

**The  
Standard  
Bearer**

**A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE**

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## THE STANDARD BEARER

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## Meditation

## Transformed Into Christ's Image

Rev. M. Schipper

*"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord."*

II Corinthians 3:18.

Two ministrations there are!

The one is the ministration of death and condemnation. The other, the ministration of the Spirit and of righteousness. The first is the ministration of the law, written and engraven in stones. The second, the ministration of the Spirit, is written upon the fleshy tables of the heart. The first was spoken by Moses, the mediator of the Old Testament. The second was spoken by Christ, the perfect Mediator; and after Him, by His servants. The first was done away with the coming of the gospel age. The second remains unto the end of the ages, yea, unto the glorious appearance of Christ in the last day.

Both ministrations were glorious!

The ministration of death and condemnation was so glorious that, when its mediator spoke, he was required to cover his face with a veil. And the reason, — when he received that ministration from the hand of God and written by His finger, the glory of God shone on his face; and not only as he stood in God's presence, but also for some time later after he had descended that mount and delivered that ministration to the people.

And the glory of the other ministration is the glory of the Spirit of the Lord, Who, having suffered and died as penalty of the ministration of death, was



exalted in the highest heavens, and filled with the glory of God in human nature.

But the glory of the latter far exceeds the glory of the former!

The glory that shone on Moses' face was temporary, and only skin deep. The time came when that glory which reflected in his face faded and disappeared. No longer was it required that he cover his face with a veil, though it was true that the veil unto this day, that is, unto the glorification of Christ, remained upon the hearts of them that read the law.

The glory of the Spirit of the Lord, on the other hand, is everlasting. It is the glory that remaineth, because that of which it is the reflection abides forevermore.

Fact of the matter is, that the apostle in our text informs us, — that with unveiled faces we, beholding as in a mirror, are transformed into the image of the glorious Lord.

Not merely a reflection!

But transformation!

Glorious image!

Mark well, the apostle does not say that we actually see the Lord! That would be quite impossible so long as we remain on the earth, and He remains in the glory of heaven.

No! We do not see the Lord Who is hidden in the heavens, but we behold His likeness, His image. To see the Lord, we must wait for the day of His coming. But when He left us to return unto the Father, whence He came when He made His first appearance, He did not leave us comfortless. He left us a likeness of Himself as it is reflected in the mirror of His Word. It is a perfect likeness. All the lines of His glorious face appear in this image. Our cameras produce images of ourselves and our dear ones almost flawlessly, and we count these images precious. Yet, because they are human inventions, they are always subject to imperfections, — the light is not just right, or the object moved as the picture was taken, or the film was not of the proper constituency. Not so, however, is the image of Christ as portrayed in the Word. It is a perfect, flawless reflection of the very Christ Himself. And the only place where we can behold His image is in that Word, the Holy Scriptures. And the whole image is not simply what you see of it in the gospels, or perhaps as He is beautifully set forth in the book of the Revelation, but it must be seen in the entire Bible, that infallibly inspired portrait of the Christ.

Understand well, and that, too, emphatically, that that image of the glorious Lord does not depend upon the description which men may give concerning Him before you can see the perfection of it. That is precisely the trouble, and especially today! Men would not have you see that glorious image except through their eyes, and their evaluation of it. Then, rest assured, you are bound to see only a horribly

disfigured, corrupted image. Man always seeks to rob Him of His glory. They tell lies about Him. As once they disrobed Him, emaciated Him by beating Him with their fists, and causing the sweet lines of His face to be obliterated with their spittle, and tore His flesh with the nails of His cross; so now, as they describe His glorious image in the Scriptures, they give a presentation that in no way even begins to resemble Him.

Indeed, the perspicuity of the Scriptures must be maintained. In lucid lines the Word of God draws for you and me in indelible etchings the portrait of His glorious image. In words so clear that a child can understand them, it defines the delicate lights and shadows that show forth the features of His face. Beautiful Saviour!

Indeed, glorious image!

Glorious it is, first of all, because He is the image of the invisible and glorious God! Of God, the all glorious One! The impressed image of the Father is He, and the brightness of His glory. But, secondly, glorious image is He as the Son of God in the flesh, raised from the dead, and glorified in human nature. So the apostle speaks of Him in our text.

In His Word we see Him in all the glory of His mediatorship. Understand well, as the Scriptures state it, no one can see God and live. But when He reveals Himself through His Son in the flesh, then we can say with the apostle John: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life . . ." And when He disappeared from the scope of our vision to return into the heavens, He continues to be seen; a glorious image He leaves us in His Word.

This image we behold as in a mirror!

And beholding it, we are transformed!

Wonderful transformation!

As the moon reflects the light of the sun, and we are comforted with the assurance that in the darkness of our night the sun which seemed to disappear in the West has not disappeared forever, but will rise again in the morning in its splendor; so is the Word the reflection of the Sun of Righteousness, Who will appear again in the day of His glory as the glorious Lord from heaven.

This glory of the Lord we behold now as in a mirror. The text suggests that this is a present reality, and a constant activity. If we look in the mirror and straightway walk away, forgetting what we saw, nothing avails in all our beholding. The apostle suggests two things as far as that beholding is concerned: that we do this in this present time, while our glorious Lord is hidden in the heavens; and that we make this a constant activity, never ceasing to look in the mirror of God's Word.

Added to the activity of beholding is the thought



that we do this with unveiled face. This undoubtedly in contrast to the children of Israel who could not look on the glory reflected in the face of Moses, and they therefore insisted that he cover his face with a veil. Not so must the Christian of the new day allow anything to bedim the glory of Christ's image portrayed in the Word. Always he must bask in the light of Christ so that not only his face is enlightened, but he is transformed, beginning in his heart, and in the completion of the transforming process he is transformed in body and soul.

Transformed in the image of Christ!

The transformation is entire and permanent!

Though it remains imperfect so long as we do not see Him face to face. Therefore the apostle, speaking of this transformation, declares that it is from glory to glory.

We are changed from glory to glory as we constantly look upon the glory of the Lord with unveiled face. Little by little, slowly but surely, we are changed. From glory to glory the glory of the Lord is seen in us. And the glory of the Lord is always the radiation of His perfections which are communicated to us as we behold with unveiled face His glorious image. Indeed, it is not yet revealed in us what we shall be, for we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. But until then, we are changed from glory to glory.

Indeed, wonderful transformation!

However, not by our own power are we changed!

Nor is it so that we only allow the glory of the Lord, reflected in His Word, to fall on us, and so we gradually transform ourselves into His image.

How could that ever be? Surely the power of

transformation does not reside in us, but in the Lord of glory Himself!

Even as by the Spirit of the Lord!

It is the Spirit of God which is given unto Christ in His exultation without measure; which He in turn gives unto the church, and thus becomes the Spirit of Christ Whom He sends unto us from the Father. He is the Comforter which Christ promised, Who would abide with us forever, and lead us into all the truth. That Spirit which searches out the deep things of God and of Christ, and reveals them unto us. That Spirit Who is at the same time the Author of the Holy Scriptures, and Who has seen to it that Christ, the God of our salvation is fully revealed therein. He it is that from glory unto glory transforms us into the glory of the Lord as He portrays to our deepest spiritual consciousness the image of our glorious Lord and Redeemer.

The effects of His power, operating in us as well as in the Word, will be that more and more spiritually we will become Christ-like. More and more of His virtues will be reflected in us. So that when He shall appear in His glory, we then shall be like Him. Now we see Him in His glory revealed in His Word. Then He shall see us as perfect reflectors of His glory.

But we all. . .!

Not just the apostles and ministers who delve into the Word, and whose calling it is to present the Christ of God unto all to whom they are sent!

But the entire church, and every living member thereof!

We all shall be transformed into His image!

By the Spirit of the Lord!

## Editorial

# Should OPs and RPs Unite? (4)

*Prof. H.C. Hoeksema*

By way of review, let me point out that this discussion was occasioned by a remark on my part that one might have doubts as to the strength of the OPC with respect to Arminianism. I made this remark because: 1) In our discussion of the proposed OP – RP union we noted that some of the OPC commissioners wanted a stronger emphasis on God's sovereignty in salvation as one of the improvements in the Proposed Basis of Union between the two denominations. 2) The historical background of the RPC in the Bible Presbyterian Church would seem to indicate a tendency to Arminianism in the RPC, judging from the

Arminian Declaratory Statement which the Bible Presbyterian Church has added to the Westminster Confession. 3) The OPC has given evidence of weakness on Arminianism, judging from the Clark Case and from the booklet *The Free Offer of the Gospel*, written by Murray and Stonehouse in the aftermath of the Clark Case. 4) Because the Proposed Basis of Union is not strong and specific on this score. These matters I mentioned in the course of my argumentation that the two denominations are not ready for ecclesiastical marriage.

Then the Rev. John Mitchell, Editor of the



*Presbyterian Guardian* (OPC), and himself a rather reluctant advocate of the marriage, wrote to me (Nov. 15, 1972 issue) taking rather strong exception to what I had written about Arminianism in the OPC, though I myself had thought I had expressed myself rather mildly when I spoke of having “doubts about the strength of the OPC over against Arminianism.” Briefly, Mr. Mitchell strongly insisted “that there is a sincere and free offer of salvation from God,” that this alleged offer is on God’s part “to any and all men,” and that this is not Arminian. Further, he denied that either the treatment of Dr. Clark or the Murray-Stonehouse booklet indicate any weakness at all in the OPC over against Arminianism. Thirdly, he denied that the Declaratory Statement of the Bible Presbyterians is Arminian, but asserted that it is “clearly in accord with the Westminster Confession of Faith, and is the traditional doctrine of Presbyterian Churches.” Finally, Editor Mitchell affirmed that “both OPs and RPs . . . would agree that the offer of salvation is freely extended to all men, is sufficient for the sins of all men, but is applied only to the elect who repent and believe under the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.”

Now although the Clark Case was treated in detail in the *Standard Bearer* at the time when it was before the Presbytery of Philadelphia and before the General Assembly some twenty-five years ago, and although the Murray-Stonehouse booklet was subjected to detailed critique some years ago by the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema, these issues are of sufficient importance that we give them some detailed attention. They have been, and still are, of importance to us as Protestant Reformed Churches: for the “free offer” doctrine of the OPC is substantially the same as the general, well-meant offer of the Christian Reformed First Point of 1924. Neither the former nor the latter is Reformed; but both the OPC and the CRC always claim that the offer-doctrine *is* Reformed. The OPC should have taken warning from the fact that in the CRC this offer-doctrine led – as we always predicted it inevitably would – to the general atonement doctrine of Prof. Harold Dekker in 1962 – ’67, a doctrine which the OPC apparently does not want and which led to estrangement between them and the CRC. But evidently the OPC has not taken warning; and in this failure they are playing with fire, as I hope to point out. True, the OPC does not *admit* to being Arminian; and it does not adopt *all* of the Arminian position. Then, of course, they would lose all claim to being Presbyterian. But the danger lies exactly in this dual position, this half Arminian and half Presbyterian position, which they attempt to take, and that, too, at a very crucial point: the nature of the preaching of the gospel.

Besides, a study of these matters will involve us all in a kind of refresher course on these matters in the

light of Scripture and the confessions – something which will certainly do none of us any harm.

Besides that, we owe it to the Rev. Mitchell to serve him with an answer to his letter. And we also cherish the hope that some of our OP readers will be enlightened and strengthened by this study. Hence, we propose to examine these matters in some detail.

The first object of our examination will be the Declaratory Statement of the Bible Presbyterian Church, a statement which Mr. Mitchell characterized as consistent Presbyterianism.

Before we proceed to this study, however, I must make a few introductory remarks in connection with the whole matter of RP-OP union and in connection with our attitude toward it.

The first remark is corrective. In my first editorial on this subject I suggested that Arminianism constituted one of the obstacles in the path of union. In the light of Mr. Mitchell’s correspondence, however, I am now inclined to doubt this. It appears to me that the two denominations are rather well agreed. And I also find it difficult to understand how, in the light of the OPC position, some commissioners wanted an improved statement on the matter of God’s sovereignty in salvation. If the OPC and the RPC are fully agreed on the matter of an alleged free offer of the gospel, and even on the Bible Presbyterian Declaratory Statement, then they may as well unite in their semi-Arminian agreement: I cannot see how any further OPC statement could influence the RPC for good on this matter. But let them not imagine that such a union will further the cause of genuine Presbyterianism!

In the second place, I want to assert from the outset that, in accord especially with the Canons of Dordrecht, we emphatically subscribe to the doctrine of the general, or promiscuous, proclamation of the gospel to all nations and to all persons “promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel.” I say this in advance because I want to forestall such old charges as “hyper-Calvinism” and “they believe in preaching only to the elect,” etc. These are red herrings of ancient vintage. And they are indeed *red herrings*! As I already made plain in my initial answer to Mr. Mitchell, we believe in the *general proclamation of a particular promise*. But the latter – and this we shall make plain in subsequent discussion – has nothing in common with the idea of a free, or well-meant, offer. The general proclamation of a particular promise is quite in harmony with Scripture and the Reformed and Presbyterian creeds; the doctrine of a free offer is in conflict with both. It cannot be harmonized with sovereign election and reprobation. It cannot be harmonized with definite atonement. It cannot be harmonized with the truth of irresistible grace and effectual calling. It cannot be harmonized with the



doctrine of total depravity. And, in Reformed and Presbyterian churches, it leads inevitably, first to the silencing of these precious truths, and then to the open denial of them. But it has been our experience that when we take this position, our opponents inevitably have hurled the aforementioned accusations at us. Hence, I wanted to forestall those accusations from the outset. They are old. They are false. We have heard them all before. We will pay them no heed – unless, of course, they can be proved, and that, too, with Scripture and confessions in hand. And if the accusations are nevertheless brought, I will only say, “I told you so,” and remind you that this is what the Arminians said to our fathers already at Dordrecht.

With that, we turn to the first item, the Declaratory Statement of the BPC.

First of all, let us get the Declaratory Statement before us:

In adopting the Confession of Faith this General Synod (the first General Synod of the BPC) declares:

*First:* its firm and glad belief in the reality and universality of the offer of the Gospel to mankind. We believe that Christ’s atonement is sufficient for the sins of all, adapted to all, and is freely offered to all men in the Gospel. We believe that no man will be condemned except upon the ground of his sin.

*Second:* with regard to the salvation of those dying in infancy we do not regard our Confession as teaching or implying that any who die in infancy are lost.

The question is whether this is in harmony with the Westminster Confession of Faith, as the Rev. Mitchell asserted.

In the first place, I call attention to the fact that the very *addition* of such a statement as this, especially to such a lengthy and detailed creed as the Westminster Confession, should at least be sufficient ground to render the statement *suspect*. I do not know the detailed history of this statement. In fact, for many years I was not aware of its existence, until a Presbyterian reader-friend once asked me, “Do you know about the Arminian Declaratory Statement which the Bible Presbyterians added to the Westminster?” Thereupon I made it a point to investigate the matter. And when I did so, my very first reaction was: “Where is the ‘hitch’? Why is it necessary to add such a statement?” If the Westminster Confession spells out Presbyterian doctrine, if it declares itself on the matters touched on in this statement, then why is it necessary to *add* – let alone the fact that it is not very Presbyterian to begin adding to confessions unilaterally? And knowing that the Westminster Confession is very particularistic, and sensing a universalistic tendency in the Declaratory Statement, I immediately became suspicious that the Declaratory Statement represents an attempted compromise, a soft-pedalling, and at bottom a conflict with the stringent position of the Westminster

Confession. You see, if this is the teaching of the Westminster, it is unnecessary to add the Declaratory Statement. But if it is not the teaching of the Westminster, it is not legitimate to add the statement. In addition, the Declaratory Statement uses rather neutral and evasive language. It does not say, “In harmony with the Westminster Confession, we further declare. . .” or some such thing. For the first statement, no proof, not even any connection with the Confession, is so much as mentioned. And in the second paragraph it is merely said, “. . . we do not regard our Confession as teaching or implying. . .” The latter is a very strange expression, especially in the light of the fact that the Confession speaks rather explicitly on this subject, as we shall see.

In the second place – and this is my main point, – this Declaratory Statement is in *direct conflict* with the Westminster Confession. Frankly, I am rather amazed that the Rev. Mitchell could write that “The first article is clearly in accord with the Westminster Confession of Faith.” I am not now referring to the “offer of the Gospel” as such. This also is in conflict with the Confession; but we shall write about this later in connection with the Murray-Stonehouse booklet. But we ought to note that the Declaratory Statement speaks of Christ’s *atonement* in connection with what is says about the offer. And about the atonement itself the statement says two things: 1) Christ’s atonement is sufficient for the sins of all. 2) Christ’s atonement is adapted to all. Then it goes on to say that Christ’s atonement “is freely offered to all men in the Gospel.” Now all this reminds one strongly of the position of Prof. Dekker. In the early stages of that history he took the position that Christ’s atonement is general (for all and every man) as to: 1) Its sufficiency; 2) Its availability; 3) The divine desire. Dekker left one category in which (at least originally) he deemed the atonement limited: its efficacy. The Declaratory Statement very evidently tries also to make Christ’s atonement *universal in some respects*. In the context of the general offer of the Gospel, it speaks of the atonement as *sufficient* for the sins of all men. The obvious implication is that if it were not sufficient, there could not honestly be an offer. But neither the Westminster nor the celebrated Canons of Dordrecht make any such statement. The Westminster Confession does not so much as breathe of any such universal sufficiency; it knows only of a definite atonement, as we shall show. But also the Canons speak a different language. For one thing, the Canons do not say that the atonement was actually sufficient for the sins of all, but that the death of Christ was “*abundantly sufficient to expiate* the sins of the whole world.” This is quite different. For, secondly, the Canons are not speaking in the context of a possible general offer; but in the article referred to (II, A, 3) they are speaking of the “infinite worth and value” of the “death of the



Son of God." And as can be demonstrated abundantly, the fathers of Dordrecht (with the exception of the covert Arminian, Martinus) had in mind only this, that Christ's death was so valuable that it would have easily covered the sins of the whole world if necessary, and, as one delegation put it, of ten more worlds besides!

But the Declaratory Statement says even more: Christ's atonement was *adapted* to the sins of all men. No Reformed man should ever subscribe to that statement. Adapted? What does that mean? It means, according to Webster, that Christ's atonement was "made suitable for, fitted unto, suited to, adjusted to" the sins of all men. And again, this must be understood in the context of the general offer. The point is, evidently, that the atonement could not be offered to all men in the Gospel if the atonement were not fitted unto, suited to, made suitable for the sins of all men.

Now as I said, the Westminster Confession knows only of a definite atonement. And it speaks clear language on this score. In Paragraph I of Chapter VIII it immediately connects all the work of Christ with election, as follows:

It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only-begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Saviour of his Church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world; unto whom he did, from all eternity, give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

What could be more particularistic? The Declaratory Statement can never be fit into this article!

But this same chapter also speaks directly of the atonement, in Paragraph V:

The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father, and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.

Here is the Reformed doctrine of particular atonement.

And this is the only doctrine of atonement which Westminster knows. The Declaratory Statement is at odds with this doctrine!

There is more fault to find with the Declaratory Statement. There is that strange statement that "no

man will be condemned except upon the ground of his sin." The explicit evidence is not at hand; and the presence of this statement needs explanation. But in the context in which it is found, this is a highly suspect statement. What is its intent? Is not the Westminster clear on God's justice in the condemnation of sinners? Is this a covert attempt to minimize *original* sin? Or is it a veiled attempt, perhaps, to blunt the edge of Westminster's doctrine of sovereign reprobation? For after all it is also true that a man goes to destruction because of God's sovereign decree of reprobation! The trouble with this sentence of the Declaratory Statement is, at best, that it is vague and partial. I would never subscribe to it as it stands and in this context.

And the same is true of the second paragraph. I know: Rev. Mitchell did not approve the second paragraph. But the second paragraph nevertheless reflects on the tendency of the first. And it only lends support to the contention that the tendency of the first paragraph is Arminian. For while the Declaratory Statement is cautiously negative: "...we do not regard our Confession as teaching or implying that any who die in infancy are lost," do not forget:

1) That it was the Arminians who taught that all infants dying in infancy are saved.

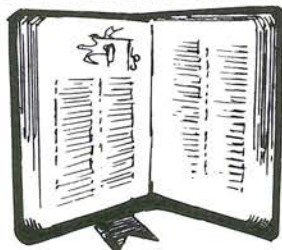
2) That it was the Arminians who tried to portray the Reformed as monsters, who taught that God cast thousands of innocent infants to hell.

3) That the Westminster Confession very definitely limits salvation to the elect and consigns the "rest of mankind" to destruction, according to God's decree to pass them by. Chapter III.

4) That the Westminster Confession specifically teaches (Chapter X, III) that "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth."

5) That, therefore, it is contrary to the Westminster Confession to say: we do not regard our Confession as "implying" that any who die in infancy are lost. For the implication of the Confession is plain as the sun in the heavens!

No, the Declaratory Statement cannot pass muster as a statement in harmony with the Westminster Confession of Faith. And if the OPs and RPs accept the statement, they are as Arminian as the Bible Presbyterians.





## All Around Us

# Ecclesiastical Potpourri

Prof. H. Hanko

In collecting items which are important enough to be commented on in this column, one inevitably runs across news items of various kinds which, while they are of some interest, are not really sufficiently important to take up space in the *Standard Bearer*. They get filed away in a drawer and see the light of day about every two weeks when it is time once again for this column to be prepared. Almost always, when the column is written, they once again go back into the drawer of the desk to await another deadline. And they accumulate bit by bit into quite an imposing pile. Sooner or later there comes a moment of truth when one must make the decision either to print them or to throw them in "File 13"; they are cluttering up things beyond that which is tolerable.

Such a moment of truth has once again arrived. It seemed too difficult to throw them all away. Here they all are, put all together into one column. They appear, for the most part, with only brief comment.

Item — It appears from a recent news item that the practice of conscientious objection to union membership may soon come to an end. A member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, an employee of the Watervliet Paper Company in Watervliet, Michigan was discharged from his job when he refused to join the United Papermakers Union. He offered to pay the equivalent of union dues to a non-religious charity. The Union refused to permit this. The employee filed suit against the union, but lost his case in the U.S. District Court for Southern Michigan and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the sixth circuit. His appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court did not help. By an 8-to-1 vote (Justice William Douglas was the dissenter) the Court refused to review the lower court rulings.

The unions have always hated conscientious objectors; and this could be an ominous precedent for all those who hold such a position.

Item — The sexual freedom which is increasingly advocated in this country is exacting its own toll. I have figures before me distributed by the Public Health Service which show that venereal diseases are now the most common of all infectious diseases in this country and are already of epidemic proportions. In the first nine months of 1972 physicians reported 573,000 cases of gonorrhea and 18,000 cases of syphilis. This is in excess of 2,000 new cases every day!

The promise of those who advocate permissiveness in matters of sex is always that modern medical science

is able to cope with these infectious diseases. And it is true that there are antibiotics available to cure them. But the fact remains that the incidence of these diseases is higher than it has ever been. And the above figures only give reported cases. There are many who think the figure would be doubled if unreported cases were added to the totals. God is not mocked. What a man sows that shall he also reap.

Item — The National Council of Christian Churches (NCC) has suffered something of a decline in recent years. This is partly due to the fact that this organization became so deeply involved in all kinds of social issues that people no longer concerned themselves with the pious pronouncements periodically passed out by the leaders. The organization was not listened to any more. And there isn't anything which hurts quite so much as to be ignored. But this was also partly due to the fact that the flow of money was being gradually dried up. The NCC was forced to cut its elected staff from 168 in 1969 to 105 in 1972. Its appointed staff was also cut from 490 to 303 in the same period.

In an effort to change its image so as to make the organization more attractive to conservatives, the NCC decided to alter its preamble at a December meeting in Dallas. The two set side by side read as follows:

Old Preamble — UNDER THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD communions which confess Jesus Christ as Divine Lord and Savior, in order more fully to manifest oneness in Him, do now create an inclusive cooperative agency of Christian churches of the United States of America to show forth their unity and mission in specific ways to bring the churches into living contact with one another for fellowship, study and cooperative action.

New Preamble — The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America is a cooperative agency of Christian communions seeking to fulfill the unity and mission the which God calls them. The member communions, responding to the gospel revealed in the Scriptures, confess Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, as Savior and Lord. Relying on the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the council works to bring churches into a life-giving fellowship and into common witness, study and action to the glory of God and in service to all creation.

The NCC has, however, given public reassurance that



it will continue to pass its moral judgments on the social and political issues of the day.

Item — The World Council of Churches (WCC) held a conference recently in Bangkok. The Conference was determined to go the way of secularism. Conference planners called for “secular strivings for a fuller human life.” Efforts were made to give the conference proceedings some spiritual character, but these efforts were, for the most part, frustrated. The Conference went on record as favoring support to those who refuse to pay taxes, refuse to serve in the armed forces, are draft dodgers and deserters. According to *The Presbyterian Journal*, from which magazine we gained this information, a certain writer is quoted as saying: “All the advance publications concerning this meeting indicate that the World Council is making a massive effort to reinterpret the classic meaning of salvation so that ‘being saved’ will come to mean having more food, more justice, more clothes, more freedom, more production, less disease, more brotherhood, more peace, in short, more *this-worldly* improvements.”

And this organization has appeal to certain Reformed Churches in this country and abroad!

At the same meeting, the Conference decided to enter into dialogue with Buddhists. The word “dialogue” as it is increasingly used in our day is an interesting one. It certainly does *not* mean “to preach the gospel.” We shall have to comment further on this term in some future issue.

Item — A great deal is being made these days of the religious convictions of professional sports figures. Perhaps this is especially true of professional football players. Why this should be is difficult to say. We are told that Evangelist Tom Skinner, e.g., is the unpaid and unofficial chaplain of the Washington Redskins. He speaks at pre-game chapel services and gives spiritual counseling to team members and their families. Many of the professional teams hold Bible-study groups for players and their families, and many players and their coaches are members of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

What strikes us is that this picture is quite different from the picture presented in the secular press. Here we read of players who boast of their exploits in drinking, sex, and even drugs, and who live a life of pleasure and sin. Descriptions of games are descriptions of organized mayhem and brutal and deliberate attempts to hurt permanently players of opposing teams.

Whatever may be a correct picture, the fact remains that nagging questions persist concerning the legitimacy of professional sports in the light of Scripture. And, more importantly, all professional teams in all sports are guilty of violating the Lord’s Day. This is flagrant desecration of that which God has made holy. This must necessarily make the Christianity of these players deeply suspect.

Item — A new law is being tried in Camden, New Jersey. Under certain circumstances, parents are made responsible for the delinquency of their children. This covers particularly such offenses as illegal drinking, mugging, vandalism, breaking and entering, curfew violations. Parents are to be given a warning first; but should additional offense be committed, parents can be jailed for 90 days and fined up to \$500.00.

The basis for such an ordinance is the fact that parents are responsible for their children and should know where their children are and what they are doing. Whether the law will work or not is a dubious question. But the whole matter underscores the fact that the delinquency of juveniles is certainly, in large measure, to be explained by the fact that parents have abdicated their God-given responsibility.

Item — Few in this country are aware of how extensive demon worship in this country really is. The same is true all over the world. *Time* magazine, in a recent issue, even featured this phenomenon. Some points made by *Time* and other news media include the following: “The Satanic Bible” is more popular on some college campuses than Scripture. A large number of colleges and high schools offer courses in the occult. The number of “spiritists” in Brazil alone has reached nearly fifty million. Early in 1971, in a small town, over 450 “ministers of Satan” were ordained. On Easter Sunday in 1971, over 400 gathered in Chicago for the purpose of worshipping Satan. In practically all countries, including Russia, demon worship is an increasingly common thing.

Certainly these events, too, are signs that we are nearing the end of the history of the world.

Item — An interesting article in a recent issue of *Newsweek* not only tells a good story, but also points out the emptiness of modern psychiatry. The story goes like this. A group of five men and three women, including three psychologists, a pediatrician, a psychiatrist, a painter and a housewife, had themselves committed to different mental institutions by feigning insanity. They told admitting doctors that they kept hearing voices that said words like “empty,” “hollow,” and “void.” Other than the fact that they gave false names, they were completely honest with their doctors concerning all their life history and “symptoms.” They were all admitted as either schizophrenic or manic-depressive. Once inside the hospitals, they were completely normal in their behavior and, in fact, did all in their power to convince doctors and nurses that they were well. But they were unable to be released. The more they insisted they were well and normal, the more the staffs were convinced they were dangerously ill. The only ones who realized that they were normal were the patients themselves with whom these people came into contact. One patient said to one of those making the experiment: “You’re not crazy, you’re a journalist or a professor. You’re checking up on the



hospital." But what was obvious to the other patients was not at all obvious to the psychiatrists and staff. It took up to 52 days for these people to get out. And then the only way they succeeded was either by simply walking away from the hospital or by telling the doctors that, although they were still sick, they were feeling much better. Their discharge slips read: "schizophrenia in remission."

It is a remarkable illustration of the fact that "mental illness" is indeed a misnomer and that worldly psychiatry is silly as it is useless.

At 9 p.m., a nippy breeze swirled around Atlanta's Civic Auditorium, but inside the air was warm with Jesus. Sweaty "A-mens" rose periodically from an interracial crowd of some 600 middle-aged people, who had waited 90 minutes through preliminary sermons for the night's featured preacher: faith-healing evangelist David Epley. Suddenly, the music swelled as Epley strode onstage, seized the mike, expertly looped the cord away from his dark blue trousers and hurled himself into a hymn. "I'm . . . like a ship . . . that's . . . lost in a storm," he sang, and beyond the stage lights the crowd drew together like laced boots.

After twenty minutes of Gospel tunes, Epley stepped down into the audience to perform his specialty — "miraculously" identifying people and their ailments by a power he calls "discerning spirits." He stopped in front of a woman with a wrinkled face and bleached blond hair who was crying softly. "O-o-o-o, honey, you don't need to cry," he purred. "Lord bless you, you've got to leave that booze alone." Leading her up onto the stage, the tall, young evangelist turned the woman's face to his shoulder and stroked her hair like a parent with a troubled child. "Now, sister," he said, "I'm going to give you this special prayer cloth and I want you to wear it for the next seven days. Oh, Father, help her," he prayed. "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus . . . Oh, I feel it tonight. I

feel Jesus here." And then, glancing back at the musicians, he whispered: "Give me an A flat."

In this way *Newsweek* introduces an article on the latest of American evangelists. The article goes on to show in vivid language that there is a comeback of sorts of old-time evangelism and revivalism, although the old-fashioned tent meetings have pretty much disappeared. Today the successful evangelists are expert showmen, and, *Newsweek* assures us, there is big money in evangelism if the game is played right. In fact some evangelists make no bones about it that money is an important part of their "preaching."

Television, however, will never replace the stand-up evangelist who thrives on personal contact. One who is indeed thriving is New York's fabled Rev. Frederick (Reverend Ike) Eikerenkoetter who makes no secret of his love of money. At a recent crusade in Houston, the Reverend Ike promised that prosperity would come to those who believe enough in themselves to support the spread of his "Science of Living." "I understand green power," the South Carolina-born Ike told some 4,000 mostly black listeners. "I don't speak black power because I can't spend it. . . I ask that you not give change, but if you only have change, I'll take it." And he did.

There seems to me to be few things quite as despicable and revolting as making a show for entertainment of the preaching of the gospel and doing this to make money. Rev. Hoeksema wrote a pamphlet many years ago (still available) entitled: "Jesus Savior, and the Evil of Hawking Him." In this pamphlet he was particularly concerned with the Arminian sin of "hawking" Jesus as a common item in the marketplace of ideas. That "hawking" of Jesus has now become big business and part of entertainment. There must be a special place in hell for those who commit such horrible crimes.

## Contending for the Faith

# The Doctrine of Atonement (Reformation Period)

Rev. H. Veldman

Until now we have been discussing Articles I — V of the Rejection of Errors of the second Head of our Canons, dealing with the atonement of Christ. Article VI reads as follows:

Who use the difference between meriting and appropriating, to the end that they may instill into the minds of the imprudent and inexperienced this teaching that God, as far as He is concerned, has been minded of applying to all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ; but that, while some obtain

the pardon of sin and eternal life, and others do not, this difference depends on their own free will, which joins itself to the grace that is offered without exception, and that it is not dependent on the special gift of mercy, which powerfully works in them, that they rather than others should appropriate unto themselves this grace. For these, while they feign that they present this distinction, in a sound sense, seek to instill into the people the destructive poison of the Pelagian errors.



This is a very fundamental article, this teaching of the Remonstrants. And it is such a fundamental article exactly because it is so pertinent in our present day and age! How true it is that it is exactly this Arminian heresy which is so rampant and generally taught today!

We understand that the word, "appropriating," could better be translated, "applying." We must, then, read this article this way: "Who use the difference between meriting and applying, etc."

Notice, too, that the fathers in this article speak of those who are imprudent and inexperienced. These are the people of God who are easily led astray. And it lies in the very nature of the case that we must not be imprudent and inexperienced. And the reason why these imprudent and inexperienced people of God are easily led astray is because the Arminians feign that they present this distinction in a sound sense. O, let us never forget: those Arminian teachers are very clever and subtle!

The fathers of Dordt, in this sixth article, speak of the difference between meriting and appropriating, or, properly, applying. Notice, please, that the fathers do not condemn this distinction as such. We may certainly speak of this distinction. Salvation was merited by our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary. But it is applied by the living God to the hearts of all the elect people of the Lord. The Arminians, however, used this distinction to instill into the hearts and minds of the imprudent and inexperienced their own perverted ideas and conceptions of the salvation and grace of God. This is easily understood. How often this happens, also today! There are those people of the Lord who are imprudent, incautious and inexperienced. They are so naive. They are so ready to accept these heretical preachers and teachers in good faith. They are so hesitant to accuse them of bad and evil intentions. This is especially the case when these erring preachers and teachers come to them in sheep's clothing, when, according to the conclusion of this sixth article, they feign to present this distinction in a sound sense. O, they mean so well! They have no intention of undermining and destroying the foundations of the church of God, of undermining and destroying and corrupting the truth. They certainly insist that the people of God should retain all the fundamental principles and truths of the Word of God. These Arminians are really not so bad after all. They really agree with the people of the Lord in all the fundamentals of the Scriptures. They only look at matters from a slightly different point of view.

Now it should be evident from this expression of the fathers in this sixth article that the fathers do not approve of imprudent and inexperienced people of God. This expression certainly implies that we should not be incautious and inexperienced. We should really be very cautious and careful. We should always be on our guard. We should always be ready to discern and

recognize these wolves in sheep's clothing. And this means that the preaching and teaching of the Word of God should always be sharply distinctive. The preaching of the truth in the church of God should always be of such a character as to emphasize every departure from the Word of God. Always the church of God must be warned against these heretical preachers and teachers. This is a must. Is it not true that our young people, when making public confession of faith, promise before the Lord and before His church that they will maintain the doctrine as taught in this Christian church and that they will fight every heresy repugnant hereto? Indeed, the people of God must not be imprudent and inexperienced.

We recognize this phenomenon, do we not? It is so common throughout the ages. These erring "brethren" mean so well. They do not mean to deny the fundamental truths of Holy Writ. Indeed not! They do not mean to deny the truths of Divine election, of the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Scriptural truth that the sinner is conceived and born dead in sins and in trespasses. And they certainly do not intend to deprive the people of the Lord of these wonderful truths. But, they warn, we must be careful. We must not go overboard with these doctrines. We must not lay too much emphasis upon them. We must not always preach on Divine election (as if this is done). We must not forget the Scriptural truth of man's responsibility. We must not reduce man to a stock and block. It is well and good, they say, that the people of God are preserved unto salvation, but we must not fail also to stress the truth of man's perseverance. It is true that the work which God has once begun shall by His grace be fully done, but it is also true that only he who perseveres unto the end shall obtain the prize, the crown. It is well to bear in mind that God has elected His people from before the foundations of the world and that Christ has died for his own, but we must not forget that the gospel must be preached to all creatures and that the sinner can hardly be held accountable and responsible if the gospel be not an offer and he be unable to accept it. We recognize these presentations, do we not? And when these heretical preachers and teachers appear in sheep's clothing, feigning that they present all these distinctions in a sound sense, then it happens only too often that the imprudent and inexperienced are quickly led astray; in fact, it will even happen that these imprudent and inexperienced become very angry when these erring teachers are accused of evil intentions and motives. These incautious people will only too often defend those heretics.

Are not the Three Points of 1924 a very vivid example of this? The Third Point reads as follows:

Relative to the third point, which is concerned with the question of civil righteousness as performed by the unregenerate, synod declares that according to



Scripture and the Confessions the unregenerate, though incapable of doing any saving good, can do civil good. This is evident from the quotations from Scripture and from the Canons of Dordrecht, III, IV, 4, and from the Netherland Confession, Art. 36, which teach that God without renewing the heart so influences man that he is able to perform civil good; while it also appears from the citations from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed Theology, that our Reformed Fathers from ancient times were of the same opinion.

Is it not evident from the authors of this declaration of doctrine that they had only the soundest intentions? Does this statement of doctrine not declare that the unregenerate sinner cannot do any saving good? Do they not quote from the Scriptures and the Confessions, such as the Canons of Dordrecht and the Belgic Confession? Do they not declare that this civil good as performed by the natural man was always taught by Reformed writers, yea from writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed Theology? Besides, we can speak of civil good, can we not? A baker does not have to be a Christian, does he, to be able to bake good, nourishing bread. A man certainly does not have to be a child of God to be an efficient surgeon or dentist. It is possible, is it not, from this point of view to distinguish between spiritual good and civil good. Well, this is what we have in this Third Point of 1924. Were not the authors of this Third Point motivated in a sound sense when they spoke of the distinction between saving and civil good?

And what about the First Point of 1924? It reads as follows:

Relative to the first point which concerns the favorable attitude of God towards humanity in general and not only towards the elect, synod declares it to be established according to Scripture and the Confession that, apart from the saving grace of God shown only to those that are elect unto eternal life, there is also a certain favor or grace of

God which He shows to His creatures in general. This is evident from the Scriptural passages quoted and from the Canons of Dordrecht, II, 5 and III, IV, 8 and 9, which deal with the general offer of the Gospel, while it appears from the citations made from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed Theology that our Reformed writers from the past favored this view.

In this point we read of the favorable attitude of God towards humanity in general. Is this not true in a certain sense? Is it not true that the Lord is favorably inclined towards humanity in general, towards His people as out of every tribe, nation, land and tongue? Do not the authors of this statement declare that God shows His saving grace only to the elect? And do not the authors of this declaration speak here of the elect? Is it not true, therefore, that this First Point does not intend to deny this fundamental truth of the Word of God. But, we must be careful. We must not be incautious and inexperienced when judging this statement. It also speaks of the preaching of the gospel as an offer to all the hearers of the Gospel. Let us understand one vital thing. We must never judge a preacher or teacher in the light of the good things he sets forth. We must always judge him in the light of the things he declares as in conflict with the Word of God. We must bear in mind that heretics never retract. They will tell you that they mean well, that they have no intention of departing from the Word of God, that they certainly do not intend to deny the fundamentals of the Word of God. They will also tell you that they were misunderstood, etc. But they will never retract. And, although we must show them the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, we may never compromise with the truth, and we must be very severe when judging them in the light of the Word of God. We must not be incautious and inexperienced, but very careful. This is plain, also from the First Point. The Lord willing, we will continue with this in our following article.

## *Taking Heed To The Doctrine*

# **The Importance of the Preaching of God's Word (1)**

*Rev. David Engelsma*

*(This is the text of a Reformation Day lecture given in Denver, Colorado in November, 1972, under the auspices of the Church Extension Committee of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland. The lecture will appear in several installments.)*

In the 16th century, about 450 years ago, there occurred an event which was the most important event for good to the Church of Jesus Christ from the time

of the apostles to the present day. That event was the Reformation of the Church of Jesus Christ. Through the ages the Church had fallen away from Christ and



had become horribly corrupt, even to the point that it was selling eternal life for money. The Holy Spirit then reformed the Church, that is, He formed her anew so that once more she appeared as the glorious bride of Christ. For this reason the name of that great movement is the Reformation. Let one of those men who were instrumental in the reformation of the Church describe what the Reformation was. In his reply to the letter of Cardinal Sadolet, John Calvin wrote: "All we have attempted has been to renew that ancient form of the Church, which at first sullied and distorted by illiterate men of indifferent character, was afterwards scandalously mangled and almost destroyed by the Roman Pontiff and his faction." The man that God used to begin the mighty work of the Reformation was Martin Luther, a lowly monk in Wittenburg, Germany. On the 31st of October in 1517, he posted on public display 95 propositions, or theses, in which he condemned the practices and the teachings of the Church regarding the forgiveness of sins, and in which he set forth the truth concerning the forgiveness of sins and righteousness with God. This proved to be the beginning of the Reformation, and for that reason we celebrate the Reformation annually on the 31st of October.

To the Reformation, all of Protestantism owes its existence. From the very beginning, the Churches that aligned themselves against the deformed institute of the Church, the Roman Church, were called Protestants. They got that name because they protested against the evils in the existing Roman institute. Almost from the very beginning of the Reformation, however, the Protestant Churches were divided into two main branches, the Lutheran Branch and the Reformed branch (which includes the Presbyterian Churches). The great leader of the Reformed branch of the Reformation was John Calvin.

The Reformation was not only a movement that built the Church, but it was also a movement that shook the entire world. This church-building and world-shaking movement was not an act of men, not even an act of those great men, Luther, Calvin, Knox, and others. They were merely instruments by which the Reformation occurred. On the contrary, the Reformation was the work of Christ by His Holy Spirit. For that reason the Reformation is an evidence in history of the presence of Christ with His Church always, as He said in Matthew 28:20. The Reformation is the fulfillment of the promise that Christ made to his Church in John 16:13, that He would give His Spirit, the Spirit of truth, and that that Spirit of truth would lead the Church into all the truth. The Reformation in history is a proof of Jesus' assurance in Matthew 16:18 that the gates of hell shall not prevail against his Church. Christ accomplished the Reformation by His Word, by the preaching of the Scriptures. The Reformers knew this. They knew that

the Reformation was Christ's work, and they knew that the Reformation was Christ's work by the preaching of His Word. Luther confessed this in his inimitable way. After the Reformation had taken hold, Luther looked back and said: "Like a blind mule I was led by Christ." Again, he wrote: "I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept or drank Wittenburg beer with my friends, the Word so greatly weakened the Papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses against it. I did nothing; the Word did everything. I let the Word do its work." The Reformation, then, stands as a monument in history to the awesome power of the Word of God, a monument that our age with its miserable underestimation of the Word very much needs to see.

If you ask the question, "To what purpose did the Reformation take place?" the answer is: In order that the people of God might again have the pure preaching of the Gospel. This was the goal of the Reformation. This was the purpose of the Reformers, but more importantly this was the purpose of the reforming Christ. Also this indicates the tremendous importance of the preaching of the Gospel. Preaching was the essential thing in the Reformation. It was the power that did the reforming, it was the goal that the Reformation aimed to achieve. And when we search the Scriptures we discover that, according to the Scriptures also, the preaching of the Word has this tremendous importance. For this reason it is fitting that children of the Reformation celebrate the Reformation by considering anew the importance of the preaching of God's Word.

Preaching is the authoritative proclamation of the Word of God by the Church through a man who is called by God to the office of the ministry. This includes the preaching to the congregation Sunday after Sunday; the teaching of the children of believers in catechism; the exhortation of believers in their homes by the pastor; and the call to those who are outside the church in the work of missions. Romans 10:13-15 describes what the preaching is and what the preaching does. All that call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how can they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? How shall they believe in Him Whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? Preaching is the one great labor of the Church of Christ. In a certain sense, it is the only task that the Church has. All of the other activities of the Church of Jesus Christ stand in service to the preaching of the Word. The Church, of course, must also administer the sacraments and exercise Christian discipline, but these things stand in service to the preaching. The Church also has a calling to show mercy by the deacons, but that ministry of mercy is an expression of the mercy of Christ that is preached in



the gospel. The Church must also establish and maintain seminaries. It publishes books and magazines. But all of this labor is controlled by the preaching of the gospel. The great commission of the Church by her Lord is: "Preach." That is what Christ told the Church in Mark 16:15: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." This was the command of the Apostle Paul to the young pastor Timothy and in him to all pastors in II Timothy 4:2: "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season, exhort and rebuke with all longsuffering and doctrine." It has always been the chief labor of the Church to preach God's Word. That was the outstanding labor of the Church in the old dispensation. The Church did that through the prophets. The Church did that through the teaching priests and Levites. The Church did that through believing parents who were to instruct their children in God's Word. This was also the labor of the Church in the New Testament. Preaching was the main element in the ministry of Jesus Christ Himself. He went everywhere preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, we read. This was the labor of His apostles. This is the labor of the pastors that Christ gives the Church for the edification of the Church.

Preaching, however, had all but disappeared in the Church prior to the Reformation. Instead of preaching, the priests administered the sacraments. This was regarded as the main work of the Church, in fact, almost as the only work of the Church. At that time, the Church was viewing the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, or Mass, or as we would say, Lord's Supper, as the chief means of grace and salvation. That, by the way, remains the official position of the Roman Church to this very day, as was expressly stated in Vatican II. Not the preaching, but the celebration of the Eucharist is the chief means of grace, according to Rome. At the time of the Reformation, so little was preaching esteemed that even the administration of the sacraments was done in a language that nobody could understand. What little teaching there was consisted of the legends of the lives of the saints and silly little tales. The Church taught at that time by means of statues and pictures, which were called "Books to the Laity." The Reformation restored preaching to its rightful place as the central work of the Church. The Reformers all taught this. Calvin is representative when he writes in his Institutes: "Christ has so ordered in His Church, that if (the pure preaching of the Word) is removed the whole edifice must fall." In the Churches of the Reformation, both Lutheran and Reformed, preaching actually occupied this prominent place. In the time of Luther, in Wittenburg, preaching services were held several times during the week, as well as several times on Sunday, and the same thing was true in Calvin's Geneva.

The reason for the central importance of the preaching of the Word is that Jesus Christ Himself

speaks in the preaching. The living, powerful, saving Word of God sounds forth and is heard in the preaching of the Word. This is the significance of preaching. It is the Word of the sovereign God in Christ Jesus. It is the Word of God as much as God's own preaching in Genesis 3:15 was God's Word. The preaching is as much God's Word as was God's own direct speaking from Mount Sinai when He gave the law. The preaching is as much the Word of God as if God Himself stood on the pulpit and addressed us. This needs proof, because that is not apparent to our senses. With our eyes we see and with our ears we hear a mere, weak, sinful man speaking on behalf of a group of other weak and sinful men called the Church. It is to be feared that this very thing is the occasion for many in our day to neglect the preaching, to disparage the preaching, and to ignore the preaching altogether. When they do this, they have a feeling of security because they say, "Well, it is only a mere man speaking anyway." In fact, it is the risen Christ speaking, and it is true, as some will find out to their eternal sorrow, that whoever hears the preaching hears Christ and whoever rejects the preaching rejects Christ. We should prove that the preaching of the Word is the very Word of Jesus Christ himself. That proof abounds in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the prophets who spoke to the people of Israel spoke in such a way that it was God who spoke through them. That is what we read in II Peter 1:20, 21: "no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." That is why the prophets always prefaced their messages with "Thus saith the Lord." That is why, when Israel rejected the word of the prophets, God condemned Israel for rejecting *His* Word that the prophets carried to Israel. There is proof that the preaching is the speaking to the Church by Jesus Christ in the New Testament scriptures. In Ephesians 4:20, 21, Paul says to the Christians at Ephesus: "But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard Him and have been taught by Him as the truth is in Jesus." Now, the Ephesians lived and were converted some 25 years after Jesus had gone to Heaven. Yet Paul says that they heard Jesus and that they were taught by Jesus. They heard Him and they were taught by Him in the preaching that they heard from the mouth of Paul. Through the mouth of Paul, Jesus spoke to them and taught them. This has to be the case because the truth is in Jesus, and if we are to know the truth Jesus must reveal the truth to us. This is also the testimony of I Thessalonians 2:13 where Paul praises the Thessalonian Christians "because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." The



Word that was preached by Paul was not the word of men, although it seemed so. It was the Word of God! This is what Jesus Himself teaches us in John 10:27: "My sheep hear my voice." We must hear the voice of Jesus Christ, and we do hear the voice of Jesus Christ

always in the preaching. Our Reformed Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, speaks of this when it says in Question 54: "The Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves a Church by His Spirit and His Word!"

## *In His Fear*

# The Age of Man

*Rev. D.H. Kuiper*

Frequently catechism students, when confronted with the fact of the long age to which Methuselah and others attained, express astonishment and wonder. Without fail little hands stab the air to ask, "Why did God make people live *so long*?" and "Why don't we live that long now?" Not infrequently adults also consider these facts, either in society or privately, responding in much the same way. These are perfectly good questions. As we seek out Scriptural answers for them, we will discover that time or man's life span, being a creature, comes under the providential hand of God. As God's upholding and governing hand touches time, it shows itself to be a redeemed creature by being a good servant of God and His Church. All things are good, and work together for good, to those who share in redemption. Therefore, it follows that the longevity of prediluvian man was good, and that our present life span is good. Recently, by way of the Old Year's service, we have all been instructed concerning the passing of time. It will be equally instructive to take a little broader perspective of this matter.

## WHY SUCH LONG LIVES?

The study of genealogies, often passed over in our family devotions, here shows itself to be profitable. Genesis, chapter five, gives us one of the numerous genealogies that form the framework of the book. In this precise chronology we find that the average life span was well above 900 years. Adam lived to be 930 years, and his successive progeny up to the time of the flood had ages of 912, 905, 910, 895, 962, 969, 777, and 950. One exception to these figures was Enoch, 365, who was not, for God took him. It may be safely assumed that the generations of Cain also lived to these advanced ages.

Although these numbers stagger us and our children, it ought to be remembered that they represent a sharp *reduction* in the age of man due to the fall. Man had come under the sentence of death spiritually, but also

physically. Nevertheless, what purpose did this relatively long life span serve? There was, first of all, the necessity to populate the world. From the words in Genesis 5, "...and begat sons and daughters..." we believe that both in the church and in the world large families were produced, so that in the 1654 years between creation and the flood, millions of people lived on the earth. In his fine book *The Flood*, A.D. Rehwinkle, fascinated by the population of the pre-flood world, argues that it could have numbered anywhere from two to eleven *billion* (p. 24). Although this necessarily involves speculation, we need not doubt that the then-world hosted a large population, and this was made possible in a relatively short time by the great ages which were attained. A father saw not only his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, but he saw his seed to the seventh and eighth generations!

In the second place, long life served God's wisdom in that He did not deign to give the Church written revelation until much, much later. The author of the Pentateuch did not come onto the scene until approximately 650 years after the flood. In place of a written record of revelation, God provided direct revelation, in which He spoke to men through angels, visions, and dreams; and He provided the circumstances that would insure the passing on of His speech by way of a strong, oral tradition. Father passed on to son the Word which God had spoken, as well as his own life's experiences. Since it was possible for seven or eight generations to live together, this information could be transmitted easily and accurately. For example, Adam could not only inform Seth concerning the temptation, fall, protevangel, and banishment from the garden, but it was also possible for him to speak of these things to Lamech, the father of Noah! If, indeed, they ever met, Lamech could have learned what we know as the contents of Genesis 1-3 directly from Adam; Noah could learn of these same things once repeated by his father!

It would make an interesting family project to prepare a bar graph which demonstrated the



overlapping of generations in the period we are discussing. On graphing paper list the names of the saints from Genesis five on the left hand side of the graph. Along the bottom of the graph indicate time, either after creation or before Christ. With a little care the exact time of the birth and death of these saints can be determined and recorded. And it will be clear, even to little catechumens, that God's Word was passed on easily and accurately to many generations.

### WHY THE GREAT REDUCTION?

Although this explains the two-fold benefit of longevity for the periods 4004-2350 B.C., the question remains, Why has the age of man been so drastically reduced? Actually this is a more important and more interesting question. All are aware that such a reduction occurred at the time of the flood: the average of 900 years was reduced roughly by half. According to the genealogy of Shem (Gen. 11) we find the next several generations living to 600, 438, 430, and 464 years. However, before we attempt an answer to the above question, we ought to include another fact in our considerations. There was, according to Genesis 11, another dividing or halving of life span at the time of Peleg, the son of Eber. He lived to the age of 239, and his generations to the ages of 239 and 230. From this time on, there was a gradual lessening of age until the time of Abraham and Moses, who lived to be 140 and 120 years respectively. Man's years continued to diminish so that we are informed in Psalm 90, verse 10: "The days of our years are three score years and ten, or if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." This condition prevails until the present time without significant change.

If such things as our subject are in God's hands, and if all God's works are the revelation of wisdom, the question is natural, Is there any similarity between the days of these two reductions, the days of Noah and the days of Peleg? The name Peleg means division. We are informed in Gen. 10:25 that he was so named "for in his days was the earth divided." This division is again referred to in Gen. 10:32, "These are the families of the sons of Noah after their generations in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood," The *manner* of this division of nations is explained in Gen. 11:1-9, the well-known incident of the confusion of tongues in the land of Shinar, where the world of wicked men had decided to memorialize itself with a tower. This occurred at the time of Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-10). There is little doubt, then, that the time before the flood and the time of Nimrod's kingdom were similar to a high degree. They were periods during which the wickedness of men was great in the earth, when every imagination of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually. Days of rebellion against every ordinance of God, including

His specific command to replenish and fill the earth (Gen. 8:17, 9:1, and 11:4). Days of intense suffering for the Church of God. Had not the Church been reduced to eight living souls at the time of Noah, and was this not the purpose of the world in refusing to scatter; That the people was one and all had one language is precisely what constituted the danger for the people of God. Revelation 13 with its description of the rising two beasts makes this so clear.

### AGE REDUCTION ACT OF GRACE

The conclusion is evident. God sees His beleaguered Church in her precarious situation. He sees that she is about to be opposed to the point of extinction. More than merely seeing, God *acts!* In mercy He sends the thundering waters of the flood in order to save eight souls and punish the unrepentant world. And in that same mercy He confuses the wicked kingdom of Nimrod with strange languages that they might not unite against the Church as present in the children of Shem. The flood and Babel were two miraculous deliverances for the people of God, and from slightly different points of view pre-figure the final deliverance in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Simultaneous with these acts of deliverance, the Lord each time divided the life span of man by two. The result is that the struggling, militant Church is able to survive in the world. We can imagine what would have happened in those days, and what would happen today, if men continued to live to 900 years and more. What a frightening thought! What monsters of iniquity would the worldlings become if allowed to practice sin for nearly ten centuries! What devilishly adept teachers they would be for future generations! What inventions and scientific achievements would be discovered and corrupted in the service of Antichrist! Where would the Church hide? But the Sovereign of heaven and earth adjusts the ages of men so that they, and their development in sin, serve the central purpose of redemption in Christ. The result has been that the Church of Jesus Christ, though a little flock, has endured. The shortening of life is an act of grace for that little but dearly beloved Church!

### WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

It must be mentioned that the history of Babel is going to be reversed. Instead of many nations and languages there will be one people and one language once more. And there will be one religion. The apostle John saw this in his vision and recorded it for us in Rev. 13. One world power, one false religion in the service of that world power, one way to escape persecution and death. For when the deadly wound of Babel is healed (Rev. 13:3) Antichrist will have the ascendancy. He shall blaspheme God, make war with the saints, be worshipped of all whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life, and have power to



kill as many as would not worship the image of the beast. What then?

God shall see this great tribulation which surpasses everything from the beginning of the world to the end. And with the same love and grace and mercy that has not wavered throughout all the ages, God will once again touch and control time. For the elect's sake He shall shorten those days. Whether this means He will cause days to be less than twenty-four hour periods, or that He will cause the end of those days to be hastened, makes no essential difference. God will once

again adjust time for the saving benefit of His people. There is nothing He will not do for those whom He loves. The Church will be saved to the uttermost! And once saved she will delight to sing with deeper awareness: "Oh, the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For of Him, and through Him, and unto Him are all things! To Whom be glory forever. Amen!"

These things, too, belong to our conception of time.

## *Voice of our Fathers*

# Belgic Confession, Article 14 Man, Formed Out of the Dust

*Rev. J. Kortering*

Our Belgic Confession describes the creation of man in this manner, "We believe that God created man out of the dust of the earth, and made and formed him after his own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy, capable in all things to will, agreeably to the will of God." This follows closely the language of Scripture. We read, "And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them," Gen. 1:26,27. To this is added, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul," Gen. 2:7.

## OUT OF THE DUST

Our reaction to the description of man's creation given in the Belgic Confession might very well be mixed. "God formed man out of the dust... and formed him after his own image."

The material which God used in creating man was *dust*! We might be inclined to react as did Naaman the Syrian when told to go wash in the Jordon River seven times. He said, "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel, may I

not wash in them and be clean?" II Kings 5:11,12. We read the creation account and learn how God spoke by His creative word and the things came into being with a mighty display of power. The sea brought forth birds and the earth brought forth animals. Of man we read, "God formed him out of dust." We might react and say, why didn't God call forth His mighty creative word and with great power bring forth man out of nothing? Why *dust*?

Let's observe the following.

First, God created man as *part* of the creation. If God wanted man to live independently from the creation, he could have created man out of some other substance, as for example the angels were. God did not want man to live on the earth and not be part of it, but the very opposite. The whole of God's creation is organically related. The earth holds the sea in its bosom. The forest provides a home for the animals. The plants take in carbon dioxide and convert it to oxygen, so essential to life on the earth. The whole of the earth and its inhabitants are wrapped up in the firmament. God created man to be part of this creation. Hence, the material for man was dust.

Secondly, we learn from this creative act that man's life is dependent upon the earth. In order for him to live, he needs oxygen, he needs the food the earth produces, he is dependent upon the earth to provide all the essential elements for his well-being. This is being pointed out in our day, so acutely, by the problems of ecology. We need clean air, water, and earth if we are to live here. This is our home. The Psalmist expressed



it this way, "The heaven, even the heavens are the Lord's, but the earth hath he given to the children of men," Ps. 115:16.

Thirdly, it follows from the above, that we are earthly because of our creation, and therefore we *like it* here. Our space program helps us understand this. We may travel to other heavenly bodies, but it is a hostile environment; it is brown and drab. We have to take our own environment with us or we cannot survive. Wasn't that a beautiful picture of earth taken from the moon? The earth is our home, it is the most beautiful of the heavenly bodies that God has created. It is colorful, it is adorned in beauty from pole to pole. Because God made us from the dust, we enjoy being here. We will do anything to stay alive. Satan may have said it, but it is true, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life," Job 2:4. Death has to grab us away from this home; we won't volunteer to leave. Yes, we are of the earth, earthy, I Cor. 15:47.

In the fourth place, since the material for our creation was dust, the scope of our perception is earthly. This does not rule out the place of faith; that was included in creation, for God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life. We mean by this that we cannot understand the heavenly. Who can fathom eternity, the omnipresence of God, the souls of God's people in glory, the angels' presence in heaven and earth, the ultimate resurrection of the dead? These things are "heavenly" and we are earthly. We believe them by faith, but cannot even picture them in our minds. This will have to await for the change from earthly to heavenly.

## GOD FORMED MAN

Added to the above, we read, "God formed man out of the dust of the ground." If the material used in creating man might seem to demean his existence, certainly this addition would change all that. Let's consider how this is true.

First, God contemplated the act of creating man before doing it. It was introduced by God speaking with Himself as triune God, "And God said, Let us make man," Gen. 1:26. This constituted a definite break in the creative process. Two things can be pointed out here. The creation of man was so important to God that He discussed it with Himself before carrying it out. This was unique. It also indicates to us that this was a distinct creative act which in no way can be connected with the creation of the animals that preceded it. The creation account does not allow any form of evolution, as if man has his ancestry in the animal.

Secondly, God became personally involved in man's creation. We realize this was true of all creation, by virtue of the creative voice of God. God personally spoke and it was done, Ps. 33:9. Nevertheless, God's

act of creating man was distinctive. We read that God, "formed man out of the dust of the ground." Notice here that dust was not so demeaning that God would not put His hands into it. We realize that we deal with the wonder of creation. Rather than poking fun of Scripture's description of it, as godless science does, we understand this description to be God's. He describes in our language the fact that He did not only speak in creating man, he also acted. He became more personally involved in this creation. By His own mighty hand he fashioned, out of the dust, the nature of man, making him of the earth, earthy.

Thirdly, the results of this special creative act of God can be seen in man, the most wonderful creature God made. God intended that man should not only be part of the creation, but the *king* of all creation. So great was the creative act, that He made man able to reign over all things. This is staggering to contemplate. Certain things indicate this.

God made man able to walk erect. This cannot be said of any animal. Some may hop about in great strides, as the kangaroo, others may swing from branch to branch, as the monkey, still others may use all fours in amazing speed like the deer, but only man walks erect. What an insult against God to say that man belongs in the category of animal. He is unique in his place. There is kingly majesty even in his erect disposition.

Think of man's face. It tells a great deal about the man, more than the face of any animal. There is a reason for this. God created man to be a human *person*. When God formed man out of the dust of the ground, He provided Adam with a nature that would enable him to personally enter into covenant fellowship with God. He gave man the faculties of friendship. This included such things as the human body, the brain and nervous system. This marvelous and complex part of man's creation provided the necessary tools by which the human mind is able to function. The ability to reason, to retain sense impressions as memory, to recall them in the future, to talk intelligently, to listen and understand, all are included in this creation of man. His face showed it. Man possesses certain likes and dislikes which are influenced by his own will. The face indicates this. Emotions run deeply within man's body and soul and these are reflected in his face. The human person communicates by a face to face encounter both in relation to the neighbor and God. God made man this way.

God also gave man a body with which to work. Certainly one can examine the animal world and find many industrious animals. Does not the Bible tell the sluggard to visit the ant, Prov. 6:6? The squirrel provides for winter and the beaver nibbles industriously to build his dam. Yet, man is altogether distinct. His body is controlled by his intellect and not



by instinct. His hand has the skill of a surgeon or the brute power of the hewer of wood. God made Adam as the workman in His kingdom. To him was given the command, "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth," Gen. 1:28.

Now we can understand that man was created by a marvelous act of God. He came forth out of the earth, yet capable of subduing it. He came out of the dust, yet he was made the king of all the creation.

### THE IMAGE BEARER OF GOD

To this we must also add that God did more, He also breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. It was by this aspect of man's creation that God lifted man above the earth and made him conscious that God existed and that he was not king in his own right, but king under God, to serve Him in loving obedience.

The Belgic Confession adds, "and made and formed him after his own image and likeness, good and righteous, and holy, capable in all things to will agreeably to the will of God."

God created man in one act, which in turn is distinguished as having two parts: the first is that God formed him out of the dust of the earth, the second is that He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The first part has reference to the fact that God made

man capable of bearing God's own image, the second describes how God enabled man to actually bear that image.

In our next article we will consider what is involved in this image of God in man. In conclusion now, we may understand that what is sometimes referred to as the "image of God in the wider sense" could better be described as man's capability of bearing God's image. By forming man out of the dust of the ground, God gave to man all the gifts he needed to function as servant king under God. He gave to man his entire human nature, body, soul, and spirit.

When God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, God unified the entire complex life of man into one human personality. This personality He directed to Himself, so that by the use of his human nature man could glorify God His creator.

Little wonder that the church of all ages has delighted in making this an object of our confession. To contemplate our origin makes us realize how great our God is, and how dependent we are upon Him. We do well to conclude with the words of David: though referring to his conception and birth, they apply to our original creation as well, "I will praise thee: for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well," Ps. 139:14.

We believe that God created man out of the dust of the earth.

## *From Holy Writ*

# Pure and Undeiled Religion (8)

An Exposition of the Epistle of James

*Rev. Robert D. Decker*

*Chapter 1:18, Born Again With The Word of Truth*

A literal translation of this verse is: "Having willed it, he caused us to be born by means of the word of truth, in order that we should be a kind of a first-fruits of his created things." Now anyone who says there is little doctrine in James just does not know what he's talking about. This text is rich in doctrine as is the entire Epistle. Consider that James speaks of the eternal will of God, of the wonder of regeneration, of the Word of truth, and of the purpose of God's regenerating us, "in order that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his created things." All of these are rich doctrinal themes which run throughout the Holy Scriptures.

James has been speaking about temptations: how we must consider them, how we must endure them through the wisdom of God which is acquired by fervent prayer, of the fact that we may rejoice in them because by them God molds our faith into perfection. In the immediately preceding context (vss. 13-17) James emphasized that when we fall into sin as a result of temptations we must not blame God. We are drawn away and enticed by our own lusts which bring forth sin, and sin when it is finished brings forth death. God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: for He is the Father of the lights, with Whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning. God is the



giver of every good and perfect gift. Continuing in that vein, James now speaks of the good and perfect gift of God, regeneration.

In the past (not so much today because people generally are ignorant of the doctrines of the Word of God and do not care to know them) a good deal of controversy swirled about this and similar texts of scripture. The controversy had to do with the question as to how regeneration is effected. Some said the new birth is mediate; that is, it happens through the means of the preaching of the Word; while others said regeneration is immediate; that is, it occurs apart from means and is the initial work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the elect. This latter is our position. (The interested reader is referred to a thorough discussion of this whole matter by Rev. Herman Hoeksema in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, the section on Soteriology.)

That the wonder of regeneration is immediate is evident when we take note of the terms involved in this text and others. The word in the text, "begat he us," means literally "to give birth to." The point is that life prior to birth is presupposed. This word is used always in the New Testament to refer to birth from the womb. In other words the term refers to life coming to consciousness. Now, a different word is used by Jesus in His conversation with Nicodemus as recorded in John 3. Jesus says in verse 3: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The words "born again" refer to the moment of conception, the very beginning of life in the womb. This is precisely how Nicodemus took what Jesus had said. He responds (vs. 4), "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus then explains that he speaks of a birth of "water and of the Spirit" (vs. 5). The same word used in John 3:3 is also found in that beautiful passage, I Peter 1:23-25. Here the Scriptures speak of "being born again out of incorruptible seed by the living and abiding word." Out of that incorruptible seed life is conceived. That's the work of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, the living and abiding — that is, the eternal Word. It happens beneath the consciousness of the elect, in earliest infancy or perhaps even at the moment of conception. That new, heavenly, resurrection life of Christ, which cannot die and apart from which one cannot even see the Kingdom of God, is brought to consciousness by means of the preaching of the Word. "And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." (I Peter 1:25).

It is in that broad sense that James speaks of regeneration in this verse. The seed of life has already been implanted in our hearts; and having willed it, the Father of lights causes that principle of life to be born (come to conscious expression) by means of the word of truth. That the inspired James means by the Word

of the truth the preaching of the Word is clear not only by comparing of Scripture with Scripture, which we have done, but also by the succeeding context of this verse, which speaks of "receiving the Word with meekness and being 'doers of the Word and not hearers only.'" Putting it all together, the idea is that God by means of the Word of truth gives birth to the life of Christ in us, calls us out of darkness into His marvelous light, unites us to Christ by means of faith so that we daily put off the old and put on the new man, justifies us, sanctifies, preserves, and glorifies us.

What is the "word of truth" by which this wonder is effected? The truth is reality overagainst that which is unreal, the lie. Truth, therefore, is always the faithful presentation of reality overagainst the lie; and that too, with respect to all things: God, Christ, the Church, the world, the past, present, and future. That means God is the truth. He reveals Himself as "a God of truth" (Deut. 32:4). He is the eternal reality Who is before all things, the Creator, Sustainer of all things. And the truth of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is revealed in Jesus Christ. Christ is the *WORD* which was in the beginning, which was with God, and which is God. He is the Word by whom all things were made and for whom all things were made, and in whom all things consist. That Word became flesh and "dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-14—cf. also Col. 1) The truth in all its fulness is revealed in Jesus Christ, the Son of the triune God in the flesh. He is the reality of all the types and shadows of the Old Testament, and He is the reality over against all that is contrary to God. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (John 1:17, 18) Christ said it Himself in those familiar but profound words: "I am the way, the truth, and the life . . ." (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit is the truth. As the Spirit given to Christ, promised by Christ and poured out into the church by Christ, He is the Spirit of Truth Who comforts us by bringing to our remembrance all that Christ spoke. (John 14:16,17,26;16:13-15)

That truth, that Word of truth spoken by God in the Son and by the Holy Spirit we have in the Bible. The times in which we live require a word or two about this. The Bible is the TRUTH. It is God-breathed, given by inspiration. (II Tim. 3:16) It is the product of God in Christ through His Holy Spirit, "Holy men spake as moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Peter 1:20,21). This means that the Bible is not in any sense the words of men except in the sense that God prepared from eternity men whom He used by the Holy Spirit as instruments through whom His Word was to be spoken and written. The Bible then is not a book that witnesses to the truth; nor is it a record of man's



religious experience or encounter with God. The Bible is the Word of God and therefore the Truth. It is the whole truth, to which nothing may be added and from which nothing may be subtracted. It is the truth about everything; it presents all of reality in its proper perspective. And, there is no truth apart from the Holy Scriptures. Anything apart from the Scriptures has to be the product of the creature; and because the creature is fallen and totally depraved, what he produces will always be the lie. By its own testimony the Scriptures are that. That means the nature and extent of Biblical authority is most emphatically not a question. It's not open for discussion. One either by the grace of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ *believes* the Bible to be the Word of Truth; or lacking the testimony of the Spirit in his heart, he rejects the Word of truth in *unbelief*. Here there can be absolutely no compromise. One does not stand above the Bible to determine what is the Word of God in it and what is not. One must approach the Bible in the faith that it is the absolute truth of God Himself.

By that Word of truth God has caused us to be born initially by implanting the incorruptible seed of the resurrection life of Jesus Christ by the Spirit of Christ. And by the preaching of that Word of truth God brings that principle of life, that seed, to conscious expression; for this living and abiding Word is "the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." (I Peter 1:25) This is the miracle of preaching. The world may call that "foolishness," let us never. For unto us which are saved it is Christ, the power and wisdom of God which destroys the wisdom of this world. (cf. I Cor. 1) It is to the saved the almighty power of God which awakens within them the knowledge of their sin and sinful natures, leads to godly sorrow and daily repentance, assures of peace and forgiveness, instructs, edifies, feeds and nourishes their hungry and thirsty souls, and keeps them from falling. This is what happens wherever the Word of truth is preached faithfully in and by God's church.

The text states, finally, the beautiful purpose of our being born with the Word of truth: "in order that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his created things." This is an Old Testament figure. At the beginning of the harvest season Israel had to bring the Firstfruits of the harvest to the tabernacle (temple) before the Lord. This was symbolic of two things: 1) by bringing the firstfruits the pious Israelite declared that the harvest was the Lord's, he consecrated the fruit of the earth to the Lord: 2) at the same time he declared by this act that God would give the complete harvest. James says we are firstfruits of his created things. Just as the entire creation fell under the curse through the fall of Adam (Gen. 3) so the entire creation shares in the redemption of the elect race (cf. Gen. 9:8-17, Romans 8:19 ff.). Out of the fire of God's wrath which will destroy the present, cursed creation (II Peter 3) God

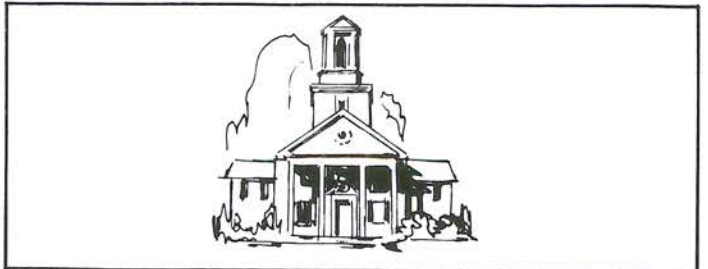
will create a new heavens and a new earth, a perfected, redeemed creation in which the elect in Christ will reign to the glory of God forever (Rev. 4; 6:12-17; 7:9-17; chaps. 21,22).

Of that we are the firstfruits. Born again by the Spirit of Christ, brought to conscious faith and life by the preaching of the Word of truth we are consecrated to God's glory now in principle and soon in perfection, and we are the guarantee that the full harvest of redemption shall surely be realized. What a tremendous wonder that is. That and nothing less is what is realized in us by the preaching of the Word of truth.

That is certain. Certain, because it is God's purpose. The text puts it this way; "Having willed it!" That word "will" is the same word translated "counsel" in Eph. 1:11; "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." The word means, "to will purposefully," or, "to be minded to do something." That's not our will. Our will is to choose sin. We are dead by nature in trespasses and sins. But God having willed it causes us to be born with the Word of truth, in order that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his created things. Having willed it, He chose us in Christ Jesus before the foundations of the world (Eph. 1). Having willed it, He sent His only begotten Son into the world to atone for our sin and merit eternal righteousness and life for us. Having willed it, He raised His Son from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places. Having willed it, He made us, who were dead in sin, alive in Christ Jesus — by grace we are saved. Having willed it, He poured out His Spirit into our hearts. Having willed it, He implanted the seed of the new life in us; and having willed it, He brings that seed to consciousness with the Word of truth preached. And having willed it He will finish that work of redemption in the full harvest when Jesus comes again.

That is the gospel of redemption. That is the victory. May the Church of Jesus Christ preach then boldly, joyfully, and without shame the gospel. To the world that is sheer foolishness. To the saved it is indeed Christ the power and wisdom of God which destroys the world.

That is God's purpose. "That no flesh should glory in his presence...let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord." For "of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." (I Cor. 1:29, 31; Romans 11:36)





# A Commentary

As to reprobation, I know that many greatly dislike this doctrine — that some are rejected, and that yet no cause can be found in themselves why they thus remain disapproved by God. But there is here need of docility and of a meek spirit, to which Paul also exhorts us, when he says, “O man, who art thou who answerest against God?” (Rom. ix. 20.) For were it lawful to investigate the cause, surely Paul, who had been taken up to the third heaven, might have showed us the way; but he is here silent and drives us away from the indulgence of a bold and an over curious spirit. Since the Holy Spirit by the mouth of Paul restrains the presumption of men, that they may not dare to go beyond this step — that God hardens whom he wills and rejects whom he wills, why do men leap beyond this, except they wilfully seek to carry on war with God? and yet they pretend modesty, and under this pretext they seek to bury the doctrine of election; we ought, they say, to speak soberly of mysteries. This last sentence I allow fully; but what is our sobriety but our docility? that is, when we embrace what God declares in his word, and never allow ourselves to investigate more than what he teaches us. But they would extinguish God’s word; nay, they dare openly to pronounce blasphemies against God, and to find fault with the Spirit, who has spoken by the prophets and the apostles.

We indeed see that there are many devils who preach modesty, when their object is to suppress the light and this chief doctrine, the main basis of our salvation; and

they extort wicked edicts from the ignorant and the slumbering, as though it were in the power of men, by babbling about things unknown, and by barbarously mixing all things together, to thrust God as it were from his celestial throne. This is horribly monstrous, and ought to be detested by all; for it would be better that all the empires of the world should be swallowed up in the lowest depths, than that mortal creatures should raise themselves up as it were into heaven, and attempt to penetrate into the secret things of God. But, however, when the whole world either assail this doctrine by barking, or seek to subvert it by threats and terrors, or when all in various ways manifest their rage, and when they roll thunders who seem to themselves to be very powerful, it behoves us to hold fast this doctrine, that God alone is the author of our salvation, because he has been pleased freely to elect us, and also that he possesses power over all the human race, so that some, according to his will, are elected and some are rejected, and that he ever acts justly, and holds secret the cause both of election and of reprobation. But it is no wonder that we are so blind, for we are stupid by nature, nay, blind altogether; and were we angels, it would be still our duty reverently to regard the manifold wisdom of God, which no human minds, no, not even angelic minds, can fully comprehend.

John Calvin, Commentary on Malachi 1:2-6  
(From: *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, V, 481-482)

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On February 7, 1973, our dear parents,  
MR. AND MRS. BERT BRANDS  
celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

We are thankful to our covenant God for having spared them for each other and for us, and we pray that God may bless them further in the way that lies ahead; and as the days approach when their earthly pilgrimage shall end, may they enjoy the peace which alone can be found in Him.

Their grateful children:  
Mr. and Mrs. Evert Brands  
Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Hop  
Mr. and Mrs. John Brands  
Mr. and Mrs. Egbert Gritters  
Harold  
Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Brands  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Brands  
20 grandchildren

Edgerton, Minn.

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Aid Society of the Hull Protestant Reformed Church expresses sincere sympathy to one of our members, Mrs. Frank Vogel, in the loss of her father

MR. ARIE BOMGAARS.

May she find comfort in the following words of Scripture, — “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (II Cor. 5:1).

Rev. J. Kortering, Pres.  
Mrs. H. J. Blankespoor, Sec’y.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in South Holland, Illinois, on March 7 at 8:30 AM. Delegates in need of lodging should notify South Holland’s clerk of their need.

Rev. David Engelsma, Stated Clerk



**NOTICE!!!**

The new Clerk of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Isabel, South Dakota is:

Mr. Jake Reichert  
Box 106

Isabel, South Dakota 57633

The new Treasurer is:

Mr. Emil Streyle  
Box 32

Isabel, South Dakota 57633

**IN MEMORIAM**

On January 17, 1973, our covenant God took unto Himself our beloved wife, mother and grandmother

LILLIAN A. ZWAK,

at the age of 70 years.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." (Psalm 116:15).

Mr. Harry Zwak  
Mr. and Mrs. Otto Kamminga  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Burt  
and 11 grandchildren

**RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The Jr. Mr. and Mrs. Society of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan, would like to express to our fellow members, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Langerak, Mr. and Mrs. Chuck Kalsbeek and Mr. and Mrs. John Cleveland, our heartfelt sympathy in the sudden loss of their brother

WILLIAM KAMPS JR.

May our covenant God heal their broken hearts and may they look for that day when the Lord will raise the dead in the glorious resurrection.

Mr. Dewey Englesma, Pres.  
Mrs. Cal Kalsbeek, Sec'y.

**RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

"The Ladies Aid Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church extends their heartfelt sympathy to one of our members, Mrs. G. Stadt in the loss of her husband,

MR. GERRIT STADT

May the God of all grace comfort and strengthen her in her sorrow.

Mrs. T. Newhof, Pres.  
Mrs. C. Pastoor, Sec'y.

**RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The Choir of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church wish to express their Christian sympathy to one of their members, Judy Holstege and to her family, in the sudden loss of their father and husband  
ANDREW HOLSTEGE.

It is our prayer that they may find comfort in God's Word.

"For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's." (Romans 14:8).

Ben Wigger, Pres.  
Donna Kuiper, Sec'y.

**RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The Ladies Society of Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan, expresses their heartfelt sympathy to one of its members, Mrs. William Kamps, her husband and their children in the sudden death of their son and brother

WILLIAM KAMPS, JR.,

at the age of 18 years.

May our covenant God comfort the bereaved in their sorrow and grant them His peace.

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (Psalm 55:22).

Rev. R. Van Overloop, Pres.  
Mrs. David Meulenberg, Sec'y.

**RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The Hope Choral Society wishes to extend its sincere sympathy to three of its members, Mr. and Mrs. John Cleveland and Mr. Chuck Kalsbeek in the deaths of their brothers and brothers-in-law

GEORGE KAMPS

and

WILLIAM KAMPS, JR.

May our Covenant God comfort them and grant them His peace.

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21).

Mr. Cal Kalsbeek, Pres.  
Janis Huizinga, Sec'y.

**News From Our Churches**

The 1972 Protestant Reformed Teachers' Convention is hardly recent enough to be considered "news." Nor is it, strictly speaking, "from our churches." But we'll include it under the above caption, anyway, since information concerning it does not stale with age, and

because the Convention concerns itself with something which is, for our churches, of no less importance than the instruction of children of God's covenant.

I have before me several school publications which devoted space to that convention. One is a newsletter



from Adams. It reads as follows:

"The teachers spent an enjoyable and profitable two days in South Holland last October. This convention was unique in the history of our schools in that there were no less than *seven* schools represented there. In addition to the four eastern schools, the faculties of Doon, Edgerton, and Loveland were also in attendance. Mr. Fred Hanko, in a little reminiscing, recalled that, at the first Protestant Reformed Teachers' Convention, there were in attendance 12 teachers, from two schools. 'We have indeed,' he said, 'been richly blest.'"

The *Polaris*, Doon's seasonal publication, included a rather complete coverage of the Convention. "Early Thursday morning, October 26," the article began, "approximately forty-five Protestant Reformed Teachers met together in South Holland. Our two day convention began with the singing of several Psalter numbers. A thrill of joy and anticipation was experienced by all as the harmony of the song reminded us of our harmony of purpose in the high calling of instructing God's covenant seed."

The *Polaris* then made mention of the keynote address, delivered by Rev. R. Decker. He spoke about the task of the Christian school teacher, from the point of view of Psalm 8. The reality of the covenant of grace, he said, is the basis of the Christian school. We are the covenant people of Jehovah. The promise is to us and to our children. God says, therefore, to parents, "these are My children. Bring them up in My fear. Out of their mouths have I ordained strength." And this is the task, also of teachers. The excellency of the name of Jehovah, which is revealed in all His works, must be brought to them, in all the subjects taught. God says to teachers, "It is your task to train My children to be soldiers of the cross of Jesus Christ, in the battle of faith."

Topics of other meetings held throughout the day included "Teaching Bible," "Basics of Elementary and Intermediate Science," and "The Responsibility of a Teacher." That evening, as we learn from *Polaris*, "all the teachers were fed a delicious meal by the South Holland Ladies' Auxiliary and afterward were privileged to listen to Prof. H. Hanko as he spoke to us on 'The Teacher as Counselor.'"

"The next morning, the teachers again assembled together; this time to discuss the work of the summer workshop on 'Writing.' After a joint meeting in which many practical suggestions as to how to augment the the basic plan of the workshop was presented, the teachers split up into three sectionals: one for elementary, one for intermediate and one for junior high and high school teachers. The sectionals provided

many practical suggestions as to how to augment the basic writing program of the summer workshop."

After the sectionals, according to *The Ledger*, Loveland's school paper, "the entire group again met in praise to God for the privilege of having been together to discuss the matter of covenant instruction and to fellowship with those who work for a common cause." And, to return to *Polaris*, "after singing a few Psalter numbers, Mr. Fred Hanko, the new president of the Teachers' Institute, closed the meeting with prayer. The 1972 Teachers' Convention had ended and now the teachers dispersed again to their various fields of labor, thankful and happy for the opportunity to meet together in the unity of God's Word."

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Then, we have another welcome contribution from our Business Manager. Read on:

The members of the Radio Committee of our Reformed Witness Hour often wonder if many of the recipients of the printed copies of the radio messages take the time to read the printed sermons after they receive them. Is it worth the time, effort, and expense involved to print and distribute the printed copies? Well, excerpts from only two of the many responses received should set their minds at ease. It certainly *IS* worthwhile!

First one comes from (of all places) Tasmania, Australia. Addressed to the Reformed Witness Hour it reads (in part) as follows:

"Dear Brethren, I want to say how much I have appreciated the sermons which have been sent to me in the past years.

"The emphasis which is placed upon the Sovereignty of God is most refreshing in these times when, on all sides, God is represented as a pathetic being who is completely at the mercy and the will of the creature."

The writer of this letter then asks permission to reprint the copies for distribution to members of his church in their "humble" magazine.

The second letter comes from an eastern state of our country. It reads (in part) — "Dear Friends, Herewith a small contribution to the Reformed Witness Hour. Unfortunately, we are not able to get the sermons over our radio station, but we do appreciate very much receiving the printed copies regularly. . . The sermons of the Witness Hour remind me of my dear father's sermons, and I am so happy to receive them. I recently passed my 80th birthday. I also am happy to have the *Standard Bearer*, and I read it from cover to cover."

The Radio committee welcomes all response, from both the listeners and the readers. We thank our God for the privilege of sending out these radio broadcasts and the printed pages.

D.D.