

The Standard Bearer

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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Assurance of Election

News From Jamaica

Beginning: Eschatology-In The Old Testament

The OPC and the “Free Offer” (3)

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THE STANDARD BEARER

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Meditation

Assurance of Election

Rev. M. Schipper

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”

II Peter 1:10.

Wherefore . . . !

Herewith the apostle connects the exhortation in our text with the preceding context. The text appears, first of all, as a conclusion to what the apostle had been speaking of especially in the verses 5-8 of this chapter. There he had exhorted his readers to give diligence to put on Christian virtues. Those who do this, so he informs us, will never be unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And consistent with this they will also give diligence to make their calling and election sure.

The rather, brethren . . . !

In these words the text, in the second place, appears

in direct contrast to that of which the apostle spoke in the immediately preceding verse. There he informs us that “he that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” In contrast to this, the brethren are urged to give diligence to make their calling and election sure, for if they do these things they should never stumble as the blind.

Urgent it is, therefore, that we make our calling and election sure!

Mark well the order in which the apostle presents the exhortation in the text!

It is not: make your election and calling sure; but

precisely: make your calling and election sure! The former is the order of God's counsel and eternal purpose; while the latter is the order of our experience. Obviously it is the latter which the apostle has in mind.

Indeed, from God's point of view, that is, from the viewpoint of His decretive purpose, then election precedes in the order of our salvation. Such is the order as expressed in Romans 8: "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called . . ." But this is not the viewpoint in our text, though it is surely the background.

Rather, as we suggested, the apostle would have the Christian brethren come to an assurance of their election as they stand in the midst of the world, and are beset on every hand not only by the trials of faith, but also as they walk still in an evil nature. He would have them to observe their election by its fruits. Consequently, make sure your calling and election!

Make sure your election?

But how can that be?

Is not our election sure?

Is it not eternally and unchangeably decreed in sovereign predestination who are, and who are not God's elect? Is it not plainly declared in the infallible Word of God that the names of all the elect are indelibly inscribed in the Lamb's book of life? Is not their number fixed, so that none can be added, and none can be subtracted, and that at last there shall appear on Mount Zion the one hundred and forty-four thousand, the sum total of all the elect of God, figuratively speaking? And if, as the Scriptures plentifully aver, the elect are determined by the predestinating counsel of the Most High, is it not also true that these same Scriptures declare: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my good pleasure?"

And, of course, the answers to all these questions are in the affirmative!

Indeed, there is nothing more sure than that the Lord knoweth them that are His, and that no one, or nothing shall be able to pluck them out of His hand. It is precisely this truth which gives the Christian the solid comfort he needs. It is this faith that prompted the Reformed fathers to declare: "Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault, from the primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom he from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of Salvation . . ." (Canons I, 7). It was this faith that moved the church of Christ to declare: "I believe an Holy Catholic Church . . ."; and the author of the catechism to explain: "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." (H.C.-L.D. XXI, Qu. 54).

Indeed, our election is very sure!

But how, then, is it that the apostle exhorts us to make it sure?

No doubt, there are many, also in our day, who will point to our text as proof that our election is sure only when we make it sure. Arminianism has a way of speaking of election, and at the same time leaving it to be something that hangs by the slender thread of man's free will. Deceiving the minds of many, they inform you that God certainly chose certain nations or classes of people, but the election of the individual depends on and waits for the action of his will, or of his faith. We are told that God from eternity chose those whom He saw beforehand would believe in and accept Christ and His proffered salvation. Your election therefore is accordingly conditional, and it depends on your action whether it will be realized. You must make it sure!

But don't you see, beloved reader, that if certainty of our election depends on man's will, there can be no assurance of election whatsoever? Man, whose breath is in his nostrils, whose will is fickle and mutable, can never be depended on. If our election rested on such shallow basis, it could never be sure. Thanks be unto God, our election rests on solid ground, — the Immutable, and Eternal Himself. So that when the apostle exhorts us to make our election sure, this cannot mean that our election is that which has yet to be determined, or that the realization of it depends on us. God forbid that, that should ever be so!

But again, we ask: what then does the apostle have in mind? What does he mean when he exhorts us to make our election sure?

The answer is very simple. In one word, he means to say: make it sure in your own consciousness. Make certain in your own heart and mind that you are one of God's elect.

And is there anything in all the world that you would wish to be more sure of than that? O, there may be many things concerning which you might desire assurance. You may desire to know, especially when you grow older, whether you will be taken care of in a material way to the end. You may desire to know with assurance whether your children will continue in the faith, and not fall away in the great apostasy of our time. You may want some assurance whether you yourself will be able to withstand the fiery darts of Satan when Antichrist comes to his own, when you shall be required to endure tribulation such as the church of Christ has never before experienced. But when you sum it all up, and try to determine what it is that you are most desirous to know with unerring assurance, is it not this, that God has chosen you in Christ Jesus to be an heir of eternal life, and to share

with Him His blessed fellowship for ever?

But again, how shall we make our election sure?

The answer very simply lies in the text itself. We make our election sure by making sure our calling. This is also the reason why calling is mentioned first.

Calling and election go together. They are one. They are so related that the former is the fruit of the latter; and the latter is the ground of the former. When you make your calling sure, you at the same time make your election sure. You will recognize your election by its fruits in your lives.

Give all diligence, therefore, to make your calling sure!

Your calling!

Understand well, this cannot refer merely to that initial calling whereby God spoke inwardly to your heart as He spoke to you outwardly through the preaching of the gospel, according to which calling you were consciously translated out of the kingdom of darkness into that of His marvelous light. Though, to be sure, your calling had indeed such a beginning, and was realized initially perhaps in such an experience. The Word of God here is not urging us to recall a drastic experience you may have had somewhere and sometime in your life when, like the apostle Paul, you were suddenly halted on your way, and your whole life was drastically changed. We are not exhorted here to simply call to mind a sudden change in our life, when, like the Philippian jailor, through a spiritual earthquake we were made to cry out: "What shall I do to be saved?" It is very well possible that you and I may never be able to boast of such a drastic experience. And if our calling depended on such an experience, then it is possible that we could never be assured of our calling.

Nay, rather, our calling, though it certainly is outwardly through the preaching of the gospel and inwardly by the voice of God to our heart, whereby we are translated from darkness to light, is also constant. It continues, and in such a way that it makes us to walk in the way of sanctification, without which no man shall see the Lord. Our calling comes to us daily as we have to struggle with the old man of sin within us, to mortify our flesh, and to put on the new man, created unto all good works. Our calling is to walk in the midst of the world of darkness as the children of light. Our calling is to be holy as He is holy, to hate evil and love the good, to hate the lie and speak the truth. In one word, our calling is to walk in all good works, which God has before prepared, in order that we should walk in them. When we are diligent in making our calling sure, we will also, in the light of the context, be adding virtue to our faith, knowledge to our virtue, temperance to our knowledge, patience to our temperance, and godliness to our patience. We will not be barren in our Christian life, but fruitful!

Give diligence . . .!

That is, desire earnestly, and give it all your attention!

And when you do this faithfully by the grace of God, you shall never stumble! Neglect to do this, and you will surely stumble and fall.

Make sure your calling, and two things will happen; you will come to the blessed assurance of your own election, and an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will be given unto you.

Blessed Assurance!

Question Box

Some Pertinent Questions About Our Reformed Position (5)

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

Question

The final question from my Canadian questioner is as follows:

"On the other hand, is it not so that the atoning work of our Lord and Savior is 'sufficient' for all men?"

See Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 15, Answer 37; Canons of Dordt, II, 3; and I Tim. 2:6, where we read, 'Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.'

"These things are deep, and we seem to be on the

verge of going beyond the Lord's revealed will, and our finite minds will not be able to grasp and reconcile as a rational whole (what is for us rational) the Lord's absolute sovereignty in electing sinners to salvation, and our responsibility on the other hand; and therefore we must tread very carefully here, and with the greatest reverence, or so it seems to me."

Reply

Let me begin by emphasizing my agreement with my questioner: we must *always* tread carefully and with the greatest reverence when we deal with God's Word. And to me, this means that one of the fundamental principles which we must remember is that Scripture (God's revealed will) is *one*, that it does not contradict itself but is perfectly harmonious, and that Scripture interprets Scripture. Hence, we must always seek to understand one part of Scripture in the light of the whole of Holy Writ. We must also bear in mind that Scripture is "rational," that is understandable. In Holy Scripture God reveals Himself to us exactly in such a way that our "finite minds" may be able to grasp that revelation as one, harmonious whole.

In the second place, therefore, I wish to emphasize that if my questioner intends to set God's absolute sovereignty in electing sinners to salvation and our responsibility over against one another, as opposing or even as *apparently* contradictory truths, this is a mistake. There is indeed an area in the relation between these two which it is difficult for us to fathom; I have reference to the *manner* in which the sovereign will of God embraces and controls and directs the rational, moral creature. As to the *fact* of this relationship, there is no doubt whatsoever. God's sovereign counsel and will embraces and controls and determines the every action of both the wicked and the righteous. Of the children of God Scripture says: "For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Phil. 2:12, 13. But also of the wicked it is said: "For a truth against the holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." Acts 4:27, 28. Hence, whatever problems there may be as to this matter, the truth itself is very plain: God's sovereign counsel and will embraces, determines, controls, and directs the responsible (rational, moral; thinking and willing) creature. And whatever may be said about the responsibility of men in general, or of the Christian in particular, we must always remember that that responsibility is completely circumscribed by the sovereign counsel and will of God.

In the third place, of the references given there is only one which speaks of the sufficiency of the death of Christ. That is the celebrated — and often misused — statement of Canons II, A, 3, which reads: "The death

of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin; and is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world." In my commentary on the Canons which appeared some years ago in the *Standard Bearer*, I pointed out that the subject in this article is not *for whom Christ died*, but *the perfection and infinite worth and value of Christ's sacrifice*. In the second place, I pointed out that this article is an answer to an Arminian argument against limited, or particular, atonement. When the fathers of Dordrecht maintained particular atonement, the Arminians countered with the sophistic accusation that with their doctrine of limited atonement the fathers proclaimed a limited and stingy God and an impoverished Christ, as though the fact that some men went lost was to be blamed on the poverty of Christ's sacrifice. Now what did the fathers say over against that? Did they say: Christ died for all men? Did they say: Christ's death is sufficient for all, but efficient only for the elect? Then they would have conceded to the Arminians. But they did say: Christ's death "is of infinite value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world." But it is important to note that they emphatically did NOT say that Christ in any sense died for the whole world in the sense of all men. Further, I wrote at that time:

"A study of the above opinions of the delegates (Acts of the Synod of Dordrecht, pp. 420, ff.) is also very revealing as to the meaning of the statement under discussion. It means that the sacrifice and satisfaction of Christ *when considered by itself*, that is, apart from God's elective decree and apart from the intent and purpose of Christ's death and apart from the fact that Christ represented in His death only the elect, *would have been* sufficient to expiate the sins of the entire human race, yea, of several more worlds. There is nothing defective in that death itself, nothing lacking in the value of the sacrifice, that limits its atoning efficiency to the elect alone; the latter limitation is not due to a limited value of Christ's death, — for His death was abundantly sufficient, yea, infinite in value; — but it is due to the sovereign limitation of God's elective will, with which will Christ was in perfect harmony when He gave Himself to the death of the cross. Such is the idea of this statement." [Note: I also treated this question in detail — and with quotations from the fathers of Dordt — in a pamphlet available from the RFPA: *The Atonement of Christ According To Dordrecht*.]

The remaining two references, however, do not speak of this value and "sufficiency" of the death of Christ. They speak of that which Christ actually accomplished in His atoning death. In the Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 37, we read: "That he, all the time that he lived on earth, but especially at the end of his life, sustained in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind: that so by his passion,

as the only propitiatory sacrifice, he might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the favor of God, righteousness and eternal life.” It is evident that here the Catechism is speaking of the actual atoning work of Christ, of His propitiatory sacrifice, and of the righteousness and eternal life which Christ merited by His atoning suffering. And this cannot be understood generally. Permit me to quote the commentary found in Rev. Herman Hoeksema’s *The Triple Knowledge*, Volume I, pp. 641-642:

A word must be said about the statement of the Catechism that Christ sustained the wrath of God *against the sins of all mankind*, of the whole human race. This dare not be understood in the sense that He suffered and died and brought the sacrifice of atonement for every man individually, nor even that it was His intention to do so. Nor may the expression that occurs elsewhere in our Confessions (Canons II, 3) that the sacrifice of Christ is “of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world,” be understood in the sense of general atonement. Christ suffered for His elect. Them and them alone He represented according to the counsel of God. For His own, for the sheep His Father had given Him, He laid down His life. He did not suffer more than was necessary to redeem them. Not one drop of blood that was shed by the Saviour was shed in vain. Those for whom He suffered are surely redeemed and saved. However, also the Scriptures employ similar expressions as occur in our Confessions. John the Baptist points Him out as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” And the apostle John writes: “And he is the propitiation for our sin: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” But these expressions, as well as similar terms, must be understood organically, rather than individualistically. They refer to the whole organism of the race, to the elect from every nation, and tongue, and tribe, and not to every individual man. After all, mankind, and not a few individuals, is saved; but it is saved in the elect. The world is redeemed, but it is the world of God’s love, not every individual man. And it is in that same sense that the words of the Catechism must be understood that Christ sustained the wrath of God *against the sins of all mankind*. For those, in whose stead and in whose behalf, He bore the wrath of God, are surely redeemed by His blood. Everlasting righteousness and eternal life He obtained for them. And what He obtained for them by His suffering, He surely bestows upon them by His sovereign grace.

Finally, there is the reference to I Timothy 2:6, where we read: “Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” The question is: can the “all” in this verse possibly mean “every individual man?” My answer is that if this is the case, then the text proves too much even for the Arminian. For then the text means that Christ paid the ransom, the price of redemption, and thus removed the sin and guilt of

every individual man by His substitutionary death. Then it means that before God every individual man is debt-free, righteous, and therefore worthy of eternal life. And then it must necessarily mean, too, that every individual man is actually saved and will inherit everlasting life and glory — unless it is conceivable that God will cast some who are debt-free and righteous, covered by the death of Christ, into hell-fire. For, mark well, the text does not say that Christ gave Himself a *possible ransom* for all, nor that Christ’s ransom was of such worth as to be *sufficient* for all. No, Christ *actually gave Himself a ransom for all*. Hence, if “all” here means “every human being,” one is bound to be a full-blown universalist.

But “all” does not mean this, as is very plain from the context. This is the same “all” as in verse 4: “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” And the “all” in verse 4 is, in turn, the same as the “all” in verse 1. And if you study this context, it will be plain that the meaning is not every individual man, but all kinds, or classes, of men — including “kings and all that are in authority,” vs. 2. There is no class of men — not even kings and those in authority, who at that time frequently persecuted the church — who must be excluded from the prayers and supplications of the saints. For there is no class of men which is excluded (as a class) from God’s will to save. For there is no class of men which is excluded (as a class) from Christ’s ransom.

And lest anyone imagine that this is merely a pet explanation of Protestant Reformed theology, let me point out that none other than John Calvin offers this same explanation, *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter XXIV, 16:

I reply that, in the first place, it becomes evident from the sequel of the words in what sense He wills this. For, Paul connects these matters, viz. that He wills that they be saved, and that they come to the knowledge of the truth. If they contend that it is firmly determined in God’s eternal counsel that all receive the doctrine of salvation, what does it mean, then, what Moses says: “For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them?” How did it come that God deprived so many people of the light of the gospel, which others enjoy? What is the cause that the pure knowledge of the doctrine of salvation never came to some nations, and that others hardly tasted some dark beginnings of the same? From this one may readily discern what Paul means. He had commanded Timothy to make public prayers for kings and magistrates, and while it appeared somewhat absurd that prayers to God should be made for those whose condition seemed wellnigh hopeless — seeing that they were not only strangers to the body of Christ, but also exerted themselves and all their powers to oppress His kingdom — therefore, he adds immediately that such prayers are well pleasing to God, Who will that all men shall be saved. By which he means to say nothing else, indeed, than that He did not close the way of salvation to any kind of

people, but much rather effused His mercy in such wise, that He does not will that there be any class of people that should not partake of this salvation. The other expressions declare, not what God determined in His secret counsel concerning all, but proclaim that remission of sin is prepared for all that apply themselves to seek it. For if they urge the objection that He is said to be willing to show mercy unto all, I will bring against this what is written in another place: that our God is in the heavens and doeth whatsoever He will (Ps. 115:3). Hence, this passage will have to be interpreted in such wise that it agrees with the other, viz. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and shew mercy to whom I will shew mercy (Ex. 33:19).

And before Calvin, the great Augustine already maintained the same non-general interpretation.

The conclusion of the whole matter is, therefore, that God's grace is always particular, never general. This is the teaching of Scripture and our Reformed creeds.

I have taken pains to answer this series of questions carefully and in great detail. My prayer is that these answers will benefit not only my questioner, but all our readers. As I indicated in the title above this series of answers, these were "Some Pertinent Questions About Our Reformed Position." They go to the very heart of that Reformed position — the Reformed position which, sad to say, is so little known and so widely forsaken in our day. If these lines at all serve to call us back to and to remind us of that tried and true position, I will consider them successful.

All Around Us

Christian Witnessing (1)

Prof. H. Hanko

[Introductory Note: The contents of our column this issue are the substance of a speech delivered for a Mr. and Mrs. League Meeting held last month. Since the speech is concerning a matter which properly belongs to subjects treated in this rubric, we thought it appropriate to include a written draft in our column.

The treatment of the subject of *Christian Witnessing* in this article must not be considered exhaustive. There are aspects of witnessing which are not mentioned. There is first of all, e.g., the whole subject of the witnessing which is carried on by the Church as a whole. I refer specifically to such work as is being done by our radio broadcasts, our *Standard Bearer* and *Beacon Lights*, the programs of our local congregations in pamphlet distribution, etc. And it would be a mistake to de-emphasize the importance of this work. There is also the whole subject of so-called "corporate witnessing," advocated strongly by some and a form of witnessing which takes place through various Christian organizations. This is a subject in its own right which is not treated within the scope of this article.

The article is intended rather to concentrate upon the individual believer's calling to be a witness; and to lay down guidelines and Scriptural principles which ought to be followed.

Nor is it our intention to overlook the positive Christian witness which is made constantly by our people and our Churches in the establishment and

maintenance of Christian day schools, the support of various kingdom causes as our Theological School, the faithful attendance at divine worship services — all of which are means of witnessing in their own right which have far greater effects than we can measure. In all these things we ought to give humble thanks to our covenant God Who has enabled us to perform all these tasks to His praise and glory.]

Christian witnessing is a subject of considerable interest in our day. There are several reasons for this. One such reason is that various movements have emphasized this aspect of the Christian's calling very strongly. I refer to such movements as Campus Crusade, Youth For Christ, Explo '72, Key '73 and its companion program, Evangelism Thrust. In fact, so much is this emphasized that it is gradually becoming a substitute for the preaching of the gospel.

This discussion has been carried on within the churches. There has been, for example, a discussion recently carried on in *The Banner* and *The Outlook* on the subject of Confrontation Witness in which one writer went so far as to say: "Confrontation witness is the very essence of the Christian life." This is, however, only one example of many such discussions which are being carried on.

On the assumption that Scripture indeed calls us to be witnesses in the world, the discussion has also been carried on within our own Churches. And the question

naturally arises: How can we be such witnesses?

That this is indeed our calling is plain from such passages as Isaiah 43:10, 12: "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God."

It is also true that we are not always as faithful in our calling as we ought to be. Nevertheless, I am afraid that we are sometimes tempted to follow the methods of modern evangelism. Against this we must be on our guard.

The Character of Christian Witnessing

Before we actually enter into a discussion of our specific calling to be witnesses, we must understand clearly what Christian witnessing is. There might be some who are impatient with this discussion. I have heard it said, e.g., that we spend so much time in discussing the theological questions involved that we never get around to the actual task of witnessing. Whether there is truth to this assertion or not, the fact is that unless we understand clearly Scripture's teaching on this subject, we shall go badly astray. This is evident, on the one hand, from the fact that much of today's witnessing proceeds from a humanistic and man-centered viewpoint. The subject revolves around what man must do, what man accomplishes, how man responds, etc. There are any number of expressions which bear this out. In connection with witnessing, one hears, e.g., such expressions as: "confronting others with the challenge to accept Christ"; "zeroing in on one's prospect"; "techniques for soul winning"; "pushing for a decision"; "confronting America with Christ"; "sharing Christ with all men"; "winning the world for Christ." I consider all such expressions as completely Arminian and thoroughly anti-Scriptural both in their wording and in the theology which they imply. Such witnessing is not the calling of the Christian and is directly contrary to the Word of God.

It is of utmost importance that over against all this humanistic emphasis we be theological also in the matter of witnessing. We must begin with God, proceed throughout from the viewpoint of God and His purpose, and end with God alone. Only then will we fulfill our calling.

On the other hand, we must get straight what is the relation between preaching and witnessing. It is possible, I presume, to get bogged down in this discussion. Here, too, the complaint is often made that we have put so much emphasis on the preaching of the gospel that we have, in effect, denied the Christian's calling to witness. I do not believe this objection is true, but there it is; the complaint is often made.

But this subject is important, too, because the

general direction witnessing takes today makes of witnessing a substitute for the preaching. Not only are all Christians called evangelists, but by this terminology the distinction between the official preaching of the Word by an ordained ministry and the Christian witnessing of believers is blurred and erased. In fact, so common is this becoming that there are trends even to discard the preaching altogether in favor of evangelism and personal witnessing. This danger is to be found in the A.A.C.S. Movement (The Association for the Advancement of Christian Studies) with its emphasis on separate Christian organizations. It is characteristic of modern day evangelistic programs. And it is increasingly the emphasis of Key '73 programs. I have, for example, before me a list of recommendations to make Key '73 evangelistic programs effective in a congregation. In connection with the sermon, they include: Invitation from the pulpit to invite unsaved neighbors and friends to worship service. Sermons on how to witness. Short sermon for children in addition to regular sermon. Opportunity for personal testimonies or personal commitment. In connection with congregational involvement, the recommendations include: allow more people more voice in the services to society. More involvement for small children. Place in our service for more expressions of joy and gladness. More openness of faith and not such a formal setting for church service. More congregational involvement during service. We have also reported before in our magazine how some are advocating a complete dismemberment of the present church structure and worship service so that personal witnessing may be more effective.

And so we must also discuss the relation between preaching and witnessing.

If we were to formulate a definition of Christian witnessing, we might do so along the following lines: "Witnessing is the calling of the Church of Christ to testify through her members of the riches of the Word of God to those with whom these members come into contact, believing that God will use that Word according to His own purpose in Christ."

There are several elements of importance implied in this definition. In the first place, we must be clear on the point that God is the only One Who can witness. We mean by this especially two things. On the one hand, God is the only One Who can witness of Himself. He alone can speak of Himself and make Himself known in all the riches of His own divine being and in all the works which He has determined to do. But, on the other hand, even when God calls us to be His witnesses, God Himself witnesses through us. He gives us the spiritual ability to know the truth; He gives us the words we must speak. He presents the opportunity and occasion for witness. And He alone can make that witness bear the fruit which He has intended.

In the second place, God's witness of Himself is recorded in the Holy Scriptures. He has caused the testimony of Himself to be infallibly set down by holy men in His Word. Here then is the standard of all truth and the only content of our witnessing as well. It is clear therefore that, when we witness, we witness of God. This is surely what the passage which we quoted above from Isaiah 43 means when it says: "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord . . ."

In the third place, this witness has been entrusted to the Church. There is a rather significant passage in Luke 24:48 in this connection. We read there and in the foregoing verses: "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things." There are some interesting features about this text. It is true, of course, that this passage refers particularly to the fact that the *preaching of the gospel* was committed to the apostles, and, through them, to the New Testament Church. But the truths set forth in this passage are applicable also to this matter of witnessing.

In the first place, it is stressed in the text that the apostles' ability to understand the Scriptures was dependent entirely upon the fact that the Lord opened their understanding. Without this work of grace it was impossible for them, and it remains impossible for us to know the truth of the Word of God. Secondly, the apostles are, with the understanding of the Scriptures given to them, made witnesses of all the Scriptures say. They were, of course, personal witnesses of the events of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. But they are called to be witnesses, that is, to testify of these things in their future work. And the point is driven home, therefore, that for the people of God to be witnesses of God and Christ, it is necessary that they possess spiritual understanding of the Scriptures —

understanding of such a kind that it gives them, through the Word of God, personal acquaintance with Christ Himself.

Thus the calling of the Church to witness is a calling given to the Church as a whole, but also is the particular calling of each individual member who stands in the office of believers.

And this brings us to the second question of the relation between witnessing and the preaching.

It is important to maintain this distinction, especially when the lines between the two are being more and more blurred in our day; and when, in fact, preaching is being abandoned in favor of witnessing.

The distinction is principally between the preaching which is the official proclamation of ordained officebearers by which God calls His elect people out of darkness into light; and witnessing which is the testifying of each member of the church of the inheritance which he possesses in Christ.

There is the closest possible relation between the two.

First of all, preaching is the spiritual power of witnessing. It is through the preaching that the people of God are enabled to be witnesses of God in the world. Separated from the preaching, true witnessing is impossible. Secondly, preaching and witnessing complement each other. The content of preaching and witnessing is the same. Believers preach through the instituted offices in the church, while they witness in the office of believers. Both are the work of God which He performs within the Church. Thirdly, witnessing serves the Church and the truth of God. Witnessing may and can bring to the Church of Christ. Our Heidelberg Catechism speaks of this in Lord's Day XXXII when it explains that the necessity to do good works is, in part, to be found in the fact that "by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ." Nevertheless, even in this connection, the important thing is that God's name is given constant testimony in the world.

(to be continued)

Mission News

News From Jamaica

By Rev. G. Lubbers

Sometimes one lives long enough in the complexity of the Jamaica churches to come to the solid conviction that he has come to the bottom of the problem from which many difficulties stem; that he has finally come to the point where he can lay his

finger on it, and see the difficulties in proper perspective. Not only does he see the difficulties, but he also sees where the solution lies, if any.

It is the official stand of the Synod of our Protestant Reformed Churches in America that we

consider the churches in Jamaica to be indigenous churches. Hence, the relationship is not one of sister churches where we acknowledge one another's offices, censures, baptisms etc., but it is a relationship where the Churches of the Protestant Reformed community in America send their Missionary with prescribed duties, which he solemnly promises to fulfil. These duties are prescribed in the *Form of Ordination For Missionaries* in the back of the Psalter, pages 74-76. This means, if it means anything, that the Jamaica Churches have voluntarily and by covenant placed themselves under this arrangement. They did this when they signed a document on February 17, 1970 at Lacovia, Jamaica. This agreement reads as follows, "We therefore subscribe to the attached document as the constitution of our churches, promising to study the *Church Order* (D.K.O) mentioned therein, and the three Reformed Creeds, which will become the rules and regulations of the churches, and the basis and doctrinal teaching respectively of the churches in this association and to submit ourselves to further instruction in these matters by the Protestant Reformed Churches in America."

On this basis the Jamaica Churches accepted the Missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches to be their teacher and leader. And the Jamaica churches ought to submit to the teaching of the Missionary not merely in a token way, but in earnest purpose, in sincerity and in truth. It was therefore the mutual understanding that the primary purpose of the work of the Missionary was not to assist in financial matters, repairing and building churches; it was to teach and help teach in the doctrines of Scripture according to the Reformed Faith, the *Three Forms of Unity*. This implies that in many areas of life and Christian ethics it should effect a profound reformation!

On February 6, 1973 a meeting of the Board of Trustees was held at the home of Rev. and Mrs. Lubbers. Rev. J.A. Heys also was present. At this meeting a paper was read, prepared by Rev. Lubbers and co-signed by Rev. Heys, in which the basic relationship as stipulated in the former paragraphs was outlined and discussed. In this paper it was pointed out that the aim of the covenant at Lacovia (see *supra*) had hardly been approximated. Some churches had outright left us and broken covenant, which perhaps they never understood at the grass-roots. These always continued to walk in their Pentecostal-Holiness-Arminian ways when the minister and missionary were absent. We rehearsed as a "Case Study" in the April 15th issue what happened at Hope Hill. Others did not leave but gave some token fulfillment of their pledge to study, which was possibly more than could rightfully be expected of some illiterate and semi-literate groups. However, they were not as the Berean brethren who "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things

were so." They were not as the violent in Jesus' day, WHO TOOK THE KINGDOM BY FORCE. (Matthew 11) These matters were brought to the attention of the brethren on the Meeting of February 6, 1973.

It was pointed out that there was ample room for misgivings concerning the keeping and fulfilling of the promise and covenant transacted on February 19, 1970 in the presence of Rev. J.A. Heys and Elder H. Meulenberg; yea, that there was sufficient reason for considering the withdrawal of the missionary from their midst by the Mission Committee.

It seems that one matter which was a stimulus for the churches hanging on was that before their minds was dangling the thought of a new church building. At any rate the missionary was often contacted for money for this purpose, (with fragmentary plans sometimes) even to the point of being abused and badgered. He was accused of breaking promises, of not keeping promises made by our churches; and that, while we were trying to get the proper Articles of Incorporation passed by the Synod of our Churches, the elder-ministers Conference on the island, and finally by the Jamaica Government. There is much legal work with this, far too much for a minister who is preaching, teaching school, caring for the poor, taking care of correspondence, writing reports, and trying to write for the *Standard Bearer* and for *Beacon Lights*.

It was no little relief to have Rev. and Mrs. Heys with us to help bear the responsibilities here. It became necessary to state honestly and forthrightly concerning these financial matters: "That the reason for giving financial aid to the ministers through the years, upwards in hundreds of dollars, was to aid them to preach the Scriptures according to the Reformed Faith, and nothing else." It was also necessary to state that aid given to help build churches and to repair them must not be interpreted as a certain unconditional agreement by which the Protestant Reformed Churches promised to give aid and help to each congregation to obtain a new cement-block church-edifice, an ornate structure; that only when and where the Reformed Faith is truly taught and studied seriously will such help be given within definite stipulations!

It was pointed out that churches have been given help in good faith and confidence that there is a sincere resolution to study the Reformed Faith and to be instructed therein; that where such sincerity is evidently lacking, even made a laughing-stock in the community, such confidence is severely shocked.

In consequence of this confrontation with the facts and evaluation of the situation, the elders pointed out that there were really two basic points which should be noted. This was because it had been pointed out that nearly all of the churches would visit on Sunday as a church with other groups of churches with whom they had visited before covenanting to become a mission

church of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. This visiting with other churches is an "old Jamaica custom." With many churches being under the control of and being started by certain women, these women make the arrangements with other women who also "have a church." Where possible, they flout or circumvent the authority of the elders. In view of this the contact with the Pentecostal-Holiness-Arminian churches is kept alive. This means that the preachers of these "outside groups," too, preach on our pulpits, if preaching it can be called. It is possibly more a harangue than a sermon, a constant repetition of the "Holiness" teaching; justification by free grace rooted in the atonement on the cross is then not on the foreground. The sinner-saint preaching is not desired, where these outside groups come with their "minister," who may be an elder, and who may be a "leadress" woman in the church.

In view of this situation, which is very real and pervasive, it was decided by the Board of Trustees to bring, among other matters, two matters to the attention of the Elders-Ministers Conference on April 3, 1973:

1. The matter of our churches visiting other churches.
2. The matter of women seeking to have an "office" in the church.

On April 3, 1973 the Elders-Ministers Conference was held. All the Churches were represented by elders. There were two ministers present. One of the three ministers sent word that he had broken off all his affiliation with the Missionary and the churches. Incidentally, he had been severely reprimanded before his consistory and before the Board of Trustees for speaking words of appreciation, and that publicly, concerning a very Arminian-Dispensational talk of an elder (outsider) by saying, "We thank brother Miller for a message, not a speech, but a message."

The matter of visiting with other groups of churches as a church-group was discussed at length. Every elder and minister had something to say. Some argued that it was a good way of performing mission work. (sic) Others argued that the Jamaican churches could not give up this custom in view of it being so ingrained in the church-life. Others said that they would go to other churches, but then insisted that their own minister would be the sole preacher. We ask the reader to judge of the merits and demerits of these reasons for going out.

After much discussion it was finally decided as follows in regard to the matter of visiting other churches:

"Art. 9 – A motion carried that we as Elders'

Conference recommend to all our congregations that they visit only the congregations of our own Protestant Reformed Churches in Jamaica, lest our people be misled by the preaching of the lie in other groups; and that we advise them that when they do visit our groups in the interest of mission work, or for this reason have them visit our churches, that they will always insist that the services be conducted by our men of the Protestant Reformed Churches of Jamaica, regardless of where the service is held."

This decision is to be made known and explained to all the churches. We should notice that this decision does not say that the visiting with other churches shall cease. It only speaks of "recommend" and "advise." Perhaps that was all that could be expected at this stage; it leaves the matter up to the churches now to show what they will actually do. At any rate, they have a guide-line and directive. And a missionary rather lives in hope that the Lord may direct the hearts, and that in this way those who are willing and those who are unwilling will come to manifestation.

Implicitly this decision also affects the plans of the "leadress women" in the churches. It will "clip their wings," so to speak. It would seem that if this mild decision is not followed, then we come to a place where the covenant made in Lacovia is broken, wittingly and willingly.

At best the visiting of other churches on Sunday is really an evil under the sun. For on these days the entire congregation cannot attend the other church, either because there is insufficient room on the mini-bus, or because the individual cannot pay the "fear" (fare). However, the victims of all this become the few who are left behind and the children. The latter then are often left to shift for themselves and receive neither Sunday School nor Catechism on that day.

And the situation reflects a lack of seriousness in teaching the Scriptures and the Reformed Faith to the children.

Now this is not written to push "the alarm-button." It is written in the interest of a realistic relating of the actual problems on the field. It ought to be remembered that meanwhile we do see fruits in the congregations of the preaching, and we have the students whom we are teaching to preach the Protestant Reformed Doctrine as we understand the Three Forms of Unity. But this too is sowing in teams, and we look for the day that we may rejoice to see young men stand forth preaching the Word of matured men of God. Idle dream? All things are possible with God!



From Our Mission Committee

Mission Musings

In the days of Joseph there was a famine in the land of Egypt and surrounding countries. A seven-year famine! Enough to destroy the life of man and beast! *But God . . .!* But God prepared a "savior of the people," so-called by Pharaoh, who re-named Joseph "Zaphnath-Paaneah." God's chosen people, Israel, cannot be destroyed by famine; they must show forth His praises in all the earth. Therefore God sent Joseph into Egypt with the express purpose of saving His people from a slow death by famine. In all this Joseph did not boast of his name and position. He remained a humble child of God, a servant of Jehovah, who said, "God sent me to preserve a remnant . . ."

When Joseph's brethren came to him the second time to buy grain, the famine was already two years old. In another five years they would all perish. It was then that Pharaoh advised Joseph to invite his family to come to Egypt, to their brother who was the custodian of life-giving food.

The parallel of Joseph's history is being realized today. The church is again faced with a dreadful famine — the worst kind: a spiritual famine! The people of God are suffering from a lack of the preaching of the pure Word of God. That famine is already 2 (?) years old, and there are still 5 (?) more years to come, until all life will be destroyed. Seven, the number of completeness. The people are suffering from malnutrition, and they know it! Many are shopping around for other sources of food. Even Reformed people are shopping in Baptist churches; not that they would like to give up their stand on infant baptism, but because they have heard that the local minister preaches the Word of God. He still believes that the Bible is the infallible Word of God.

The parallel is further evident in that starving people are saying to their children, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt." And they are saying to one another, "Get you down thither, and buy grain, that we may live and not die."

Further, we believe that our churches have been preserved by the grace of God to be a Zaphnath-Paaneah to the people of God. We, like Joseph, did not choose to be banished from our fatherland (mother-church); we, like Joseph did not seek to be nominated to that office; we, like Joseph,

also say, "God has sent us . . ."

We are a small denomination, hardly creating a ripple in the church world. But the starving ones are sending to us for grain. From far and near our Mission Committee is receiving requests for our food. From listeners to our Reformed Witness Hour; from readers of our *Standard Bearer* and books and pamphlets. From all over the world they send to us for food: from London, from New South Wales, from New Zealand, from New Guinea, from Australia, and from Korea.

Our Mission Committee is sending our ministers to preach the Word of God to hungry people when they request it. In Maine, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. They confess that they are starving for wholesome food. They have been forced by that dreadful famine to send to Egypt for grain. To Egypt, the place where God had prepared, and was pleased to preserve, a Zaphnath-Paaneah for His chosen people. Oh, it is not pleasant to see our brethren suffer in their fatherland. No, it causes us deep grief to note that brother Calvinists are forced to leave their cherished domain to seek for food! We are grateful to God — and profoundly amazed — that we are privileged to be the purveyors of food for the famished. Like Saul of old, we say, "I am the least of my father's house." *But God . . .* but God has clearly shown us that He has entrusted to us to hold forth the bread of life to the hungry. We are convinced that our pulpits are still faithful to the "Faith of our Fathers." Our ministers, to a man, preach the infallible Scriptures in all their purity. We are convinced that God has led us to say with Joseph, "God has sent (kept) us to preserve a remnant in the earth."

We invite you, you know you are starving, to send to us for grain. And when you will need more, and again more, we will advise you, with Pharaoh, "Tell your family to leave their fatherland (mother church) and dwell with us." The storehouse of God is full. Freely we have received; freely we give.

You may address your requests to: J. M. Faber, Secretary of the Mission Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1145 Franklin Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49507. Home address: 128 Ken-O-Sha Drive, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49507. Phone: (616) 243-9563.

Contending for the Faith

Eschatology--In the Old Testament

Rev. H. Veldman

We now propose to call the attention of our readers, the Lord willing, in our discussion of the history of dogma, to that doctrine known as Eschatology. Eschatology, the last locus of the six loci of our Reformed dogmatics, refers to the doctrine of the last things. Now it is true that this last locus of our Reformed dogmatics also treats the future state of the people of God and of those that perish and are lost. Strictly speaking, however, it is the doctrine that concerns, not the things that shall be in the hereafter, but the last things of this present time and world. It is upon these last things that Eschatology lays the emphasis.

The doctrine known as Eschatology embraces many points of doctrine. It calls attention, for example, to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the clouds of heaven. Must this return of Christ be understood in the pre-millenarian sense of the word, the post-millenarian sense or in the a-millenarian sense? One cannot escape the conclusion, for example, that the disciples of our Lord entertained a pre-millenarian conception of the kingdom of Christ and of the Messiah. This is obvious. This doctrine also calls attention to what is known as the Intermediate State, the state of the soul between the death of the body and the final resurrection at the last day. Do we believe in "soul sleep," or do we believe that the departed soul exists in a state of consciousness? Another subject is that of the precursory signs, the signs which precede the coming of Christ and are inseparably connected with that coming. And there are also the doctrines of the antichrist, the millenium, the coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment. What is the history of these various doctrines? What has been the position of the Church with respect to them? How has the history of these various doctrines developed throughout the ages? It is, of course, important that we know this. Of course, there is no development of doctrine as far as the Scriptures are concerned. The Word of God constitutes a closed canon. God's revelation, as far as the written Word of God is concerned, is finished. Nothing shall be added to the Scriptures. They are finished and complete. And, incidentally, they are very much "up to date." It is not true that they must be understood in the light of their times and this in the sense that they may not be

applicable in our present day and age. The Word of God is always very much "up to date." How true this is! Of course, we must understand the times in which the Scriptures were written, but we must always remember that the Scriptures proclaim eternal principles, applicable to the time when they were written, but equally applicable to our present day and age. There is, however, a development of the history of dogma as far as the believing consciousness of the Church of God is concerned. And it is surely important that we note this and follow this development. After all, our Lord Jesus Christ has given us the promise that He would send forth into His church the Holy Spirit, that He would abide with us forever and that that Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would lead us into all the truth. And He has not failed us! It is, therefore, interesting and very instructive to be reminded of this guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It lies in the nature of the case that this doctrine of the last things is more clearly set forth in the New Dispensation than in the Old Testament. After all, we live in the "last hour." The New Testament, inaugurated by the "first" coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, His coming into our flesh and blood and subsequent glorification at the Father's right hand, speaks directly of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout the ages. The Old Dispensation is the dispensation of the shadows. The New Dispensation is the dispensation of their fulfillment. Christ Jesus has come, has united Himself with our flesh and blood, has suffered and died and is glorified, is coming upon the clouds of heaven throughout these ages of the New Dispensation. This does not mean, however, that Eschatology is not taught in the Old Testament. It surely is! And to this we would call attention briefly before we begin to call attention to the history of that doctrine known as Eschatology, the doctrine of the last things.

That the doctrine of Eschatology should be taught in the Old Testament lies in the very nature of the case. Eschatology refers to the doctrine of last things, the things that must occur prior to and in connection with the final coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and His appearance upon the clouds of heaven. This final coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will inaugurate the heavenly kingdom of God in Christ Jesus. It will mark

the beginning of that eternal salvation of the people of the Lord, the completion of that salvation which we now possess in our hearts only in principle, the beginning of that wonderful salvation which eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, and which could not enter into the heart of man. It lies in the very nature of the case that also the Old Testament would speak of this final coming of our Lord. The Church of God, also as in the Old Dispensation, was never without this blessed promise of the Lord. Abraham saw Christ's day and rejoiced. David declares of himself that he was a pilgrim and a stranger in the earth. God is one, Christ is one, and there is but one church of God throughout the ages. And to this one Church of God the one God in Christ Jesus gives but one promise, the promise of everlasting and heavenly salvation in the new heavens and upon the new earth. And it lies in the very nature of the case, therefore, that the doctrine of Eschatology, although more clearly set forth in the New Testament, should also be set forth before the people of the Lord in the Old Dispensation. We now call your attention, briefly, to this revelation in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Generally speaking, there is, first of all, the passage of Gen. 3:15: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." It is true that this passage calls attention to the struggle throughout the ages between the seed of the serpent and that of the woman, between the forces of darkness and those of the light and of the kingdom of God. From this viewpoint, that of the spiritual struggle between the kingdom of God in Christ Jesus and the kingdom of darkness and of this world, this passage of the Word of God is surely a key passage. This Scripture describes all history, speaks of whatever happens in this world as an uncompromising struggle between the forces of light and those of darkness. There is no mention of any "Common Grace" in this Word of God. But, we also have Eschatology in this particular Word of God. We have here the "Mother" promise, God's assurance to His people of their ultimate victory over all the powers of sin and death and darkness. We have in this Word of God the Lord's promise of the coming of *the* Seed of the Woman, our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom we have the victory, centrally as upon the cross of Calvary, and ultimately at His final return upon the clouds of heaven, in that wonderful day when He shall make all things new. Then, in that day, the head of the serpent will be crushed, the kingdom of darkness completely destroyed, and the people of God will gain the victory over all their enemies. This Word of God is surely God's promise of the renewal of all things in everlasting and heavenly glory.

The Old Testament Scriptures certainly speak of the return of our Lord Jesus Christ at the end of the ages.

We refer, first of all, to Ps. 72:1-11 and 17-19. It is true that this passage undoubtedly also refers to the New Dispensation, but ultimately this will be realized in the new heavens and upon the new earth, as is evident from the fact that we read of this kingdom that it is an everlasting kingdom. We read:

Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the king's son. He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear Thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth. In His days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before Him; and His enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve Him . . . His name shall endure for ever: His name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed by His glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen, and Amen.

In Joel 2:28-32 we read this Word of God, which passage, incidentally is quoted by the apostle in his sermon on Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the Name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.

It is evident that this passage in Joel refers to the day of Pentecost. This appears from the words that the Lord will pour of His Spirit upon all flesh. And the apostle, referring to what has just happened as recorded in Acts 2:1-4, declares that this is that which is recorded by the prophet Joel. But it is also evident that these words of the prophet must also be understood as referring to the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the clouds of heaven. This is evident from the fact that the prophet speaks of the signs in the heavens, the turning of the sun into

darkness and of the moon into blood, as occurring before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. We know, for example, that the prophets, speaking of the first and second comings of the Lord, often spoke of them as one coming, not seeing, as it were, the valley between these two distant mountain peaks, these first and second comings of the Lord. This

also enables us to understand why the prophet Joel, too, speaks of these two comings of the Lord as one, calling attention to the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh and then also calling attention to the final coming of our Lord Jesus Christ as upon the clouds of heaven. The Lord willing, we will continue with this in our following article.

The Day of Shadows

So Did He

Rev. John A. Heys

Three very small words.

Two of them have only two letters. The third has only three.

And yet these three small words are a powerful statement of the love of God in action.

Do not read them as though others did a certain deed, and so did he. Read them in the sense of "according to all that the Lord commanded him, *so did he*." For these three small words are used that way in Genesis 6:22 and are the last three words in the full sentence, "Thus did Noah; according to all that the Lord commanded him, *so did he*."

What he was commanded to do, we find in the preceding verses. He was to build an ark, and to gather the animals and food, because God was going to send a flood. God had told him that the end of all flesh was at hand, for man had corrupted his way on the earth, and the earth was filled with violence; and God was ready to destroy the whole earth.

In New Testament as well as in Old Testament language it means that Noah was commanded to live by every word that proceeded from the mouth of God, and if he would not, he and his family and all flesh with them would die. We do not live by bread alone, and those living in that day would lose their lives, because they were striving to live by bread alone. Noah's only hope, and our only hope is that we live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God while we eat our bread.

Man again stands, and is presented to us as standing, as king of the whole earthly creation; and it stands and falls with him. All the creatures that have in them the breath of life will perish or be saved with Noah, even as all rational, moral creatures here below fell in Adam.

And let it be clearly understood that each and every one of us constantly stands before this command of God: "Keep My commandments. Live not by bread

alone, but live by every word that proceeds from My mouth." If the Son of God, when come in our flesh, declares to Satan that *He* must (and will) live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, how much more is this true of us, who have fallen away from such a walk in Adam?

The quotation of Jesus does have to do with the commandments that proceed from the mouth of God, as well as the word of promise. For Jesus says, "It is written . . ." And He refers to Deuteronomy 8:1-3, where we read, "All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which I swear unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no. And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

Noah did live by these words, because Noah lived by faith.

The author of the epistle to the Hebrews expresses it that way in Hebrews 11:7 in these words, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

And after all, there was nothing for Noah to see, and Hebrews 11:7 speaks of "things not seen as yet." There was the rain, which was not seen as yet, but, according to Genesis 2:6 "there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground."

Even then, for the sake of argument, assume that it did rain; there surely were no indications that it would rain so hard that every mountain and hill would be submerged. And there would be no sense in Noah's building an ark in the valley. It ought to be built on the top of a mountain, and not as a boat but as an high tower.

Besides, there really was no evidence, and Noah had nothing but the word of God in regard to it, that God was going to destroy the wicked. Their eyes stood out with fatness. Their violence increased, and their pleasures of the flesh multiplied. It seemed as though God lost control of the human race. Yea, it even looked, as it did to Asaph, as though God did not care. Clean hands were worthless, and a pure heart was vain. For prosperity, the joys of life, and even life itself seemed to be had by disregarding the words that proceeded from God's mouth. To the natural eye it seemed as though crime did pay, that God paid the criminal, the violent man, the law breaker with joys and pleasures, and that there was a "common grace," an attitude of favour that He was willing to bestow upon them in giving them culture and arts and advancements in material things.

Among thousands that did not live by faith it took a rich measure of God's grace, His saving grace, the only grace that God has, to believe His Word and to keep His commandments. Consider what Hebrews 11:7 says concerning Noah. In keeping God's command, and in building the ark, he condemned the world. His righteous stand, his refusal to practice their evil, his obedience to God's command amid those who walked in open hatred of the living God was a condemnation of their evil, and of them as evil men.

You may be sure that Noah did more than build an ark with the very crude tools at his disposal, so crude that our most simple tools are vast improvements over what Noah used. We are at the moment on the mission field of our churches on the island of Jamaica, and here the lawns are still cut, almost one blade of grass at a time, with a long knife and a long stick, the stick being placed in front of the left leg to stop the knife as it is, from a slightly bent-over position, swished across the grass toward the left leg. But even this is more than Noah had to cut down thick trees and to shape them for the ark. No wonder it took one hundred twenty years to build that ark. No wonder that God said that man's days on this earth would be an hundred and twenty years. This is not the span of man's life, so that from the nine hundred year span, it will now be cut down to one hundred twenty. No, this is the time that the wicked world has left before that flood would come, and the time that it would take Noah to build that ark.

But as we began to say, you may be sure that Noah condemned that world by speech as well as by the deed of building the ark. They asked him what he was

doing. He did not lie. He condemned their evil, told them that he agreed with God, and that they were going to be destroyed in the holy wrath of God. God is the one Who condemned that world. Noah was no more than judge under God. But he *was* a judge under God. He condemned their evil and said to himself and to his family, "We will live by every word that proceeds from God's mouth. We will not walk in evil with the evil world. We will by our speech and by our obedience to God's word condemn this world, and in God's name will we pronounce His judgment upon it."

By faith also he built that ark in the assurance that the animals would come to him. By faith he gathered food also for the animals in the belief that they would be there with him in the ark. We may be sure that from the fall of Adam, when man became a corrupt king, the animals began to fear man, fled from him, even sought to slay him. But at any rate, Noah had no tranquilizing bullets, no equipment to capture huge beasts, and no time to go about trying to collect the various kinds of animals in pairs. He had to build the ark in the faith that God would bring them all to him, even as He brought them to Adam to see what he would name them.

And let us remember the lines which appear in Hebrews 11 in the verse that precedes this one that speaks of Noah's faith. The author states that "without faith it is impossible to please God," so that pleasing God, walking in love before Him, keeping His commandments, living by every word that proceeds from His mouth is found only and exclusively *in the believer*. Let us not talk so foolishly about civic *righteousness* that the unbeliever performs. As God commanded so did Noah, and the rest of the world outside of his family simply did unrighteousness, violence and lawlessness. At times they may do deeds that look good to man. At times they may fulfill the letter of the law of what God orders them to do, as Jehu did. But to keep God's law means to love Him, and to love Him is possible only by faith, and is found only in the believer.

Speak not a word of praise to Noah for his faith. It was God's gift to Noah, and not Noah's gift to God. Because Noah had been chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world, and because Christ is the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world, Noah can and does receive, long before that cross of Christ is an historical event, the gift of faith to stand over against that wicked world and to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

And Noah did see Christ. He did not see Him as clearly as we do today. But he saw salvation in the ark. He saw a salvation that God would give, a salvation that He promises to those who live by the words from His mouth. And Noah believed in such a salvation, and was himself a type of Him Who lived perfectly by

EVERY word that proceeded from God's mouth, as the Lamb without spot or blemish. For the Spirit of that Christ was in him and worked in him both to will and to do of God's good pleasure.

And you, the reader of these lines, do you by words and deeds condemn the wicked world that is rushing toward a destruction of fire? That may not be one hundred twenty years away. It may come much sooner than that. But are you with that world living by bread alone? Do you shove aside God's law in order to get bread? Do you strive to get this world, its bread, its pleasures and its luxuries by joining that world, being one with it, approving instead of condemning its evil practices and godless ambitions and actions? Do you bow before the idols of gold and silver, of money and land? Do you desecrate God's Sabbath because there are pleasures of the flesh that can be gotten on that day by radio and television, for example — that you will miss if you live by the words that proceed from God's mouth, also those that proceed from Him through the

mouth of one of His servants in the sanctuary? Do you rob and steal and lie and cheat to get this earth's goods, and place these above the knowledge of a salvation in the blood of Christ, and a seeking of the kingdom and the things of the kingdom, with the assurance that God will take care of you and give you all the earthly things you need to reach the blessedness of His kingdom?

Can it be written on your gravestone, "As the Lord commanded, so DID he?" Blessed you are. Yes, blessed you *are*, as well as blessed you shall be. For the ability to live by the words that proceed from God's mouth is a blessing, and it assures us that even as Noah and his family were saved from the ungodly world and its destruction, so we shall be saved from the judgment of fire to come. For what God promises so He does. So did He in Bethlehem. So did He at the cross and through the empty grave. So will He do in the day when Christ returns.

The Voice of Our Fathers

The Fall of Man into Sin (1) The Belgic Confession, Article 14

Rev. J. Kortering

The second sentence of Article 14 of the Belgic Confession begins with the conjunction, but! This places the sentence and subsequent thoughts in contrast to the former one. Thus it is. Having expressed the truth of God having created man in His own image, our fathers add, "But being in honor, he understood it not, neither knew his excellency, but willfully subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death, and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil. For the commandment of life, which he had received, he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life, having corrupted his whole nature; whereby he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death." The contrast has to do with man's fall into sin.

THE FALL, A HISTORICAL FACT

There are only two possible explanations for the presence of sin in the world. The one is rooted in godless evolution, the other in divine revelation. In this article, our Reformed fathers express that they agree with the historical account of the fall as recorded in

the Bible, as the explanation for sin and death in the world. By doing this they clearly part company from those who would do otherwise.

We have quoted previously from *The Naked Ape* by Desmond Morris in dealing with the question of man's animal origin. We now quote briefly once again to demonstrate that these evolutionists equate sin with man's animal past. Hence we read, in connection with man's urge to fight,

If we are to understand the nature of our aggressive urges, we must see them against the background of our animal origins. As a species we are so preoccupied with mass-produced and mass-destroying violence at the present time, that we are apt to lose our objectivity when discussing this subject. It is a fact that the most level-headed intellectuals frequently become violently aggressive when discussing the urgent need to suppress aggression. This is not surprising. We are, to put it mildly, in a mess, and there is a strong chance that we shall have exterminated ourselves by the end of the century. Our only consolation will have to be that as a species,

we have had an exciting term of office. Not a long term, as species go, but an amazingly eventful one. But before we examine our own bizarre perfections of attack and defence, we must examine the basic nature of violence in the spearless, gunless, bombless world of animals.

He then goes on to demonstrate that there are two reasons for animals to fight, to establish their dominance in a social hierarchy, or to establish their territorial rights over a particular piece of ground. These animal instincts are still in us; hence we have aggressive drives to fight. There is no room in this kind of thinking for sin against God and death as punishment for sin. Consequently, man's hope of the future is to continue his social evolution and become a better social animal. This means he must make adjustments to prevent self destruction and instead build a lasting social order.

We must somehow improve in quality rather than in sheer quantity. If we do this, we can continue to progress technologically in a dramatic and exciting way without denying our evolutionary inheritance. If we do not, then our suppressed biological urges will build up and up until the dam bursts and the whole of our elaborate existence is swept away in the flood, page 241.

Man's salvation is seeing himself as he is, a fragile animal with a precarious past, working to overcome this and to deal honestly with it. Salvation is not in Christ; it is in man himself. As Reformed believers, we recognize the importance of holding to the doctrine of creation not only, but also to that of the fall of man.

To hold to this doctrine, we must also reject the attempt to make the Genesis account of the fall a teaching model. A myth, or allegory. This attack from within the sphere of Reformed churches is a rejection of the historical record of Genesis 3 and a sell-out to evolutionism.

The Belgic Confession states briefly and in child-like submission to the Word of God, "Man willfully subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death, and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil." This was a historic event that was occasioned by the devil coming to Eve in the serpent, tempting her, and followed by the fall of Adam into sin.

Charles Hodge in his *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, gives five reasons why we should receive the account of the fall into sin as a historical fact. (1) From internal evidence: when contrasted with the mythological accounts of the creation and origin of man, as found in the records of early heathen nations, the difference is at once apparent. The latter are evidently the product of crude speculation; the Scriptural account is simple, intelligible, and pregnant with the highest truths. (2) It forms an integral part of the book of Genesis, which is confessedly historical. (3) It is not only an integral part of the book, but an essential part of Scriptural history as a whole, which treats of the origin, apostasy, and

development of the human race, as connected with the plan of redemption. (4) We find that both in the Old and New Testament the facts here recorded are assumed, and referred to as matters of history. (5) These facts underlie the whole doctrinal system revealed in the Scriptures. Because Satan tempted man and led him into disobedience, Christ came to destroy him and redeem his people from his dominion.

In this Reformed tradition, we agree that God created Adam and Eve. As we said before, man (used generically here, not distinguished from woman) was created good in God's image. He now listened to an actual serpent which came to him as Satan's mouth-piece; Eve fell first and gave to her husband and he ate. All this happened in the Garden of Eden, which God had created.

UNKNOWN EXCELLENCY

In explaining how the fall came about, the Belgic Confession declares, "But being in honor, he understood it not, neither knew his excellence, but willfully subjected himself to sin and consequently to death and the curse."

With this expression, our fathers deal with the difficult question, how could Adam, a perfect creature who was made in God's image, ever be tempted to fall into sin. If man was given the capacity to bear God's image, and through creation actually reflected God, how could that man even fall into sin? How could perfection produce disobedience?

The answer suggested here is this; that man did not understand his honor nor know his excellence, but willfully sinned against God. We notice:

First, the confession speaks of both honor and excellency. These two ideas are closely related. Honor has reference to the high office which he possessed. It is the esteem one holds for a position of trust in which he has been placed. The office which Adam held was that of prophet, priest, and king all combined in one. He was made the prophet with whom God could speak and have conversation, the priest by whom the whole earth was consecrated unto God, and as king, he was servant-ruler under God. Adam should have recognized this high calling and honored the office by faithfully exercising the duties of that office. Excellencies refer to the various qualifications which Adam possessed which enabled him to be faithful in that office of honor. He had knowledge, wisdom, love, holiness, righteousness, authority, power, etc. which enabled him to function in the position of honor.

Secondly, the confession states, "he understood it not (honor) neither knew (his excellency). This does not refer to some ignorance of Adam, which was an inherent limitation in his ability to use his excellencies

in the service of his honorable office. If this were true, we might be tempted to say Adam fell by ignorance or increased necessity. Because he was created in the image of God, he possessed all things necessary to obey God's will and serve God in the sphere of creation. He was able to be God's prophet, priest, and king.

Rather, this lack of understanding and knowledge was directed toward the opposite side, namely sin. Adam could not understand the consequence of disobedience and weigh this overagainst his honor and excellency. Adam knew his calling, he knew what disobedience would involve, but how could he know what the sentence of death would really be like? He did not have the ability to place these two alternatives beside each other and conclude that his honor and excellencies far surpassed anything the devil might offer to him. For this reason the devil came to him with the temptation, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." It was the lie, but it tempted man enough to cause him to disobey God's command by causing him to desire something which he thought might be greater than God had given to him.

Because of this, there is added the fact that man "willingly subjected himself to sin." He was not tricked; he was not forced; he was tempted; and through this temptation he sought to attain something God had in mercy kept from him, viz., the knowledge of sin. The devil enticed him with the offer of something better, "ye shall be as gods." Man in pride sought that, and thereby willingly rejected God and went after Satan. Through this act of disobedience, man learned to know evil. The heartache of sin and evil is written upon every page of history. The man that chooses Satan over against God delights in the evil and hates the good. This is what brings him into bondage. The terrible abyss of death becomes the lot of everyone who says "yes" to the devil and "no" to God.

Now, we can look back and see things that Adam could not understand or know. In the words of John Calvin, Institutes Book II (1), "When reflecting on what God gave us at our creation, and still continues graciously to give, we perceive how great the excellence of our nature would have been had its integrity remained, and, at the same time, remember that we have nothing of our own, but depend entirely on God from whom we hold at pleasure whatever he has seen it meet to bestow; secondly, When viewing our miserable condition since Adam's fall, all confidence and boasting are overthrown, we blush for shame, and feel truly humble. For as God at first formed us in his own image, that he might elevate our minds to the pursuit of virtue, and the contemplation of eternal life, so to prevent us from heartlessly burying those qualities which distinguish us from the lower animals, it is of importance to know that we were endued with reason and intelligence, in order that we might cultivate a holy and honourable life, and regard a blessed immortality as our destined aim. At the same time, it is impossible to think of our primeval dignity without being immediately reminded of the sad spectacle of our ignominy and corruption, ever since we fell from our original (condition?) in the person of our first parent. In this way we feel dissatisfied with ourselves, and become truly humble, while we are inflamed with new desires to seek after God, in whom each may regain those good qualities of which all are found to be utterly destitute." This leads us to seek salvation in Jesus Christ.

The true significance of heaven will be that we will know good and evil, only then truly as God, to know the good and love it, to know the evil and hate it. Against the background of sin and its consequence, we will enjoy the true liberty of the soul set free: not able to sin anymore, only able to serve God faithfully forever.

Our God is abundant in mercy.

Editorial

The OPC and the "Free Offer" (3)

BASICALLY, A QUESTION OF EXEGETICAL METHOD

In our previous editorial on this subject we pointed out the fact that from the outset the position of "The Free Offer of the Gospel" involves its proponents in flagrant contradictions concerning God's will and concerning His attitude toward the reprobate.

Ultimately, of course, this whole question becomes a question of what Scripture itself teaches. I say

"ultimately" because it is not — for a Reformed man — merely a question of Scripture, but also, and first of all, a question of the creeds. This, by the way, is something that is singularly ignored by the authors of "The Free Offer of the Gospel." Nevertheless, ultimately it becomes a question of what Scripture teaches on this score. This is plain also from the attempted appeal to Scripture in the booklet under discussion.

And this question is basically a question of *exegetical method*. Does Scripture contradict itself? Does Scripture present mutually exclusive truths? Does Scripture posit doctrines which stand diametrically opposed to one another? There is one method which holds this position: the method of appealing to isolated proof-texts. There is the Reformed method, however, which denies this: it is the method of presenting the *current teaching* of Scripture, or, the method of allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture.

Recently, in connection with this matter of the "free offer" and also in connection with the questions currently being treated in *Question Box*, I have been impressed anew with this matter of exegetical method.

And rather by coincidence, in connection with our Dutch Reading Class at seminary, I came across a thorough treatment of the question of exegetical method in the series of articles which the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema wrote in answer to the late Rev. Daniel Zwier's writings on "God's General Goodness." Fortunately, these articles were also translated into the English language and published in a brochure entitled, "God's Goodness Always Particular." And because this chapter on exegetical method is very appropriate with a view to our current discussion, we are presenting it in this and the next issue of the *Standard Bearer*. [Incidentally, this 267-page brochure is now out of print — just in case any of our readers should think of obtaining it.]

Here follows the first installment of the chapter referred to.

In "God's General Goodness", XV the Rev. Zwier writes concerning our explanation of Ps. 145:9: "Yes, esteemed reader, this proof is so utterly weak, that for years it was a riddle to me, that one who possessed even a quarter of an ounce exegetical brains could permit himself to be convinced of it".

He writes this in the erroneous imagination that we explain the text as meaning that "the Lord gives good gifts to all", or "that the Lord is good to all His elect, and His tender mercies are over all things in the realm of redemption".

Where, in any of our writings, he finds these interpretations of that text, he fails to mention.

But about this later.

Before I enter into these details, and before I submit the exegesis of various texts by the Rev. Zwier to criticism, I must refer to another, deeper and more fundamental difference between him and myself, a difference that determines our several exegetical results. There is here a fundamental difference with respect to the method of exegesis. It is this difference that explains why our interpretation of certain passages of Holy Writ impresses the Rev. Zwier as utterly in-

competent, so that after years of study he cannot even understand that one who has no more than a quarter of an ounce exegetical brains could accept such exegesis. Although I am not acquainted with the standard-weight of a normal exegetical brain, I take it that by this somewhat haughty and contemptuous figure of speech the Rev. Zwier intends to convey to his readers the opinion that our exegetical work is far below normal. We have attempted to explain how the Rev. Zwier could arrive at such a contemptuous judgment about our interpretation of the Word of God. And we came to the conclusion that there exists a deep and fundamental difference between his conception of the proper exegetical method and our own. What I consider exegesis according to the proper method he brands as a distortion of the text to suit our own notions; and, on the other hand, what he offers as exegesis of Scripture is, in our opinion, not worthy of the name.

It is imperative, therefore, that we, first of all, give ourselves account of this fundamental difference.

The difference does not, as the Rev. Zwier seems to think, consist in this that he simply lets Scripture speak for itself, while I impose my preconceived dogmatic notions upon the text of Holy Writ; but rather in this, that the Rev. Zwier proceeds on the assumption that interpretation of *an individual text*, apart from its connection with the current teaching of the Bible, is interpretation of *Scripture*; while I am convinced that the Word of God is one organic whole that presents us with the same teaching throughout, and that, for this very reason, one may very well explain a certain text in the Bible without interpreting Scripture; that the whole of Scripture must be taken into consideration when we interpret any particular passage, so that, in other words, every text is explained according to the *regula Scripturae*, the current teaching of the Bible.

The entire Scriptural foundation on which the Rev. Zwier attempts to build the superstructure of his doctrine of "God's General Goodness" consists of a few, a very few individual passages of Scripture that superficially appear to support his view, but his interpretation of which stands directly opposed, not only to several other very clear texts of the Bible, but to the continuous teaching of Holy Writ. He is very well aware of this conflict. He admits it. But he openly refuses to make the attempt to explain Scripture in its own light.

In this chapter I shall show first of all, by means of a quotation from his articles, that the Rev. Zwier is, indeed, laboring according to this method; secondly, I hope to prove that this method of exegesis is certainly not Reformed; and, thirdly, I will call attention to the great danger of following this method.

First of all, then, a quotation from the Rev. Zwier's articles. He writes (God's General Goodness, XVI) :

"Let us now attend to the second argument the deviating brethren usually adduce in explaining this passage of Scripture.

"Does not Scripture teach us clearly, so they ask, for instance in Psalm 73 and Psalm 92, that all the good gifts which the non-elect receive, are but so many means whereby the Lord realizes His eternal counsel of reprobation? In Psalm 73 Asaph first stares himself blind on the fact that the ungodly prosper and the righteous suffer in this world. He cannot understand why the ungodly have peace and increase their substance in the world, while he is being chastened all the day and plagued every morning. But when he enters into God's sanctuary, he beholds the same things in a different light, in the light of God's counsel and purpose with all these things. Now he notes that this peace and prosperity of the wicked are nothing but slippery places, on the which they are set by God in order presently to fall into eternal destruction.

"In Psalm 92 the same thought is expressed more strongly when it is said that all the wicked grow as the grass and all the workers of iniquity do flourish, *that* they may be destroyed forever. And note the little word *that*, which here denotes the purpose of the Lord.

"Hence, thus is their conclusion, all the good gifts which the Lord bestows upon the non-elect, He gives them in His wrath and great anger. Expressions as are found in Ps. 145:9 and Acts 14:16, 17 must be interpreted in harmony with this. How, then, can one so interpret these texts that they speak of a favorable disposition in God toward the ungodly?

"Our answer to this question is very simple: *Because Scripture teaches us this.*

"We do not attempt in a rationalistic manner to interpret these two series of Scriptural passages in harmony with each other".

Let this one illustration from the Rev. Zwier's writings suffice.

According to him, we are dealing here with two "series" of Scriptural passages that stand in direct opposition of each other, so that the one text teaches us the exact opposite from what is taught in the other, and they are mutually exclusive. In the one "series" we are taught, according to him, that God in bestowing the things of the present life upon the ungodly is merciful to them; in the other that, even in the bestowal of these things, he hates them, is filled with wrath, and purposes to cast them down into destruction. Now we might expect that in reverence to Holy Writ the Rev. Zwier would reason as follows: *Both* cannot be true; both the Scriptures cannot teach, for in that it would flatly contradict itself; one of these series of passages

I, therefore, misunderstand; let me examine my interpretation of both these series once more in order that I may come to a correct understanding of the true teaching of the Bible on this point. But this he emphatically refuses to do. He does not even want to make an attempt, to put forth the least effort to explain the Bible in its own light. It is even his avowed opinion that such an attempt would be rationalistic! And the result is that he arrives at the conclusion that both are true. God's *yea* is also *nay*!

He might have found sufficient reason to review his exegesis of the one "series" of texts in the light of the other, in Psalm 73. For, that Psalm teaches us plainly that Asaph labored under the illusion that God is good and gracious to the ungodly in the things of this present life *only as long as he did not view things in their proper light!* He discovered his mistake *as soon as he viewed the same things in the light of the reality of God's counsel!* How natural it would have been for the Rev. Zwier to draw the conclusion that he also labored under the same illusion as did the psalmist of old, and that he misinterpreted the one "series" of texts only because he did not view them in the proper light, and that he would have to change his exegesis the moment he studied these texts in the light Asaph received from the sanctuary of God! But in spite of all this the Rev. Zwier refuses to interpret Scripture in its own light.

When he meets with a "series" of texts that plainly teach that God's grace is always particular, while His wrath abideth on the ungodly even in this present life; and, on the other hand, finds passages that superficially appear to teach that God's grace is common and general, he simply leaves them stand side by side, in glaring contradiction with each other, and says: both are true!

It is this method of interpreting the Bible which I do not accept. I am deeply convinced that this method must needs lead to a distortion of the meaning of Holy Writ. It does not lead us to the true Word of God. *Word-interpretation* is no *Scripture-interpretation*, even though it may superficially appear to be such. Interpretation of individual texts is no interpretation of the Word of God, although both for the writer and for the reader it may represent by far the easier method to follow. It is with this as it is with many a sermon, that are praised as very clear and convincing. They explain every word of a certain text. But they fail to explain the text in the light of the whole of Scripture. And because of this such sermons are unworthy of the name: "ministry of the Word of God".

I wholeheartedly condemn this method.

How thoroughly unreformed the doctrine of "com-

mon grace" is may be gathered from the fact that it can be maintained only on the basis of an exegesis of the Bible that proceeds according to this erroneous method of interpretation. When I write *only* on this basis I assume that the Rev. Zwier this time offered us his very best to prove the theory of "common grace".

This method of interpreting the Bible was never accepted as correct by those that believed and defended the truth of God's absolute predestination, but was always condemned by them as in conflict with the unity of the Word of God.

On the other hand, it was always applied by the Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians and Arminians.

Already that arch-opponent of the doctrine of sovereign grace, Julian, urged against the doctrine of Augustine the objection that the Scriptures in such passages as e.g. I Tim. 2:4 (this last text is also adduced by the Rev. Zwier, following the example of the Synod of 1924, to sustain the doctrine of "common grace") plainly teach that God wills that all men shall be saved and is merciful to all men. But what does the great church-father answer the heretic? He speaks of three possible explanations of I Tim. 2:4, viz.: 1. That the word *all* in the text means all of whom God will that they shall be saved, for it is certain that no one can be saved contrary to His will. (Enchir. 103). 2. All classes of people are meant, not all individual men. 3. All that will be saved by virtue of the new will infused by God (C.J. XXII, 2). And how did Augustine arrive at these possible interpretations? Simply by explaining them in the light of the expression in Scripture to which he refers very frequently, and which is also quoted by Calvin in a similar connection, that God is in the heavens and doeth all His good pleasure, and that, therefore, if God hath performed all He willed, He certainly cannot have willed what He did not and does not perform. And for this same reason he explains the goodness of God that leadeth us to repentance, mentioned in Rom. 2:4, as referring only to the elect: *quem praeordinavit adducit*. (Cf. Dr. Polman: *De Predestinatieleer* etc. p. 98).

If the Rev. Zwier had lived in the days of Augustine he would, no doubt, have taken sides with the heretic Julian, and would have remarked that one who possessed but a quarter of an ounce exegetical brains would not permit himself to be led astray by such exegesis!

But we prefer by far the method followed by Augustine.

John Calvin follows the same method as Augustine. Also he was confronted more than once by his opponents by the text from I Tim. 2:4. And how does he reply to this objection? He writes (Inst. Book III, cap. XXIV, par. 16):

"I reply that, in the first place, it becomes evident

from the sequel of the words in what sense He wills this. For, Paul connects these matters, viz. that He wills that they be saved, and that they come to the knowledge of the truth. If they contend that it is firmly determined in God's eternal counsel that all receive the doctrine of salvation, what does it mean, then, what Moses says: 'For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them?' How did it come that God deprived so many people of the light of the gospel, which others enjoy? What is the cause, that the pure knowledge of the doctrine of salvation never came to some nations, and that others hardly tasted some dark beginnings of the same? From this one may readily discern what Paul means. He had commanded Timothy to make public prayers for kings and magistrates, and while it appeared somewhat absurd that prayers to God should be made for those whose condition seemed wellnigh hopeless—seeing that they were not only strangers to the body of Christ, but also exerted themselves and all their powers to oppress His kingdom—therefore, he adds immediately that such prayers are well pleasing to God, Who will that all men shall be saved. By which he means to say nothing else, indeed, than that He did not close the way of salvation to any kind of people, but much rather effused His mercy in such wise, that He does not will that there be any class of people that should not partake of this salvation. The other expressions declare, not what God determined in His secret counsel concerning all, but proclaim that remission of sin is prepared for all that apply themselves to seek it. For if they urge the objection that He is said to be willing to show mercy unto all, I will bring against this what is written in another place: that our God is in the heavens and doeth whatsoever He will (Ps. 115:3). Hence, this passage will have to be interpreted in such wise that it agrees with the other, viz. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and shew mercy to whom I will shew mercy (Ex. 33:19). (I underscore, H.H.).

The above is a very clear illustration of the method of interpretation applied to the Word of God by Calvin. First he refers to Deut. 4:7 to show that God sovereignly determines who shall come to the knowledge of the truth and who shall not receive that knowledge, in order then, in the light of that truth to interpret I Tim. 2:4. And if the opponents still object that Scripture clearly teaches that God will show mercy to all, he replies that such expressions must be explained in the light of others, such as Ps. 115:3 (often appealed to also by Augustine) and Ex. 33:19.

The Rev. Zwier must have nothing of this method of explaining Scripture. He considers it rationalistic. He differs principally from Calvin. (I say *principally*, for he that applies a wrong method of interpretation to Scripture must needs distort the foundation of the

truth and exposes himself to every wind of error). He refuses to compare Scripture with itself; especially to interpret those texts that superficially considered appear to teach "common grace" in the light of the many others that plainly teach the very opposite. He insists that he will maintain both. And presently, if he does not relinquish this fatal method, he will be forced by the power of that "wretched human logic" to discard one of the two contradictory propositions, and have nothing left but "common grace". And if himself can remain sufficiently inconsistent to avoid this danger, his readers surely will draw the conclusion that God's grace is always common.

Allow me to refer to one more illustration from the same paragraph of Calvin's Institute:

"They appear to bring us into greater difficulty by opposing to our view the passage in Peter (II Pe. 3:9) that God does not will that any should perish, but will receive all unto repentance. But how to untie this knot we learn immediately from the second member of this declaration; for by this will to receive unto repentance *may be understood no other than is taught everywhere in Scripture.* (I underscore, H.H.). Indeed, repentance is in the hand of God; it is proper, therefore, that we ask Him whether He will bring all to repentance: seeing He promised that to some few

He will give a heart of flesh, while He leaves to others their heart of stone (Ez. 36:26). It is true, that if He were not ready to receive all that invoke His mercy, this other declaration would be made void: Turn ye unto me, and I will turn unto you (Zach. 1:3); but I say that no mortal will turn to God than he whom God has first drawn. And if, indeed, man's conversion hinged on his own good pleasure, Paul would not say (II Tim. 2:25): if God peradventure will give them repentance".

From this you may notice that Calvin consistently follows the same method of interpretation. He explains the Scriptures in their own light, and does not hesitate to explain apparently "general" texts in the light of those that clearly teach God's particular grace.

Do not object to this that Calvin in the above quotations is dealing with saving grace, while the Rev. Zwier writes about the non-saving goodness of God. For this has nothing to do with the point in question. I am not criticizing as yet the contents of Zwier's teaching, but only his method of interpreting the Bible.

And this method is itself un-Reformed.

Let the Rev. Zwier but apply the same method to those passages of Scripture that have reference to "saving grace" and his interpretation will certainly be Arminian.

(to be continued)

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News From Our Churches

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THE STANDARD BEARER

Because of the Classes Reports in the last two issues of the *Standard Bearer*, a considerable amount of news for this column has been accumulating — so much so, in fact, that I hardly know where to begin. The flurry of news concerning current mission efforts of our churches is certainly of special interest at this time, so perhaps I should begin with that, and see what space yet remains for other items.

* * * *

From a February bulletin from Isabel we read of that congregation's efforts to "spread the light of the gospel in yet another way than by the regular preaching on Sunday." According to the announcement, "plans are now underway to air over the local radio station, KOLY, thirteen 15-minute sermons provided by the Mission Committee and the Loveland consistory. The Lord willing, this will begin as soon as a time slot is made available that is favorable to both the station and us."

A news bulletin distributed to members of Southeast's congregation, tells of further use of the airways. Part of it reads as follows: "Our Radio sub-committee, in conjunction with the Reformed Witness Hour Committee, has made a contract for one year to broadcast our Reformed Witness Hour program over WXUR — Media, Pennsylvania. This station is located on the outskirts of Philadelphia — has AM & FM frequencies — and covers a highly populated area where there are over a million potential listeners. The cost of this station is \$54.00 per half hour, and broadcast time is 3:00 — 3:30 P.M. Sunday afternoon. The Mission fund of our churches will bear half of this expense, and Southeast Church the other half . . .

"We are informed that there is some good response already, and this broadcast will greatly assist the man we will have working in this area. As you must already know, Rev. Engelsma spent several weeks in Philadelphia. Rev. Van Baren is there now as follow-up, and Rev. Kortering will be going there for the summer months we are told."

This same Southeast newsletter made mention of the fact that, while Rev. Engelsma was working in Philadelphia, "he also made substantial contacts with people in New Jersey." As a consequence of those contacts, a group of people there has requested that our Mission Committee send a man to engage in further work among them. Rev. Decker, subsequently, was released by his consistory to spend the four Sundays of May in that area.

In further developments, which seem to be occurring with such rapidity that it's difficult to keep up with them, a request from Maine has led to a

decision that Rev. Schipper spend some time with a group of people in that state.

From Grand Rapids' Hope Church's bulletin we learn that a congregational meeting was scheduled for May 4 to call a home missionary, to labor specifically "in the Philadelphia area of the eastern United States."

* * * *

A couple of other bulletin announcements could be quoted, yet, to give a better understanding of what is really happening in the different areas in which our churches have been laboring. From that of First Church we quote the following: "A report, via phone to the clerk, from our pastor informs us that he conducts worship services twice each Sunday, with a catechism class on Sunday mornings. He also held a Good Friday service as he would have had at home. He meets with a group each Thursday evening, discussing the Neth. Conf. and intends now to discuss with them the Antithesis in the area of Christian Living — a real issue with them as they understand Christian liberty versus the things of the world . . . Most of his evening time is spent visiting various families, discussing our doctrines as they are embodied in our Confessions and as they relate to our walk in sanctification. Rev. Van Baren expects to be back home May 8, and we gather that he will be eager to take up his labor of love in our midst again. He appreciates our prayers in his behalf as he works in Philadelphia . . ."

Rev. Veldman has long since completed his six-week stay in Florida, but it should not be inappropriate to add a few lines about that work, taken from Southwest's bulletin of March 18. It included excerpts from a letter the consistory had received from Rev. and Mrs. Veldman. Here they are: " . . . The Sundays of Feb. 25 and March 5 were spent by preaching in a Holiday Inn to some twenty-seven persons, ten of which were not members of our denomination. Beginning March 11, services will be held in the chapel of a funeral home . . . Several contacts have been made and much literature has been distributed . . . A man from Winter Haven has requested us to preach there to about 60 souls, some of whom live there permanently. We are both well and enjoying this work very much. It is so wonderful to witness of our truth to others."

That last line of Rev. Veldman's is a good one with which to close our news for this issue. These contacts and apparently "open doors" are exciting and, of course, heart-warming. Information concerning them, therefore, is likely to appear elsewhere in this issue. I hope that what's on this page is not too repetitive to be of interest.

D.D.