in this chapter the apostle is speaking directly of church worship but because the very nature of public worship demands that this be given special emphasis. Paul speaks of "the whole church coming together into one place." This is to worship God. If then all that is done in and by this assembly is not carried out in an edifying, decent and orderly manner, the whole function of the church collapses. The inseparable relation between the worship of the church and all her other functions is such

that if the core of the former is broken, the latter become completely futile endeavors. Thus we give to the worship of the church a place of primary importance and properly emphasize the importance of its *order*.

In discussing the order of worship it is not redundant to restate the character and purpose of worship. Worship is the meeting of God with His people. God comes to His people to have fellowship with them and to bless them. The church approaches God to serve and to worship Him and to extol His glory. This also means that it is the worship of God as the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ and through the Spirit.

From this description of worship it follows that its purpose may not be characterized as missionary or evangelistic, i.e., the saving of souls. Those that unite in public worship are the saints, that is, the people of God with their children. They gather together in one place to communally glorify God with praise



and thanksgiving and joy. Each time God's people assemble in worship there is a reverberation from the heart of the Psalm of David, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His Name together." (Psalm 34:3) In the deepest sense of the word this is the *exclusive* purpose of worship. All other things are and must be subservient to this end.

It is true, of course, that there is also a secondary purpose in worship which may be defined as the building up and edifying of the saints; the strengthening and growth of the church in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. But very clearly then, this secondary purpose serves the first, since the more the people of God are strengthened in faith and grow in grace, the better equipped they are to serve and glorify God in and through all things.

From this it becomes evident that in worship there are two parts: *a parte Dei* and *a parte populi or ecclesiae*; that is, a part of God and a part of the Church. To remove all possible misunderstanding we immediately add that the second part is entirely dependent upon the first. The church can and does come to God to worship Him only when God has come to her to bless her and to fellowship with her. God is always first. He calls His people to worship and that act on His part is already the impartation of His blessing so that to this call His people respond singing:

"My heart was glad to hear the welcome sound,  
The call to seek Jehovah's house of prayer;  
Our feet are standing here on holy ground,  
Within thy gates, thou city grand and fair.  
God's people to Jerusalem repair  
To hear His word and worship Him with praise;  
The throne of justice stands eternal there,  
Messiah's throne through endless length of days."

This point is emphasized by Dr. Volbeda when he writes as follows: "God naturally takes the initiative. This comparts with the fact of His priority. (Psalm 90:2); but it is grounded particularly in His Inscrutability and Sovereignty. Since God, agreeably to His nature as the infinite God, dwells in eternity and in an unapproachable light (Is. 57:15 and I Tim. 6:16) no creature can find and investigate God of himself. . . . But God's initiative is a prerogative that God may rightly claim no less than a human need that only he can satisfy. As the Creator and Sustainer of man and the world, God is invested with absolute, i.e., unconditional and perpetual, sovereignty. The exercise of His Supremacy has as its natural corollary high honor and royal majesty. Corresponding to God's sovereignty is man's obedience and to God's majesty man's obeisance. It follows from God's majesty that man may only approach to God Who drew nigh to him, if, and when, God Himself bids him come and extends His gracious welcome. Entering into God's economic presence is a privilege conferred, not a human right recognized. This is not due to the fact of sin, but is implied in the original constitution of things."

He then adds: "In worship the congregation meets at God's behest, He gathers them, They meet on His day, in His House, In His Name. His Word is central

to the exercises performed, the liturgete, though, too, the representative of the congregation, is nevertheless His servant. And the dominant purpose of worship as the terms worship and eeredienst imply, the praise of the glory of God and His grace. (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). In worship, as in all things, God is the First and the Last. (Isa. 44:6, Rev. 1:11)."

Now this part of God in our worship is very important and we cannot stress that importance enough. We proceed then on the assumption that our readers understand this because in our future writings we are going to concern ourselves almost exclusively with man's part in worship. This follows from the very nature of things. We are going to deal with the matters that pertain to our order of worship and, consequently, will be considering the things which we, the worshippers, do. When then we also emphasize the importance of our various acts of worship, it is not that we equate these things with God's part, but always the understanding is that we can and do participate in these significant things only by the grace which is given unto us.

Several preliminary matters must be considered in connection with *a parte ecclesiae* in public worship. Rev. H. Hoeksema makes the statement that, "in regard to public worship the form and the principles of public worship are derived freely from the Word of God." (Liturgics, pg. 1) This is of fundamental importance. If we remember that the purpose in all that we do in our worship is to glorify God and to edify His people, we will also consciously realize the necessity of conforming our practices to the principles of His Word. Only those things that conform are conducive to this end. The Word of God then is our only standard by which our worship practices are to be evaluated.

In this connection we may also add that our worship conforms to our Church Order and our Confessions. This is not contradictory to the foregoing but harmonious inasmuch as our Church Order and Confessions are also based on God's Word. We will not take time to demonstrate this now. However, this is important because it determines a particular perspective and unqualified usage of these things. They are designed to aid us in our worship. The Church Order, for example, must not be regarded simply as a book of legalistic rules and regulations which by some magical formulation is supposed to solve every problem in the church or bear upon every realistic situation in life, but rather, in the terms of Dr. A. H. De Graaff, professor at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois, "The church's law must at all times remain. . . 'an instrument of faith for the effectualization of the sole authority of Christ Jesus by His Word and Spirit.' At no time may the church-order be applied in a formal manner, so that the legal rules begin to dominate the activity of faith and destroy the bond of love between the 'brothers' and 'sisters' of the 'household of faith.' The church-order is a very sensitive instrument for the working of God's Word and must be completely bound by the peculiar nature of the church as a community of faith and a fellowship of



believers." (The Educational Ministry Of The Church, pg. 80, 81)

From the same source quoted earlier, we find the following statements of Rev. H. Hoeksema: "Strictly speaking, the church that is congregated participates in the entire service. It is not a service of the officiating minister to which the congregation merely listens, as an audience comes to listen to a lecture or to the rendering of a program. It is the whole church that worships in every part of the service..."

This is something for every individual worshipper to seriously consider. He goes to the house of God to actively participate in all that transpires in the worship service. Each step or element in the procedure of worship is to build him up in faith and enable him more effectively to glorify God. Though it is certainly his privilege to act in that worship, there is much more to it than this. There is the highest of all responsibilities involved here. He is confronted with a God-given task which he must accomplish and to do this he must labor more arduously than he does during the six days of the week. This is his starting point and if he fails here, his labor throughout the week will be nothing more than vanity of vanities. In the house of God he cannot idle away the time in sleep. He must exert every faculty of his being in active preparation for his calling in all of life to glorify the God of his salvation. Through active participation and fruitfulness on the part of the congregation does the ministry of the Church have far reaching effects.

Earlier we quoted Dr. De Graaff. We add here a few more statements from his book that touch upon this point. Firstly, he states that "The Church then is first of all to be conceived of as the new humanity, the people of God, or the body of Christ." He adds that, "The Church...is found wherever the Christian attitude to life expresses itself in a temporal form. In its central religious sense the Church manifests

itself everywhere and pervades temporal society in all its structures." Further, "It would therefore be quite wrong to place the 'institute' overagainst or next to the church as 'organism.' The one body of Christ, the 'Organism', expresses itself both in the 'institute' and in the church as 'organism,' that is, in all the other spheres of human life. The 'invisible' Church as the reborn humanity or the body of Christ is one and reveals itself in the entire 'visible' church, in the total life and witness of the people of God, including their worship and the organization of the ecclesiastical offices and services." Then again, "But since this re-formation of all of life can only come about through the power of the Word of God, the 'institute' can be 'nothing more' than an instrument in the service of the 'organism.' The 'institute' can only *administer* the Word of God and the sacraments, but from this *administration* one may expect great things."

Public worship in the church then must aim to prepare and equip each worshipper to lead a God-glorifying life in every sphere in this world. The "what, how, why and when" of each phase of worship must be evaluated in that perspective. Spiritual order must always have primacy over chronological order. As Dr. De Graaff wrote, "Every service of the church must be seen as an instrument of faith for the effectuation of the absolute authority of the Word of God. Through the administration of the Word and the sacraments Christ would build up His body. The special ecclesiastical offices are the gifts of His Spirit to equip God's people for work in His service. They are to be conceived of, therefore, as *ministries* within the fellowship of believers. Through proclamation and admonition, instruction and guidance, care and assistance, the congregation is to be built up in the faith. In this upbuilding of the faith of the body of Christ the ministry of the church finds its inner boundary." (pg. 82)

## IN HIS FEAR—

# Sanctified Freedom of Speech

by Rev. J. A. Heys

These lines can be and are written because in our land we have a certain freedom of speech.

There is a wholesome benefit for us that we have this freedom.

Because of it we are free to publish our *Standard Bearer* and let others know what we believe. Because of it we can share with others the heritage of truth

which is ours. Because of it we may hold our public lectures, have our divine worship services, teach our children, maintain our own Christian schools and beam the truth by radio across the miles of our own land and into foreign lands as well.

And we are not to thank our government and our lawmakers for this great privilege. It is a gift of our



covenant God. To Him be the thanks, and in His fear let us make use of that freedom. He has seen fit, for the present at least, to grant us this liberty; and He demands of us that we make proper use of it. And in our use of that freedom we are to remember the words of James, "For in many things we offend all, If any man offend not in word, the same is perfect, and able also to bridle the whole body." (James 3:2) Extreme caution must be used when we begin to open our mouths and to move our tongues. The ninth commandment in all its implications and requirements should be before our consciousness when we put our speech-making motor in gear. Nevertheless, we must be thankful to our God that in His counsel we may have this liberty to speak and write and preach the Word.

We do not by these lines mean to leave the impression that this freedom of speech which our government at the moment guarantees us is in itself such a wonderful gift. Nor do we have this freedom of speech in mind when we write of a "Sanctified Freedom of Speech." The same freedom that gives us all that liberty mentioned above also grants the unbeliever the right to propagate his heresies and the worldly philosopher the opportunity and liberty to try to corrupt the minds of your and my children. It grants the communist the right to preach his overthrow of our government and the adoption of his Marxist revolution and socialism. And as we again approach another presidential campaign we are already subjected to so much slander and evil speaking of men in authority, whom Scripture teaches us to fear and to respect. Men may be ridiculed and dishonoured left and right with impunity. Each must be given his right to speak. And the last phrase in the Heidelberg Catechism's explanation of the meaning of the ninth commandment is thoroughly rejected. We refer to the phrase, "Also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honour and good character of my neighbour."

Instead, with covetousness for the office of another, men will with all their power and by a rapidly wagging tongue do all in their power to dishonour and destroy the good name of the neighbour. Let us make the remark at this juncture that killing, adultery and theft go hand in hand, so that men murder to cover up their adultery — remember David — and their theft, or to make their theft possible. Theft, deceit and covetousness form another infamous trio. Deceit, the lie, false testimony, corrupt advertising are resorted to in order to steal the neighbour's goods when we are too squeamish or hesitant to use violence and murder. And covetousness is what motivates us to steal, to take away a man's goods or office, or business.

And thus, although we may be thankful to our God for freedom to speak and teach and train our covenant seed in the truth, the freedom of speech which He gives us through men is not completely a wonderful thing, surely not as commendable as many freely speak their piece of defence concerning it. What we wish to consider with you is a freedom of speech which God gives us through Christ and His sanctifying Spirit. We speak of a freedom of speech that the Sanctifier gives us, and

that enables us to speak freely in a sanctified way.

Now speech in itself is a wonderful gift of God. It is a faculty that enables us to communicate with each other, and because of this power we can have fellowship and friendship. And this reaches its highest point of development in man. All the beasts of the field and animals of the forest can communicate with each other. Wishes and intentions can be conveyed by sounds. And by this kind of sounds they can also communicate to us in a limited way. The dog may growl and bark his warning to us not to come nearer, or to make tracks as fast as we can, if we do not want to get hurt. He need not speak all these words. He need only give a sound. Your own dog may communicate to you by a different sound his hunger, his discomfort of cold, and by a whimper in connection with actions make known to you the thorn or sliver stuck in the tender part of his paw or the like. The canary or parakeet may speak his word of greeting when you step in the door. He cannot express sympathy to you, cannot wish you a "Happy Birthday," tell you that the phone has been ringing all afternoon or tell you as you leave the house that you left the car keys on the table, or the house key on the inside, so that you will be locked out of your home. But he can communicate with you on a limited scale and give you a very limited fellowship.

The same is true of your new born child when you bring him home from the hospital. By an assortment of sounds he not only manages to make known to you his likes and dislikes, desires and needs; but he soon begins to lord it over you and make you his servant. You can be friendly towards that infant, but you can hardly say then yet that he is friendly to you. You can talk to him, but he cannot reveal his soul to you. Your communication with him is very limited; and speaking is very much a one way street. But the potential is there; and in due process of time he is your equal to receive from you all you are able to express, and to express fully to you what he wants to from his heart.

And friendship and fellowship are the exercise of communication. Let us go to the other end of that fragile line of life. Your parents become feeble with age, have a stroke or two, lie on their beds with little more ability than to smile back at you. Hear you, they may yet be able, although you may have to shout. But contribute anything in the way of speech they cannot anymore. Their life hangs by a very slender thread. And although you visit them regularly and faithfully, and lovingly, you have to admit each time when you leave that you have nothing or little of their life and fellowship anymore. And death puts an end to it all. Communication is ended and fellowship is terminated.

What a power, then, did God create in us making it possible for us to have fellowship with each other, to teach our children, to share our secrets, to live together in the joy of each other's fellowship and friendship.

But how much more wonderful that He made us so that we could communicate with Him and He with us! How marvellous that He made us so that we could re-



ceive the revelation of Himself in Christ that He intended to give to us! His covenant is His relationship of friendship with us in Christ. But what friendship would we have with Him without that revelation? Even Adam in his state of righteousness would have had no friendship with God without the power of communication whereby and wherein God spoke to him. The revelation of God in all the creatures was not enough. God came Himself and met Adam at the tree of life and communed with him, speaking to him and receiving Adam's praise.

All men are not free, however, to have that covenant fellowship with God, because all men are not able to receive His speech nor to speak the truth with Him. Many a tongue, and every man's tongue at one time or another is wagging in backbiting, slander, gossip, deceit and evil speaking of every sort. We may, as James suggests, be so very careful in regard to murder and adultery. We may abhor theft of every kind and advocate loudly submission to all in authority. But that little member in the mouth, that small muscle that is yet so powerful, that it will kindle a world of iniquity and cause a world-wide fire of hatred and iniquity, is so very hard to control. And it gets us into trouble more often and deeper than the hand, the foot, the eye or the ear.

We wish to say more of this next time and to show that we are not free to speak God's praises, are not free to use that little member in sanctified speech. For the sake of continuity of thought we will leave it then for the next edition of the *Standard Bearer*. We have a certain freedom of speech which men grant us — at least in our land; and there are lands where speech is bound. But the only freedom of speech that counts is that of a tongue that is freed from speaking anything but the truth. It is the freedom we shall have in perfection in the new Jerusalem.

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The response to our lines last time re the Jamaican young men who desired to prepare for the office of Minister of the Word of God in their churches was encouraging. Several expressed their deep interest in and even willingness to help support financially the project of their instruction. Others who may be interested can contact the undersigned either at 111 East 22nd Street, Holland, Michigan, 49423 or in care of the *Standard Bearer*, whose address may be found elsewhere on these pages.

Sunday School superintendents and presidents of societies can approach their societies about this matter. They can, perhaps, help in the support of the project. We have prayed for years for a mission field and for years investigated a foreign field, that is, one beyond the borders of our country. And our young people and children should be trained to have an interest in the field which our covenant God has given us. Supporting or helping to support young men for the office of the ministry in their churches will keep their interest alive and give them something tangible for fruit of their collections and efforts.

Knowing the need and the desire of these young men, and having been given a rich heritage of truth not only to believe and to enjoy but also to share with us as much as we can, we ought to consider this matter before the face of our God.

It may be possible, and the Mission Board has the matter under advisement, and the Synod may likewise be confronted with this matter in June, that one or two of these young men could be enrolled in our new high school which is scheduled to open in September.

Shall we further this cause and prepare such young men?

Dare we, in His fear, do anything else when the opportunity is given us?

## SPECIAL FEATURE—

# Biblical Ecumenicity

by Prof. H. Hanko

### INTRODUCTION

That this subject of "Biblical Ecumenicity" is of considerable importance to the Church can hardly be denied. Its importance is to be found, in the first place, in the fact that no other kind of church news so captures the imagination of church members as the

various types of ecumenical endeavor. If the history of the church in the world can be described in any given age by its outstanding characteristics, this age would undoubtedly be called "The Age of Ecumenicity." For in one respect or another no denomination is immune from the march towards church unity. And all



of this brings us sharply before the question: What must we do about it? Not simply, what must be our evaluation of the ecumenical movement? But, what responsibility do we have as a part of the church to join in this quest for unity?

In the second place, the importance of this movement is to be found in the desire of those most intensely involved to bring the whole church under one ecclesiastical roof. This is the stated goal of the leaders of ecumenicity. They will not rest until the fractured and fragmented body of Christendom is united and the wounds in the body of Christ healed. This goal, in many of their public statements, is set forth as the most urgent calling of the church today. The following aptly expresses this goal:

The other aspect of ecumenism is a drive for Christian unity which envisages bringing all churches, including the Roman Catholic, under one ecclesiastical tent. Here ecumenism reveals its geographical overtones as referring to a worldwide or all-embracing unity of ecclesiastical structure. This is the main direction ecumenism is taking today, the significant direction. Ecumenists are no longer content with Christian unity as a kind of vapid togetherness among creeds. They want to get at the business of merging churches. Ecumenism among Protestants, (as, for example, the proposals advanced by Eugene Carson Blake, formerly stated clerk of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and now executive secretary of the World Council of Churches), means the structural joining of various denominations — eventually all denominations. Protestant-Catholic ecumenism is concerned with the extension of this process in the creation of a vast ecclesiastical structure in which all Christians and their churches would eventually be joined. (G. Stanley Lowell, "The Ecumenical Mirage," p. 12)

No longer can schism and separatism be tolerated. No longer will the church be permitted to present anything but a united front to the world. This, it can readily be seen, touches upon our own life and calling. We shall have to face the question of what we are going to do when the pressures of ecumenicity become irresistibly strong. We shall have to decide before these days come whether we are going to join these movements or face the grim prospect of being denied the right of existence.

The subject on which I am to speak is "Biblical Ecumenicism." There are two points which must be made in connection with this subject. In the first place, the phrase "biblical ecumenicism" is really a contradiction in terms. "Ecumenicism" is an "ism"; and an "ism" is always contrary to Scripture. This is not to deny that much of the ecumenical movement today is indeed *ecumenicism*; but we are talking tonight about Biblical ecumenicism. This is something else. And so, for the sake of accuracy, it would be better to make our subject Biblical ecumenicity, by doing which we already take a stand against the various "isms" found in the ecumenical world.

Secondly, the fact of the matter is that the Bible has very little to say specifically about the calling of

the church under circumstances such as we find today. There are no passages in Scripture which speak explicitly concerning ecumenical endeavors. Nevertheless, the whole subject of ecumenicity revolves around the more basic subject of the *unity* of the church. Concerning this the Scriptures have a great deal to say. It is important then that we understand what Scripture means by the unity of the church, so that we can properly evaluate modern day ecumenicity in the light of this Scriptural truth and find our own proper place and role in today's ecclesiastical world.

Finally, by way of introduction, we ought also to notice that the ecumenical movement takes on many different forms. There are movements which are attempting to unite all the religions of the world into one vast organization. This includes not only Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, but also Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. There are, secondly, organizations which are unions of different denominations in which each individual denomination, while cooperating with other denominations, retains its own denominational identity. These range all the way from the more liberal organizations, such as the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches, to conservative movements, such as the International Council of Christian Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. There are, thirdly, movements towards institutional merger in which various denominations come together into one larger denomination. These types of ecumenicity also range from the liberal movements, such as the Conversations on Church Union, to more conservative mergers, such as the one now being proposed between the Southern Presbyterians and the Reformed Church of America.

It will of course be impossible to evaluate individually all these individual movements tonight. We shall have to lay down the general principles and leave the evaluation to your sanctified judgment.

Bearing these things in mind, I call your attention to:

#### BIBLICAL ECUMENICITY

##### I. WHAT THE SCRIPTURES TEACH

##### II. AN EVALUATION OF MODERN ECUMENICITY

##### III. OUR CALLING

#### I. WHAT THE SCRIPTURES TEACH

While the term "ecumenical" comes from a Greek word which is used several times in Scripture, its Scriptural use is of very little use to us in the current discussion. The term is used throughout Scripture as meaning "the whole inhabited earth." In this sense it is used without any reference to the church.

However, as applying to the unity of the church, the term was used in the sense of the church occupying the whole inhabited earth from very early times. The early church, especially from the Fourth Century on, spoke of an ecumenical church which held ecumenical councils. This was then the Christian Church which was to be found throughout the entire known world and which was both catholic and one. Only when this entire



Church was represented at a council meeting could that council be called "ecumenical."

These connotations of the word have been retained today. In the strictest sense of the word, ecumenical means a one-world church. There may be many aspects of the ecumenical movement which are not world-wide, but even these are considered hesitant steps towards the creation of a one-world church.

For many centuries after Pentecost there was only one church to be found in the world. There were, of course, many off-shoots from this one church; but they were considered sectarian and heretical movements divorced from the life of the true church. The one church that existed was what became the Roman Catholic Church. This was the only important denomination until the time of the great schism in 1054 when the Church was split into the Western Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church — a split which continues till today.

This situation continued until the time of the Protestant Reformation. It was in the years following the Reformation that the church was apparently hopelessly fragmented. There were not only national branches of one particular stream of the Reformation, but there were also countless denominations differing from each other in fundamental respects.

It is this denominational situation which has, in the minds of many, destroyed the unity of the church and necessitated the ecumenical movement. Not only within the sphere of Protestantism itself must all the breaches be bridge; but also the wounds of the Reformation — the break between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism must be healed. Hence, the goal of the ecumenical movement is to restore the unity of the church.

But the question which must be answered is: What is the unity of the church?

But to answer this question involves us in yet another question: What is the church?

We cannot enter into this question in detail, but certain important points have got to be made — points which are as often as not forgotten in modern ecumenical thought.

First of all, and fundamentally, the Scriptures emphasize throughout that the church is the handiwork of God through Jesus Christ. There are many figures which Scripture uses to describe the church: it is the body of Christ, the temple of the living God, a royal priesthood, an elect nation, etc. But always it is also emphasized that the church is created by God Himself. Our Heidelberg Catechism, e.g., defines the church in these words:

What believest thou concerning the "holy catholic church" church of Christ?

That the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to himself by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and forever shall remain; a living member thereof.

This has several important implications.

In the first place, the church is the object of eternal election. God chose His church from before the foundation of the world, and only those so chosen by sovereign determination belong to that church.

In the second place, the church is the redeemed body of Christ. For His church Christ died, because in His death He made atonement for sin. The church is a church only because it is built upon the blood of the cross.

Thirdly, that church is formed in time by the power of irresistible grace. God calls His people irresistibly out of darkness into light, out of the fellowship of the world into the communion of the body of Christ. Those who are chosen eternally and redeemed are those who are called into existence as a church in history.

Fourthly, this church, elect, redeemed and saved shall some day be brought into glory. There shall not one elect be missing from that host before the throne. There shall not be any for whom Christ shed His blood who shall not be gathered there.

This has several important implications also.

The unity of the church is principally a unity of divine election, of glorious redemption, of irresistible grace. The church as such, is one. As a spiritual body it is a unity. Every Sunday we confess together: "I believe one holy catholic church." On the one hand, this means that the unity of the church is a work of God. It is not the object of man's efforts. It is not something attained by human effort. It is God Himself Who establishes the church as a unity. And, on the other hand, this means that no work of man can possibly destroy that unity. No earthly powers, no denominational fracturing can destroy the essential unity of the church of Jesus Christ.

All this implies that the true unity of the church is a unity which is in Jesus Christ, and that the unity which the church has in Jesus Christ is a unity effected by the Spirit. This is the teaching of all Scripture. I call your attention to a couple of passages which demonstrate this. There is, first of all, that beautiful passage in I Corinthians 12 in which the unity of the church is defined in terms of a body. While this is discussed in great detail by the apostle, the recurrent theme is: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." (vs. 12.) The same is true of Ephesians 4:3-13. In the first verses of this section we read: "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." And then there is that oft-quoted text in John 17:21: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

But it is evident that this unity consists in many things. The deepest principle of that unity is Christ Himself. The whole church exists in Christ and out of Christ. Her life comes from Christ. Her inheritance



is given to her of Christ. Her existence in the world is dependent upon Christ. All she is and has is only because she belongs to Christ.

Yet the point is precisely that inasmuch as Christ is the deepest principle of her unity, this unity comes down to one essential point: unity in the truth.

This is to be expected, for Christ is the full revelation of the truth — the truth as it is in God and as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ. This is also emphasized in the texts which we quoted above.

In that beautiful passage of I Corinthians 12, the apostle introduces his discussion of the unity of the body of Christ with the important words: "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of Christ calleth Jesus accursed; and that no man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." The same is true of the passage in John 17. Indeed the Lord speaks of the unity of the church; but He emphasizes that this unity is always and only in the truth, just because it is in Christ: "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.... And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." And Paul sums up the true idea of unity in Ephesians 4 when he concludes with the words: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

From all of this it is evident that the unity of the church in Christ is a unity of the truth. Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. And it must be understood that this truth is exactly the truth of Christ as it is recorded in the infallibly inspired Scriptures. Only in this truth can there be unity. Apart from this truth there is no unity at all -- except perhaps the unity of the lie. In this truth the whole church of all ages, beginning in Paradise and continuing to the present, finds its unity. In this truth the church in every land and gathered from every nation finds its unity. In this truth the church is one in her Lord and Savior. Thus, this truth, as it is expressed in the creeds of the church, "The Forms of Unity," is the basis for all unity also today.

I have been speaking up till now of the church in her spiritual character as the body of Christ. But this church which is the body of Christ also comes to manifestation in the midst of the world in an institutional form. And in this institutional form the unity of the church is also expressed.

This takes place, first of all, in the local congregation. Each local congregation is a complete manifestation of the whole body of Christ. That is, it is

this to the extent that it maintains the confession of the truth of Scripture, that it faithfully preaches this truth from her pulpit, that it lives out of the communion of the saints according to this truth. This unity of a congregation, therefore, is evident in her confession which she makes through the preaching, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of Christian discipline.

But this same unity, expressed in a congregation, also comes to manifestation in denominational life when several congregations join together for a common purpose. But still the principle of that denominational unity must be in Christ and in the truth of Christ. Only then will a denomination reveal the unity of the body of Christ. And it is at this point that we enter into the area of ecumenicity.

## II. AN EVALUATION OF MODERN ECUMENICITY IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE

It is not too difficult to characterize the modern ecumenical movement. Sufficient has been written about it and by those who are in the vanguard of the movement to judge what the chief characteristics are.

It is clear, first of all, that the first impetus for modern ecumenicity came on the mission field. In the mission work of the church, the church was embarrassed by the fact that different denominations worked in the same mission fields teaching different doctrines and therefore competing with each other. Because of this embarrassment the first ecumenical organizations were mission organizations — denominations cooperating in the work of spreading the gospel to the unchurched.

But the ecumenical movement has not stopped there. Especially in the larger ecumenical movements the work of missions has been broadened to include what the leaders in this field like to speak of as "service." It is said that the church is in the world, placed there by God, to be of service to humanity. And this has determined the direction of much of modern-day ecumenicity. And so the present ecumenical movement is strongly colored by the call to serve. This is characteristic especially of such organizations as the W.C.C. and the N.C.C. This is the reason why these organizations and others like them have entered so forcefully into the areas of race relations, national and international politics, social problems of poverty, crime, etc., the opposition to war.

But with this emphasis there has been a corresponding de-emphasis on doctrine. This manifests itself in several ways. Sometimes doctrine is simply considered irrelevant. The Executive Committee, for example, of the World and Life Movement which preceded the W.C.C. pointedly observed in an official policy paper: "Doctrine divides; service unites." Or, again, the doctrinal bases upon which cooperation and church merger are founded have been so broad that almost any denomination can meet the requirements. This is true of the W.C.C. which has such a broad doctrinal basis that even the Russian Orthodox Church can belong to this organization and Roman Catholics



can ponder seriously the value of joining. And this same thing is true of the so-called COCU talks. Doctrine is simply considered irrelevant. When even an outspoken heretic of the caliber of Bishop Pike can be found in an ecumenical movement embracing the United Presbyterian Church, then one wonders whether doctrine means anything at all. And yet, at the same time, it must be understood that these movements de-emphasize doctrine so completely because they are of the opinion that doctrine is relative, subject to change, adaptable to each new generation. And all because the Scriptures are no longer the absolute standard of all truth!

But with this characteristic comes also another. If indeed doctrine is unimportant, if service is the real calling of the church, one can readily see that the direction in which the church is heading is the direction of postmillennialism. They seek a kingdom here upon earth, a universal church which rules in a world united in peace and prosperity. And it is precisely for this reason that the modern church world is heading rapidly in the direction of becoming the false prophet mentioned in the book of Revelation. There is absolutely no question about it but that the church shall presently join forces with the world-power and become, through her vain apostasy, the right arm of the Antichrist.

G. Stanley Lowell speaks of this in his book quoted above:

(The ecumenical movement) envisages a gigantic religio-political consensus for doing good. They seek involvement. The church of Christ, they tell us, cannot stand aloof; it must be 'involved' in this, in that, in everything. These are men who seek involvement with everything because they themselves have nothing. They spread the church to every secular endeavor because they have lost its spiritual dimension. All they can do is to seek absorption in the temporal because they have lost their grip on the Eternal. The ecumenical leadership seeks an alliance with the state because its functions have become no different from those of the state. These leaders want the church to undertake everything because they have lost the one distinctive thing for which the church exists. They have lost the gospel. They have substituted for it an ecumenical mush concocted of a little bit of everything and adding up to nothing.

We need not hesitate to condemn this form of ecumenicity on the basis of Scripture. It is apparent that the approach is fundamentally wrong. If the unity of the church is principally the unity of the truth as it is in Christ, then the truth of Scripture is all important. Then unity can be gained only by growing in the truth. Any movement which ignores the truth or plays it down is simply a counterfeit movement, a fake ecumenicity, a unity of the lie. True unity can only be gained by increasing in the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. That is, taking the truth of the confession of the church in the past by which we stand with those who are now made perfect in the unity of Christ, we go on to develop this truth on the basis of Scripture, ever growing and increasing in Jesus Christ.

Thus the calling of the church is never to engage in social action. Her calling is to preach the gospel, to defend the faith, to bring the glad tidings of the kingdom. If she refuses to do this and turns instead to social action, she sells her birthright for a mess of pottage. She is no longer even a church; much less does she have the right to claim to be seeking the unity of the church. The post-millennialism and universalism of the ecumenical movement is in direct conflict with Scripture; it is a movement aiding and abetting the cause of Antichrist, is a movement with which the church cannot cooperate.

But what about the more conservative organizations and mergers? I have in mind such organizations as the I.C.C.C., the R.E.S., and mergers among conservative bodies.

Even these bodies have not entirely escaped the serious errors to be found in the more liberal ecumenical movements. The I.C.C.C., e.g., is not at all reluctant to engage in battles in the political arena and to strive, although from a different viewpoint, for the kind of government it happens to espouse. But of far greater concern is the fact that while this organization claims to be conservative, it nevertheless also is willing to take under its wing denominations differing radically on fundamental points of doctrine. And the entire organization makes no provision for any kind of discussion of these differences, evidently considering them of little or no account.

The same thing is true of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. While I am firmly convinced that there is surely room for such an organization, as it is composed in its present form it is very reluctant to discuss questions of doctrine which divide the denominations which are members. It refuses to deal seriously with the threat of modernism and Arminianism. As these evils of modernism and Arminianism threaten more and more the Reformed community in, for example, the *Gereformeerde Kerken* in the Netherlands and the Christian Reformed Church in our own country, it would seem that unity in the truth demands far more of such an organization than it has up to now produced.

Besides, it is more than passing strange that the R.E.S. is apparently not ecumenical enough to include our Protestant Reformed Churches. And this gives me an opportunity to point out that we are, in the sense in which I have described it, thoroughly Reformed and thoroughly ecumenical. That is, we are always ready to discuss questions of doctrine which divide us from other denominations as long as these questions are discussed on the basis of Scripture.

But if this is not done, these movements fail to bring about the true unity of Christ within even the Reformed church world.

### III. WHAT IS OUR CALLING?

If we turn now to the question of our calling, it becomes quite obvious that our calling is, first of all, negative.

There appears to be no question about it that the ecumenical movement will gain continued impetus.



Scripture itself is clear on this point. This means that there will be increased speed in bringing all Protestantism together not only, but also all denominations found in the world. Already Protestantism is courting Roman Catholicism and Roman Catholicism addresses Protestantism as "our brethren." Sooner or later even all the splinter groups and competing organizations will have to fall into line. Certainly, to the extent that their basis is not securely established in the truth of Scripture, they lack the power to resist the siren calls that sound from the leaders in the movement.

Our calling is, therefore, to condemn all this false ecumenicity unceasingly and unwearyingly as a perversion of the true unity which the church has in Christ. And we must be sure that our condemnation of it is also expressed in our refusal to have anything to do with it.

Now yet we have the choice of participating or refusing to participate. But presently the many requests which now come to us to join will become imperious demands. There will be a time when we shall not be given any choice at all. To refuse to jump into the swelling tides and ride with the rushing currents will be to invite ridicule, scorn, and even overt persecution. But even then we cannot shrink from our position, lest we lose our heritage.

This is equally true of what goes today under the name of "dialogue." The very word presupposes that all who engage in dialogue are to some extent right and to some extent wrong. The purpose of dialogue is to find common ground and a basis for union in

compromise. But I would warn you that all compromise in the truth is a devil's compromise! And you may be sure that the devil does not concede anything which is important to him!

But this does not alter the fact that we also have a positive calling. Basically and fundamentally this calling is to grow and increase in the truth of the Word of God. This must be done on the basis of the Confessions which bind us securely in unity with the church of the past — the church now in glory. Shall we deny the unity we have with saints made perfect by sneeringly destroying the faith they loved and for which they bled and died? God forbid!

Secondly, our calling is to seek this truth with others who also maintain this historical faith of the Church. Discussion on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions is not simply desirable, but also mandatory. We are prepared to engage in such discussions at any time. And we are prepared to join any organization which will accomplish this all-important task. But yet it must be remembered that such discussion must be fearless and frank discussion of things which now divide us.

Our goal must certainly therefore be to express the spiritual unity which we have with all the believing elect in an institutional unity of the church as it appears in the world. Perhaps we shall not attain this on this side the grave except in that day when the false church rules supreme and the people of God can find no ecclesiastical roof at all. But such must nevertheless be our goal. Our prayers too must be that all God's people may be one in Christ to the glory of God.

## A CLOUD OF WITNESSES—

# Abner and Ishbosheth

by Rev. B. Woudenberg

*But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim;*

*And made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel.*

*II Samuel 2:8, 9*

During the extended period of Saul's spiritual disintegration, he had gradually gathered about him a group of wicked and ruthless men. In fact there had always been such about Saul, such as Doeg the Edomite, for Saul had never been one to reject a man just for his lack of spiritual concern. It was, however, after David had been driven from the palace that the power and influence of these men began to mount. Those who were spiritual children of God within the palace could

no longer endure the hatred and wickedness of Saul and either defected to David or returned to their own homes. Even Jonathan, Saul's oldest son and the heir apparent to the throne, began to fall more and more into the background. Valiant soldier that he was, he would not and could not be trusted to take part in the campaigns against David, so that the only time he came to stand beside his father was when they went forth to fight with the heathen nations about them. Those who



rose in Saul's esteem were those of ruthless nature who were perfectly willing to set themselves against David just as they did against any other enemy. Moreover, as time went on, there was one especially that rose to pre-eminence; that was Saul's own cousin Abner. His character was much the same as Saul's except that he was much less emotional and much more cunning in his ways. It was exactly as Jonathan fell more and more into the background that he stepped in to take his place until gradually he attained to the position as captain of the whole army of Israel. It was a position to which he was well adapted and of which he was ready to take full advantage. In fact, after the deaths of Saul and his two sons in the battle of Gilboah, he was left the only man in Israel with the power and ability to act.

Being the man that he was, Abner felt immediately the need for a quick response to the results of Saul's death. The situation was critical and the danger very real that he should soon lose all of the position and power which he had built for himself through the years. Should a vacuum of power be left in Israel for even the shortest duration of time, David was sure to step in to fill it; that would leave him out completely. As yet there was only one thing that might hinder David in this goal — that was, the mistrust of the people because of David's defection to the land of the Philistines. Although many could perhaps see why he had done it, they still could not look upon it as anything less than a sort of treachery; and now while Israel was still hurting so sorely from the invasion of the Philistines through the heart of their country, feelings were still running high and were sensitive. David was going to have to do some careful, political fence-mending before the people would receive him wholeheartedly as king, and Abner knew that for his own good this had to be prevented.

Very cunningly, Abner knew better than to try to place himself directly in the way of David. His own claims were no stronger than David's, and he lacked the popular appeal that David had. Instead, he took Ishbosheth, the fourth and most ineffectual son of Saul, brought him to Mahanaim on the east side of Jordan and there had him proclaimed king. Ishbosheth was exactly the kind of man he needed, or, at least, so it appeared to Abner at the moment. He was a weak and incompetent man to the point that he was incapable of taking care of himself, much less to rule over a nation. It meant that he would be completely dependent upon Abner — a figurehead, while Abner did the actual ruling. And, for a time at least, Abner's conniving did work. Ishbosheth was accepted as the successor of Saul by all except the tribe of Judah, and he was able to do what he wanted through him.

In this all, moreover, Abner held one great advantage, the unwillingness of David to fight against his fellow Israelites, and thus his unwillingness to do anything that would interfere with the maneuverings of Abner. From his very first awareness that he was appointed by God to be the ruler of Israel, David had been very determined that

he was not going to try to take the throne by his own power; it would have to be given him by God. For this he had waited all of these years, and for this he was going to continue to wait still. They had received him willingly as king in Hebron, and he was willing to reign there too; but, if as yet the rest of Israel was not ready to receive him to be their ruler, he would wait until they were. It was this that more than anything else left Abner free to do as he chose.

Nevertheless, it was not as though Abner's way was now easy. The fact of the matter was that, although Ishbosheth was in name the king of Israel, there was very little of a kingdom over which he actually ruled. The Philistines in the battle of Gilboa had won a devastating victory. They had not only invaded but had actually taken over the heart of the nation of Israel from their own border to the river Jordan. Together with the land of Judah over which David ruled, it left him very little indeed besides the comparatively poor east bank of the river. For Abner it meant that, if all of his efforts were to come to anything, he was left with no choice but to drive the Philistines back out of the territory that they had taken.

It was a hard and difficult task. The forces of the Philistines were strong and deeply entrenched while the army of Abner had been broken. But the land belonged to Israel and the inhabitants were with them. Slowly mile by mile and town by town, they did manage to push the Philistines back until finally, after five and one half years, it could be said that Ishbosheth was king not just in name but over all of Israel. For Abner it was the first step in his overall plan. Next he would have to dispose of David; after that he could do away with Ishbosheth and then he would have the throne of Israel for his own.

Even for Abner, however, it was not an easy thing to try to bring force against another part of the nation of Israel. Perhaps it was the memory of the massacre of Benjamin that left too much of an impression upon the nation; but whatever it was, it was not an easy thing to obtain the cooperation of an Israelite against his own brethren. Thus almost two years passed by in which Abner tried to obtain for himself some decisive advantage; but all that took place was a number of minor skirmishes of which only one reached very large proportions.

It appears as though this particular incident was fairly early in the reign of David, at least it was prior to the two year period when Ishbosheth reigned over all Israel. Nevertheless, it was also after Abner had restored a great part of the western bank of the Jordan to his power, for the incident took place in Gibeon, just north of the city of Jerusalem. Abner had come from Mahanaim across the river with the expressed purpose of doing what he could to make inroads in the land of Judah. He had not traveled far within Judah's border, however, before Joab was there with David's army to meet them. It was a tense time for those two armies as each was within itself between the desire to fight and the fear of going against their own brethren. How long this stand off continued we do not



know, but the end result seems to have been that Abner and Joab went down together to the pool of Gibeon which stood between the two armies to talk over the situation.

The plan which they finally hit upon was one quite commonly used in that day. To us it might appear as a rather strange plan, and in fact it was workable only because of the psychology of battle that prevailed in that day. To them a war between nations was not a matter of months and years; their confidence and hopes were pinned upon the outcome of one decisive battle. Even more, that one battle was not expected to be extended, but everything was considered to be determined by the outcome of the first conflict. As soon after a battle started as it became evident which side was winning, the losers would turn in flight and the winners would pursue to kill as many as possible and to loot the fallen. Thus it was that at times, through an interplay which we find hard to understand, it was thought that, rather than expose the whole of two armies to the dangers of the original conflict, this original confrontation was confined to a small representative group from each side. This is the way it had happened with David and Goliath, and once the original conflict was decided each group reacted as was expected, much to the advantage at least of the winning side. So Abner and Joab decided, too, to limit the original conflict to a representative group of twelve from each army. This time, though, it did not work out that well. So evenly matched were these two groups of choice soldiers that, when the dust had cleared from their conflict, all twenty four of them were dead. Nevertheless, it was enough to stir up both armies to action, and, forgetting their inhibitions, they closed in upon each other. Soon, however, it became apparent that the Lord was with the army of David, so that Abner's army turned to flee.

But that was not the end of the important events of the day, for the very flight itself had a strange after-effect that would have deep results in the future. It so happened that one of the participants in the battle was Joab's younger brother, Asahel. Perhaps, it was his first battle, with the result that he was excited to an enthusiasm that approached folly. As the army of Israel turned to flight, he set his eye upon Abner and determined that he was going to obtain the real victory for his people by pursuing Israel's captain to the end. Being young and not inexperienced in running, it was not difficult for him to stay close behind the fleeing

captain. But neither, for that matter, did Abner try particularly to escape him. He was a hardened fighter while this was evidently little more than a child. Even more than this, looking upon him, he thought he recognized his features, so that he asked in a not unfriendly manner, "Art thou Asahel?" And when the answer was affirmative, he gave him some kind advice, "Turn thee aside to thy right hand or to thy left, and lay thee hold on one of the young men, and take thee his armour." What he was saying in effect was that, if Asahel wished a trophy for his first battle, it were wiser for him to take it from someone of his own age and experience rather than to set his goals upon as seasoned a soldier as he. But Asahel was determined and Abner's condescension only made him more so.

Perplexed and irritated, Abner turned to him again and tried to reason, "Turn thee aside from following me:" he said, "Wherefore should I smite thee to the ground? how then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother?" But Asahel would not listen until finally, more in irritation than in anger, Abner took the blunt end of his spear to push the boy away with it. But Abner was strong and the spear not carefully directed. It struck Asahel in the soft of his abdomen piercing him through completely so that he died.

Hearing of what had happened, Joab and his older brother, Abishai, took up the pursuit in hot anger until evening stopped them at the foot of a hill at Ammah upon which Abner and a great company of his men had taken up camp for the evening. Even here, though, the cunning of Abner did not depart him. In the night he sent a message to Joab with exactly the right appeal. He said, "Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? how long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?"

Here was an appeal that a true Israelite could not reject, an appeal for mercy upon the members of his own nation. Not as though Joab did not understand the duplicity of Abner. Bitterly he replied, "As God liveth, unless thou hadst spoken (that is, if you had not challenged us) surely then in the morning the people had gone up every one from following his brother." It had been Abner who had started the whole conflict in the first place. But still the appeal was there and had to be heeded. Lifting his trumpet to his lips Joab called back the pursuing forces leaving Abner to return to his plots and plans in Israel.

#### CLASSIS EAST

Classis East will hold its next meeting Wednesday, April 3, 1968, in the First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Consistories will please consider this an official announcement in the appointment of their delegates.

M. Schipper, S.C.

#### TEACHERS

Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School is in need of a principal for the 1968-69 school year. If you wish to be considered for this position, please contact:

Mr. Clare Kuiper  
2450 Boulevard Dr., S.W.  
Wyoming, Michigan 49509



## ALL AROUND US—

## Ecumenicity In The Netherlands

by Prof. H. Hanko

A reader of our *Standard Bearer* recently gave to me a couple of copies of the Dutch paper *De Spiegel*. Evidently this paper has become very interested in ecumenical developments in the Netherlands, especially in the Reformed Churches. One issue contained an interview with a retired minister from the *Gereformeerde Kerken* by the name of Ds. Sillevius Smitt. He commented at length on the state of affairs in his own denomination and about his feelings towards ecumenicity in general and union with Rome in particular. The following are some excerpts taken from this interview in which Ds. Smitt expresses his views on these questions.

After stating that he does not like the word "christian" at all, he goes on to say:

That is such an odd word. A heathen invented it. Christian....For my part people need not become Christians. They must become children of God. Man must be a child of God. And then: the tree is known by its fruits.

But yes, I do not want either now to run down christendom entirely, because the abolition of slavery, to mention but one example, after all also took place under the influence of christendom.

Turning to other subjects he goes on:

If the churches are really serious about the gospel, then they will change very quickly. In their organization, their presentation, their entire manner of gathering together.

If they remain as they are, they will not be in a position to catch the people outside of the church; and the number of people outside of the church that is receptive for the Bible is growing steadily larger.

The solution? To be a different quality of christian. And this shall have to reveal itself by removing the prejudice and the disgrace of ecclesiastical separation. For what now is the reason why the Hervormden and the Gereformeerden are not together? You have a sort of strange, crazy inconsistency: the baptism is indeed acknowledged, but you may not sit at communion with one another. It is not only prejudice and a disgrace, but it has also become a kind of madness that we are still separate.

Concerning his own denomination he has some biting criticism to make.

I have never kept it secret that I am Reformed. But to be Reformed is least of all a recommendation. It is an obstacle.

And it is also terribly difficult if people who have come to the faith, to a new life, to say to them: Now you must go to that Reformed Church. Because as a rule they don't feel at home there.

You may calmly write that I applauded when a short time ago I read that the Reformed were together, and openly allowed it to be put in the newspaper that they had heard that the judgment about the Reformed by those outside the church is belittling. Do you remember that yet? Now at that time I applauded and said: That is the truth. That is the way you must see yourself. Then there is a chance that improvement will come.

Turning to the Bible he said:

The Bible, of course, is much read in Reformed circles. But whether it is well read, that is another question.... You can see and know all kinds of texts of the Bible. I would say: The Pharisees and Sadducees are an eternal warning for us that you must be careful for this.

I feel it to be a great temptation that I know so much about the Bible. Because to know so much of the Bible could indeed upon occasion be for me a great obstacle to knowing the Bible and certainly to obeying that Bible, and humbly living by it.

It is fortunate that great changes are taking place in the churches, but I surely want to say to you that if the pope and the synods do not take care that we come together, then the children must simply see to it, then they must simply mutually marry. I would wave the flag at every Hervormd-Gereformeerd marriage.

The Catholics are in our land closer to us than in other lands. But I am a little afraid to say that because then it is as though we are putting a feather in our hat and we as Reformed have done that so often that I have a horror of it. This is much more a merit of the Catholics than of us. With the Catholics there is so much care of the sick, so much mercy, so much piety, so much inclination to sacrifice. It is highly necessary that from that direction also a help be given and a correction be brought about from which we protestants may profit.

Several things are apparent from these quotations.

In the first place, this minister of the *Gereformeerde Kerken* is not at all reluctant to throw overboard the entire Reformed heritage for which his



fathers fought so valiantly. In fact, he is in a hurry to discard this heritage because he is of the opinion that it forms an insurmountable barrier to union with Rome — a union which must be realized.

In the second place, he finds all kinds of fault with his own denomination not only, but also with the distinctive truths of the Church, with the name "Christian," and with the Scriptures themselves.

In the third place, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the real heart of the ecumenical movement (in the Netherlands surely, but in this country as well) is the effort to bring Protestantism and Roman Catholicism together. All other manifestations of the ecumenical movement and all Church mergers have as their goal union with the Church of the pope. This is the real goal.

If this sort of thing is prevalent in the *Gereformeerde Kerken*, it is more true in the *Hervormde Kerk*. There the talk has not only been about the desirability of union with Rome, but something is being done about it. In another issue of *De Spiegel* an interview with a Ds. Taverne was carried. He is apparently a deposed minister of the *Hervormde Kerk* — deposed (if his explanation is correct) for criticizing his church. He became aware of a meeting which was to be held in the *Grote Kerk* of the Hague between members of his denomination and Roman Catholics. He evidently intended to distribute some pamphlets at that meeting. But when he discovered that this meeting was a joint celebration of the mass....But let him tell his own story and give his justification for his actions.

At first I thought that in the *Grote Kerk* of The Hague a eucharistic congress was going to be held, such as the papists hold more often. It was the intention that my people were to distribute two thousand pamphlets among those present. But when they had brought away a program, I saw that this Reformed Church was going to be misused for a Romish mass. That went beyond all limits. I decided immediately as a protestant to protest once soundly against this. As a *Hervormd* minister — I do not acknowledge my deposition — I felt myself called and justified in *Hervormd* territory to let my testimony be heard.

I walked calmly to the front before the beginning of the service, looked for the so-called altar, but could not find it. I saw two candles on the communion table — externals about which the Bible has nothing, and I thought: "It is best if I begin with them." I smashed them to the ground. One fell in pieces. The janitor tried to stop me. He wanted to come to the defense of the Romish, who, however, had absolutely no rights in that church. I was a *Hervormd* minister in a *Hervormd* church and thus I had rights. Hence, I climbed upon the platform, and while my followers guarded the steps to prevent my being deprived of the opportunity to speak, I read about the answer to the 80th question of the Heidelberg Catechism, in which it is said that the mass is an accursed idolatry. I looked the people straight in the eye and repeated the words "accursed idolatry" a couple of times. When I spied one of the ministers of the mass in full garb, I pointed to him and called: "There stands the accursed idolatry."

As explanation for all this he said:

I hope I have given the chair of the pope a jerk. His fall must become a reality as soon as possible. I expect that it will take place toward the year 2000.

The ecumenical movement is deceit and foolishness. Its representatives are going about speaking with the pope. You don't have dealings, do you, with antichrist? The pope wants to dominate the church. He feels himself to be more than others, but that is entirely an usurpation of power. He is not more than an overseer of the Romish Church. And what is the Romish Church? At best nothing more than the christian congregation of the city of Rome. The Waldensian Church there may also call itself the Romish Church. I am overseer of the Reformed church in Hoogeveen. Is the pope therefore more than I? Absolutely not. He may have no power over me. And it is certain that ecumenism will end up in Rome. It must either go along with Rome, or it must tag along behind Rome, and then we nevertheless are under the yoke of the pope. And that cannot be. First they must be rid of Mary and of the pope, and then we can talk once yet about ecumenicity.

While we certainly do not agree with the method of criticism which this minister used, the point is that ecumenicity has gone to the extreme in the Netherlands where the mass is celebrated together between Reformed and Roman Catholic. One wonders how far behind the Reformed Church in this country is.

#### NOTES

— Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, well-known proponent of the power of positive thinking and minister in the Marble Collegiate Church of the Reformed Church in America could carry his ecumenical vision to such an extreme that he preached in the same day a funeral sermon for Dr. Daniel A. Poling and Rabbi William E. Rosenblum. The latter is spiritual head of the Temple Israel congregation (Reform) and a believer in Judaism who flatly denies the divinity of Jesus Christ.

— A laymen's group has withdrawn from the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand after that denomination, in her General Assembly, upheld Dr. Geerling even though he denied the resurrection of Christ and the immortality of the human soul. The laymen's group hopes to lead all conservative people out of the denomination and preserve a Church in which the Westminster Creeds are retained.

— Dr. L. S. B. Leakey, world-renowned anthropologist and evolutionist still believes the missing link between apes and men will be found. He even predicts that it will be found in Egypt's Fayum Valley and that it will be about 35,000,000 years old. Of more interest is his assertion that anyone who maintains that evolution contradicts the Bible simply does not know his Bible. He sees the evolutionistic development of the planet from gas to solid matter and from inorganic matter to life as being just exactly what Genesis describes. Perhaps Dr. Leakey ought to consult his Bible again. Yet this is precisely the assertion of many church members even in Reformed churches.



## FROM HOLY WRIT—

# The Book Of Hebrews

by Rev. G. Lubbers

## Hebrews 6:1-8 (Read from your own Bible)

Everywhere about us in the realm of nature we see God's law of growth and maturity. It is a phenomenon in all the living creature as well as in the plant world. We see this in seed-time and in harvest-time. It was none less than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself Who brings forth this truth in the parable on the sower. Not all the seed that was sown came to full growth and to maturity. Some fell in stony ground, some fell by the way side and some fell among the thorns. Only that which fell in good ground came to full maturity, the fruits of patience — a hundredfold, sixtyfold and thirtyfold to the glory of God.

The writer to the Hebrew Christians speaks also of two kinds of earth in this awesome passage. It is true, this is only used by way of illustration. However, it really is an implied parable. He speaks of the earth which receives the rain from heaven and the sunshine and brings forth thorns and thistles and which is nigh to destruction, and the end is that it is burned. On the other hand, he also speaks of good earth which brings forth fruits and receives the blessing. Two kinds of earth: that which is cursed and that which is blessed.

These are tremendous realities. They are written for our warning and admonition. No one can really read this passage and not be moved to fear and awe. This is written for our benefit as the church of Christ. God works grace through admonitions. (Canons of Dort, III, IV, 17) Well may we take the warning and admonition here expressed to heart. Repeatedly the writer to the Hebrews intersperses his writings with such warnings. In Hebrews 4:13 he had written, "For all things are naked and opened before him with whom we have to do." Later, in Chapter 10: 26-31, we will hear him say, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Thus also in this passage from Scripture here in Hebrews 6:4-8: "For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the good word of God, and powers of the age to come, and (then) fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame...."

Thus speaks our text.

It is well to bear in mind that the text here does not speak so much from the viewpoint of what the confessing believer really is, as to what he *professes* to be. The viewpoint is that of *profession*! We have this repeatedly in this book of Hebrews. We are to consider the High Priest of our *profession*, Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 3:1) Again in Hebrews 4:14 we read, "Having then a great High Priest, who hath passed through the

heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our *confession*." And, once more, we read in Hebrews 10:23, "Let us hold fast the *confession* of our hope that it waver not: for he is faithful that promised..." In all these passages we are dealing with what the readers "profess" concerning Jesus. The same may also be said for such a letter as First John. There too we read repeatedly, "If we *say*....," and, "If we *confess*...." (I John 1:6, 8, 9, 10; 4:19, 20) Hence, the viewpoint is not that of the elect as they are all written in the Lamb's book of life, but rather as the Christian here lives under the preaching of the Word, walks by faith in the battle, where there is a twofold manifestation of coming to perfection of faith and of a falling away in unbelief, crucifying the Son of God afresh to themselves.

## THE PERFECTION TOWARD WHICH WE PRESS FORWARD (Hebrews 6:1)

The book of Hebrews is replete with the idea of pressing on to and arriving at "perfection." The term in the Greek is *teleiōsis*. This term does not mean the same thing as holiness, ethical perfection, although these two cannot be separated in the Christian. Yet, they are rather markedly distinguished. Perfection looks at the *end* of the process. It is the end of a matter in the same sense that the harvest-time and the full-harvest is the end of spring and seed-time. It is the fully developed fruit. It means that what was potential has become real and actual.

According to the context, "perfection" here is the full-orbed understanding of the truth of the Gospel in Jesus; the full understanding and confession of all that God has spoken in His Son in these last days. It brings to mind the beautiful Question and Answer 19 of the Heidelberg Catechism, where we have the key-words: *Revealed — proclaimed — portrayed — fulfilled!* And the last of these we must see as the fulfilment of the former. And when the full implication of this "fulfilment" in Christ is seen and apprehended by a living faith, then we have arrived at perfection. God will make a perfect work. He will have our works perfect before God. (Revelation 3:2) It is interesting to notice how the term to perfect *teleiō* is applied to Christ in the highest and supreme sense as the Son of God in the flesh. Thus we read in Hebrews 2:10, "to make the captain of our salvation *perfect*, through suffering." This must refer to his exaltation at the right hand of God, far above the angels, to have Name above every name, that in the Name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God. In this sense Christ is made perfect, and thus He became the author



of eternal salvation. Thus we understand too that the Law made nothing *perfect*, but the bringing in of a better hope did through which we draw nigh to God. (Hebrews 5:9, 7:19) The sacrifices in the Old Testament cannot, as touching the conscience, make the worshipper perfect. (Hebrews 9:9) However, Christ through one offering hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. (Hebrews 10:14) The perfection which Christ has brought about cannot be changed, added to, nor detracted from. To do this is to crucify the Christ, the Son of God, afresh to ourselves.

This "perfection" brought about by Christ is the hope which is set before us!

When Christ was upon earth he was very conscious that He would perfect all things through his death and resurrection. Wherefore He says to the Jews in John 5:46, "...For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of (*peri*) me." I am most emphatically the subject of Moses' writings. Take Me out of Moses writings, and there is none concerning whom he writes. He did not write concerning Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, or any other of the saints. He wrote of Me as the "Seed" which was to come; I am the Mediator into whose hand the fiery oracles were intrusted till the time to come. (Galatians 3:19) Wherefore Christ can begin with Moses and all the prophets and interpret to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27) Small wonder that the hearts of these two travelers to Emmaus were burning in them while he opened to them the Scriptures.

When we come to this "perfection" we are then understanding more than the mere a-b-c, the first principles of the oracles of God. We must see and understand more than a child of the Old Testament dispensation could see under the shadows and types. This was all the type and pattern of the things heavenly. However, we must also see more than the mere first words of Christ which we learn in the Catechism Class. We must see and understand the deeper implications of the Old Testament types and shadows as fulfilled in Christ. We must, too, come to the full realization of the "perfection" wherewith Christ was perfected, so that He could bring many sons to glory.

Not only is Christ perfected!

We too must be perfected with the perfection wherewith Christ is perfected, and must grow and come to the perfect man. (Ephesians 4:13.) The church must become the fullgrown man; unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ she must come. Then she shall not be cast to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness after the wiles of error! However, what is true of the entire church must also be true of each individual member.

### PRESSING FORWARD (Hebrews 6:1-3)

The text here really is in the form of an exhortation. Let us press forward. The verb in the Greek is *pherometha*. A better translation is really, "let us be borne forward." Dr. Westcott writes concerning this as follows: "The form of the positive charge is remarkable. The thought is not primarily of personal effort 'let us go on,' 'let us press' (Old Lat. *tendamus*: Aug. *respiciamus*), but of personal surrender to an active influence. The power is working (Comp. 1:3 *pheroon ta panta*); we have only to yield ourselves to it (comp. Acts XXVII, 15, 17). At the same time the influence and the surrender are continuous (*pherometha*), and not (under this aspect) concentrated in one momentary crisis." Hence, this work, at bottom, is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts as this manifests itself in our act. Being borne along by the Spirit of grace we press on to perfection!

Here is deep spiritual pedagogy.

Here is not an appeal to sinful motivation in the least. Here is an appeal to the new man in Christ in these professing Christians. True, they had become dull of hearing. They did not have their senses exercised by the constant use. However, the hope is that they must yield to the Spirit of grace and knowledge who leads into all the truth. (John 14:26; 16:13) Here is an appeal to the inward impulses of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. In the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 103, we read in part "..... Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and *yield myself* to the Lord, to work by his Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal sabbath." (italics added)

In every teaching situation there are three factors: the teacher, the student and the subject matter. However, there is also the matter of proper motivation. Now, such motivation can be simply worldly motivation in learning. What a tremendous motivation in learning and science was brought about in the United States when Russia launched their first satellite around the world. It was the motivation to excel as a nation, or even the motivation of survival in the race for power and supremacy. Now here too the writer would insert motivation for these sluggish and dull hearers to press forward. It is the motivation of attaining to the "perfection" in Christ, and to know that unless we will press on in learning in what we know concerning the first principles we shall forget what we have learned, or what is worse lose it through indifference.

Now we will attempt to follow the instruction of the writer.

This we shall do if God permit.

### IN MEMORIAM

On Jan. 31, 1968 it pleased the Lord to take unto Himself our beloved husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather,

JOHN HELDER

at the age of 86 years.

Mrs. Anna Helder  
Mr. and Mrs. Jos. Oomkes  
Mrs. James Westenberg  
Mr. and Mrs. Howard Deur  
Mr. and Mrs. Herman Hoogewind  
10 Grandchildren and  
4 Great-Grandchildren



## NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES—

February 23, 1968

The Beacon Lights February Hymn-sing was held in Southwest Church and drew a pew-filling, aisle-stuffing crowd of enthusiastic singers. Jim Schipper led the "sing" in his usual jovial manner, lifting the spirits of the people to a rafter-ringing response to his direction. A sixteen voice segment of Adams St. School choir rendered a few numbers; Mrs. Phil Lotterman and Kathy Clawson gave an organ-piano duet and also accompanied the singing. Ken Kuiper gave a reading which revealed his responses in an imaginary debate with an unbelieving acquaintance who challenged his faith. From all reports, this was a very satisfying hymn-sing which brought the Lord's Day to a fitting close.

\* \* \*

Because he was a delegate to Classis West, which would meet the first week in March, Rev. C. Hanks, of Redlands, Calif., planned to preach in Hull, to lecture in Doon, and to conduct church visitation in the churches. The lecture was sponsored by Doon's School Board, and the announced topic was "Training Our Children."

\* \* \*

Lynden's congregation was happy to witness the public confession of faith of three of their members in the afternoon of February 18.

\* \* \*

Southwest's congregation approved a consistory-proposed repair and remodel project and a new heating unit to be installed in the basement. Their hard-of-hearing members have also been supplied with some seven hearing-aid outlets in three rows of seats. Their Mr. De Kraker was prepared to give instruction for their use to those requesting it.

\* \* \*

Because of a badly disrupted work schedule due to the long session of Classis East, many pulpit exchanges were arranged. The Revs. Lubbers, Heys, and Harbach made a three-way switch, and Revs. Veldman and Kortering traded their posts for one service.

\* \* \*

All of our bulletins revealed the fact that we were privileged to share Edgerton's burden in maintaining their own school. This was indeed a privilege, and the great need was supported while heeding the admonition, "share ye one another's burdens."

\* \* \*

The Mission Board of our churches has requested Southeast's consistory to release Rev. Schipper for four weeks so that he may return to labor in Pella, Iowa. This request was granted, which necessitated a cancellation of their pastor's classical appointments to South Holland, as well as supply of both the latter and of Southeast's pulpit by the Seminary.

\* \* \*

Oak Lawn's Adult Bible Study Class, in their bulletin announcement, made this request, "Let us strive to follow the example of the Bereans who were 'more

noble than those in Thessalonica in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so,'" quoting from Acts 17.

\* \* \*

Hull has called Rev. Decker to be their minister. And when you read this (written 25 days before publication) you also will know what Rev. Decker's reply to Hull was.

\* \* \*

The Federation Board invited the area young people to a toboggan party at Hula Heights for the evening of February 22. This ad mentioned the *fee, fun, food*, and *fellowship*, but couldn't have mentioned the knee-out-of-joint to be suffered by Ron Yonkers at the bottom of the hill! That George Washington's birthday celebration will probably be best remembered by the jaunt to the hospital emergency room to re-locate the dislocated joint. Some *fun!* Some *fee!*

\* \* \*

The Jr. Mr. and Mrs. Society of Hope Church recently enjoyed some slides of the Island of Guam, shown by Mr. and Mrs. Quenga, who are teachers in Hope School. Mr. Quenga is a native of Guam, and Mrs. Quenga taught school there for some time, and is fully acquainted with the country and its people. In the school's "Highlights" Mr. Quenga has a contribution in which he tells about the Island and records some of his impressions of his new environment. It is too long to be inserted in this column, but we wish you could all read his reflections on parent-controlled schools; he relates that the primary consideration why their family moved to the mainland was their son's education. His concluding thoughts were of "their precious son, for soon the time will come when his little face, with its dark almond-shaped eyes, will appear along with the others to claim his right to these covenant blessings, even though his coming was from far across the sea."

\* \* \*

The other school papers, Adams St. "Announcer," South Holland's "Reflector," and Loveland's "Ledger" have all come to our desk and are excellent contributions to the reading material coming into our homes. It would be extremely difficult to award first prize to any one of these if such a contest were ever held. They are all tops!

\* \* \*

Lynden's little flock does not boast a janitor. All the male members are so described — even the minister takes his turn to clean the church. Clearly the social strata of Lynden is singular!

\* \* \*

*Quiet Thought:* "Christ has gone to prepare heaven for us and has sent the Holy Ghost to prepare us for heaven."

\* \* \*

...see you in church.

JMF